



UNIVERSIDAD DE QUINTANA ROO

División de Ciencias Políticas y Humanidades

**Causes of Failure of CAE as a Graduation Requirement
Examination: A Case Study.**

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Para obtener el grado de
**MAESTRÍA EN EDUCACIÓN CON MENCIÓN EN
DIDÁCTICA DEL INGLÉS**

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DEDICATION

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed the causes of the high rate of failure of students in the English Language Major (ELM) of the University of Chetumal, Quintana Roo (UQROO), in the Certificate of Advanced English (CAE) as a final examination and requirement to graduate from the major. This investigation also determined the policies behind the choice of the CAE test as a final examination in the English program of the ELM. A case study was developed where students, alumni, teachers and representatives of the ELM talked about their experiences with the CAE test as a final examination in order to determine the reasons of the high rate of failure. The findings revealed that a lack of resources for the students of the ELM to become autonomous learners led them to be undermined in their preparation for the examination during the major. At the same time, students lacked a preparation from the major that could enable them to achieve a CAE level and proficiency. Regarding the policies, a situational-driven and precipitated selection of the CAE as final examination in the ELM, and an absence of curricular adjustments or plans to achieve such level, were almost immediately reflected in general student low scores in the test. As a conclusion, a combination of these and other related aspects act as limitations for the ELM students to perform adequately in the examination in the level they are being required.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

High-stakes testing¹, although it can be an efficient measure, can affect students and institutions severely if it is neglected or employed inappropriately (Johnson, 2004; Giambo, 2010). There are many causes that can lead a student to fail a high-stakes test or examination. Some of the causes can be anxiety, lack of motivation, negative backwash², the status of the test or examination, the validity, fairness, reliability of the test or examination, the teaching methodology, the physical conditions in which the test or examination is administered, inappropriate educational policies, or school administration issues (Syrquin, 1997; Córdova, 2001; Molebatsi, 2001; Johnson, Shinjin and Ying-Ling, 2004; Qian, 2005; Wun, 2006).

Low performance and failure can be perceived as the reflection of the factors affecting a student in a high-stakes testing situation. The present study focuses on a high number of university students failing the Cambridge English: Advanced (CAE) as a requirement to graduate from the English Language Major of the University of Quintana Roo (UQROO), Chetumal campus. Passing CAE is necessary for these students to graduate and to obtain a degree. Therefore, there is a need to determine the aspects that are leading them to fail the CAE as this implies a number of negative consequences for these students' personal and professional lives.

Proficiency tests are invaluable tools regarding measuring students' abilities in a specific language. The Cambridge English: Advanced or Certificate in Advanced English (CAE) is an evaluation of English proficiency whose value is recognized internationally and at a professional level. The CAE is used by many important institutions and companies from around the world to test potential students and employees and thus, make admission or hiring

¹ A test can be considered high-stakes if the results of the test produce or cause perceived or real consequences for students, staff, or schools (Madaus, 1988 in Johnson, 2004).

² The positive or negative effect of a test on a student (Hughes, 1989).

decisions. The CAE is developed by Cambridge ESOL and its level of certification is located in the fifth position on a scale from one to six, from basic to proficiency - A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2 - in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (University of Cambridge, 2010) (See figure 1).

Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)	Proficient user	C2					Proficiency (CPE)	BULATS 90	IELTS 9	C2	
		C1					Advanced (CAE)			Business Higher (BEC)	International Legal English Certificate (ILEC)
	Independent user	B2		First for Schools (FCE for Schools)	First (FCE)	Business Vantage (BEC)		75	6.5 6 5.5 5	B2	
		B1		Preliminary for Schools (PET for Schools)	Preliminary (PET)	Business Preliminary (BEC)					40
	Basic user	A2	Young Learners Flyers (YLE Flyers)	Key for Schools (KET for Schools)	Key (KET)				20		A2
		A1	Young Learners Movers (YLE Movers)								A1
			Young Learners Starters (YLE Starters)								

Fig. 1. Common European Framework of References (CEFR). (Cambridge ESOL, 2010).

As a student of the class 2003-2008 of the UQROO, I took eight courses of English Language, one course per semester. During the first six courses the English variety that was used was American English (English I – VI), and it was taught 8 hours a week. The variety was changed to British English the last two courses of English (English VII – VIII), except for the language of instruction. These two courses were taught 3 hours and 40 minutes a week. At the time I had to take the CAE to graduate from the major, I asked myself a question: are two semesters of British English enough to achieve the skills, practice, security and competence necessary to achieve success in an examination whose nature is British English? In the UQROO, Chetumal campus³, CAE was implemented as the English Language Major (ELM

³ There are three campuses to choose from at the University of Quintana Roo; Chetumal campus, Cozumel campus, and Playa del Carmen campus.

will be used in this work to refer to the English Language Major) exit examination around the time when I started the major. However, as well as other students of the ELM of the Chetumal campus, I failed to notice this requirement until the 9th semester.

My class (2003-2008) had various alternatives to get the CAE certificate. There were two dates available to take a CAE equivalence⁴ offered by the Language Center of the UQROO as well as another date to take the official CAE at the UQROO, Cozumel campus. The official CAE was not offered at the Chetumal campus. Since both the CAE equivalence and the official CAE are accepted in the UQROO, most of the students took the equivalent version in Chetumal. The CAE equivalence was much less expensive than the official CAE and also, since the official CAE was offered only at the island of Cozumel, taking the Cambridge examination required students to travel and spend three days there. Thus, in addition to the cost of the test, students had to spend much more in matters of food, transportation (bus and ferry) and accommodation. Moreover, before taking the CAE, some of my classmates had the belief that the official version was more “difficult” than its equivalence, and were afraid of taking it. As such, the majority of the students of the major of that class took the UQROO equivalent version of the test on the Chetumal campus.

In addition, the equivalent CAE test was available on two dates and they would take it at the Chetumal campus. Students believed that there was a variation in “difficulty” from one equivalent CAE to the other. These and a number of unconformities regarding the test taking conditions were expressed by students of the ELM at that moment. Therefore, the reliability of the UQROO equivalent test began to be questioned by this researcher.

⁴ The CAE equivalence is a version of the official CAE examination taken from previous CAE papers and that is scored and administered at the UQROO to students of the English Language Major by members of the English department. The English level certification provided by the CAE equivalence is valid only at the UQROO.

The CAE was implemented as a graduation examination in 2007. The examination that was required to graduate from the major before the CAE was the First Certificate in English (FCE). Regarding proficiency, the FCE is located one level below the CAE in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. This means that the abilities and the language level required from the students at the end of the major were increased from one semester to the next. Cambridge ESOL provides a list of “Can Do statements for each of the CEFR levels” developed by ALTE (See figure 2).

ALTE Can Do Statements: overall general ability			
CEFR LEVELS	Listening/Speaking	Reading	Writing
C2	CAN advise on or talk about complex or sensitive issue, understanding colloquial references and deal confidently with hostile questions.	CAN understand documents, correspondence and reports, including the finer points of complex texts.	CAN write letters on any subject and full notes of meetings or seminars with good expression and accuracy.
C1	CAN contribute effectively to meetings and seminars within own area of work or keep up a casual conversation with a good degree of fluency, coping with abstract expressions.	CAN read quickly enough to cope with an academic course, to read the media for information or to understand non.-standard correspondence.	CAN prepare/draft professional correspondence, take reasonably accurate notes in meetings or write an essay which shows an ability to communicate.
B2	CAN follow or give a talk on a familiar topic or keep up a conversation on a fairly wide range of topics.	CAN scan texts for relevant information, and understand detailed instructions or advice.	CAN make notes while someone is talking or write a letter including non-standard requests.
B1	CAN express opinions on abstract/cultural matters in a limited way or offer advice within a known area, and understand instructions or public announcements.	CAN understand routine information and articles, and the general meaning of non-routine information within a familiar area.	CAN write letters or make notes on familiar or predictable matters.
A2	CAN express simple opinions or requirements in a familiar context.	CAN understand straightforward information within a known area, such as on products and signs and simple textbooks or reports on familiar matters.	CAN complete forms and write short, simple letters or postcards related to personal information.
A1	CAN understand basic instructions or take part in basic factual conversation on a predictable topic.	CAN understand basic notices, instructions or information.	CAN complete basic forms, and write notes including times, dates and places.

Fig. 2. ALTE’s list of Can Do statements (Cambridge ESOL, 2012).

Candidates must be competent in a number of skills for the four abilities: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. To reach the level C1, there were a number of skills that had to be achieved by students of the ELM, which were not considered before implementing the CAE, since the level they were required before was B2.

Furthermore, the CAE was first taken as the English Language Major graduation examination in the year of 2008. In relation to this, another concern of this study was to find out why the FCE was replaced by the CAE and if modifications were made to the syllabus of the English Language Program of the major. The aspects discussed above were considered in this study as possible factors of influence for the high rate of students (from 2008 to 2010) failing the CAE examination. There was also a concern regarding how to overcome the problem. Since the implementation of the CAE, all classes of the English Language Major have been affected by the matter. The purposes of this study were to find the reasons behind the high rate of failure of the CAE and the educational policies behind its implementation as a graduation examination at the UQROO.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Students of the English Language Major are failing the CAE, which is necessary for them to graduate from the major. However, previous to any new decision regarding the ELM exit examination, there was a necessity to develop a thorough study to identify the aspects that were leading students to fail the CAE. In order to make more conscious decisions, suitable to the circumstances of the problem, some questions that needed to be answered were: What considerations were taken for the students' academic sake before changing the evaluation instrument? What changes were made in the syllabus to adjust the major to the CAE? Was the implementation of the CAE necessary? And, why was this decision made?

Since its first application, a large number of students of the ELM have been failing the CAE at the UQROO. Moreover, there are many who have taken the test up to eight times without success (Centro de Enseñanza de Idiomas, 2010). Up until the time of this investigation, the CAE equivalence was available at the UQROO three times a year, and the official CAE was available once a year in the island of Cozumel. This means that students have

a maximum of three opportunities to take and pass the test in Chetumal and one in Cozumel, if they wish to graduate the same year. If they fail, they have to wait until the next year.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this investigation was to analyze the causes of failure of the Certificate in Advanced English (CAE) in the English Language Major of the University of Chetumal, Quintana Roo and to identify the institutional policies behind its implementation as a graduation examination.

1.2.1 Specific objectives

1. To analyze the causes of failure of the Certificate in Advanced English (CAE) as an exit examination of the English Language Major of the University of Quintana Roo, Chetumal campus.
2. To identify the institutional policies behind the choice of the CAE examination as a graduation requirement in the English Language Major of the University of Quintana Roo, Chetumal campus.

1.3 Delimitations and Limitations

1.3.1 Limitations

The external restrictions this research encountered were lack of time and availability of the participants. Some teachers were not interviewed due to lack of availability and time restrictions. Also, the original plan for the data collection was to carry out two focus groups with ten students each; one previous to the CAE and one after they took the CAE (or its equivalent). However, only two students arrived to the first focus group and, by the time the second focus group took place, a number of students had finished the major and decided to leave the investigation. Therefore, the focus groups became into a dyad and a triad. The alternatives were to set another date for the first focus group or to carry out individual interviews instead of focus groups. However, the first alternative was dismissed considering

the possibility that, for the second time, students might not attend the meeting and consequently, continue to delay the investigation. Regarding the second alternative, the individual interviews were carried out to gather more information from the pre-CAE perspective of the students. Still, eight was the total number of participants for the pre-CAE interviews and only three students could be reached for the post-CAE individual interviews. Also, the short amount of time allotted for carrying out the data collection and data analysis prevented further changes in the procedure to meet all the needs of the study. All these factors were considered as limitations since the resulting data might have been less than what could have been if such adjustments to the study had not been made. Therefore, conclusions were made cautiously as regards to the final amount of data.

1.3.2 Delimitations

The present is a qualitative case study research. Regarding the research population, people from institutions other than the University of Quintana Roo, Chetumal campus, were not taken into consideration due to time restrictions. Other examinations, such as the FCE, as well as other English programs were not presented or analyzed in detail due to the short amount of resources and time destined for the investigation. The instruments in this research were selected in consideration of the time allotted for the study, the research objectives and availability of the participants.

1.4 Contextual Information

The CAE was first introduced in the English Language Major in 2003 to replace the Cambridge English: First (FCE) as graduation requirement for students (G. Campos⁵, personal communication, June, 2010). The language requirements for the students in the English Language Major were raised from the level B2 to the C1 from the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) during the course of a semester. The students

⁵ Head of the Language Center of the UQROO Chetumal campus by the time of the data collection.

of the English Language Major of the UQROO have to get a CAE certificate (the official CAE or the UQROO equivalent version of the CAE) as one of the requirements to get their degree. However, the majority of students take the UQROO equivalent CAE test and a high percentage of them fail it causing them to put on hold their professional plans.

Cambridge ESOL examinations are described in the official web page of the University of Cambridge as proficiency tests applied by universities, employers, and organizations for acceptance/entry decisions (University of Cambridge, 2010). Moreover, according to Brown (1995), proficiency tests are designed to measure one's ability in the language and not to evaluate a particular language program. The use of a proficiency test to evaluate an English program can have an undesirable effect on the stakeholder's future if the syllabus of that program is not designed in accordance with the abilities and level of the test (Hughes, 1998). The syllabus of the English Language Major of the UQROO contains compulsory *Program subjects*. Amongst these, there are eight English Language courses (The organization of the English Language courses is shown in Fig. 3). As it can be observed in Fig. 3, there is no course that prepares students in the Cambridge English: Advanced (CAE) level. According to the syllabus of the ELM, students are being prepared to reach an FCE level.

Furthermore, the Cambridge ESOL organization offers assessment to potential stakeholders in order to ensure positive results in the examinations. As a member of The Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE), Cambridge ESOL is concerned about a set of specific standards and principles to ensure fairness in language testing (See figure 4). This way, Cambridge ESOL ensures the reliability, fairness, and validity of their tests. The question that remained at the moment of the study was if the same standards and procedures were fulfilled or taken into account to ensure such qualities in the UQROO CAE equivalent test, which is the test that the majority of ELM students take at the end of the major.

UNIVERSITY OF CHETUMAL QUINTANA ROO	
ENGLISH LANGUAGE MAJOR SYLLABUS 1995-2010	
Subject	Brief Description
English Language I	Introduction to grammar structures and functions. Basic vocabulary through four skills (speaking, listening, writing and reading).
English Language II	Knowledge of basic grammar structures and functions through the four skills.
English Language III	Knowledge of more complex grammar structures and functions through the four skills.
English Language IV	Development of the English Language awareness and PET ⁶ preparation.
English Language V	Development of the four skills to reach an intermediate level to achieve fluency and precision.
English Language VI	Development of the comprehension of the four skills in an advanced level with focus on the FCE ⁷ .
English Language VII	Implementation of what was learned during the previous courses on the development of the four skills to achieve fluency and precision.
English Language VIII	Continuance and widening of the immediate previous course.

Fig. 3. *The English Program of the English Language Major Syllabus at UQROO.* (UQROO, 2010) (Own translation).

Test Construction	Marking and Grading
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Candidate information analyses - Detailed test specification - In-depth item writer training - Extensive pre-testing and item calibration - Trialing of speaking and writing tasks - Modified tests for test takers with special requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rigorous examiner training - Marking and grading procedures, inc. checking - Detailed appeals procedure
	Test Analysis
Administration and Logistics	Communication with Stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Comprehensive test center regulations - Test center staff training, management and monitoring - Secure test dispatch - Secure and confidential test results - Extensive support systems – web, hotline, etc. - ESOL website - Sample/past test materials - Regular stakeholder consultation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teacher handbooks - Research publications - Teacher seminars - Conference presentations

Fig. 4. *Cambridge ESOL procedures for the implementation of ALTE standards.* (Cambridge ESOL, 2011).

⁶ Cambridge Preliminary English Test or Cambridge English: Preliminary

⁷ Cambridge First Certificate in English or Cambridge English: First.

Moreover, the Language Center of the UQROO offers CAE Preparation courses taught by English teachers. These courses are not designed or offered by the Cambridge ESOL organization; they are designed by teachers of the UQROO Language Center and are neither compulsory nor contemplated within the syllabus of the English Language Major. They are offered during summer only if a certain amount of students make an official petition before that time (University of Quintana Roo, 2010). In the following section there is a review of studies related to aspects such as the ones mentioned above; testing and evaluation, high-stakes testing, validity and assessment.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Testing and evaluation are two aspects that need to be handled carefully in all areas of education, or in this case, language teaching. The difference between these two is not only semantic but also pragmatic; they are not the same and they are used for different purposes and in different situations. There are various types of international tests with very specific purposes, and the random use of these tests as evaluation tools can lead to negative consequences for students. In relation to this, “high-stakes-testing” (refer to page 1 for definition) is a term of relevance in this study, as it implies the significance of passing these tests on the stakeholders’ lives. Therefore, the present chapter has been divided into four parts: 1) the literature concerning testing and evaluation, and 2) a review of studies related to failure and high-stakes-testing, 3) the validity of tests in high-stakes situations, and 4) studies related to assessment in high-stakes testing situations.

2.1 Testing and Evaluation

For people who are unaware of the specific teaching terminology, an *evaluation* and a *test* may mean the same thing. In teaching, testing and evaluation are two different terms whose accurate definition is of great relevance. Bachman (1990) explains that the difference between a test and an evaluation is that tests rely on their “information – providing function” and that evaluations have a “decision – making function”. However, he also mentions that the evaluation’s “decision – making function” is not recognized as the absolute definition. In addition, Rodríguez and Garcia (1972) define *evaluation* as:

- The complete process of indicating the objectives of a particular aspect of education and to make an estimation of the degree to which such objectives were achieved.
- The establishment of the “current state” of the teaching – learning situation.
- The process that determines if there has been success in what was intended to be achieved.

On the other hand, Hughes (1989, p. 10) defines test as “any structured attempt to measure language ability”. This distinction is important for this study since the CAE is being used to evaluate students at the end of the major. For this, it is necessary to ascertain the *raison d’être* for the application of the CAE at the UQROO and to identify the sources of the problem. Hughes (1989) refers to *backwash* as to the “effect of testing”. He states that backwash can be beneficial or it can be harmful. For instance, when the syllabus of an English institution does not agree with the test that the institution is using to evaluate its students, the backwash is harmful. The negative effects increase when the test is used also as an evaluative tool of the institution such as if the test scores will decide which students enter a university, or in this particular case, get a degree from the university. Conversely, if the aspects evaluated by the test coincide with the content of the syllabus and the way in which the students were taught, then, the outcomes can be positive. Using the CAE to evaluate UQROO students in a high-stakes testing situation can thus result in harmful backwash.

Hughes (1989) and Dean (1995) refer to four types of tests: *Diagnostic*, *Placement*, *Proficiency* and *Achievement* tests. *Diagnostic* tests are those used to identify the students’ strengths and weaknesses with the objective to identify what teaching adjustments are needed. *Placement* tests are used to assign students to a determined language level group. When first entering an English program, for example, there is a need for a placement test in order to identify the student's English level and therefore, their teaching-learning necessities. *Achievement* tests are used to identify the progress or final achievements of students of a specific program. These tests are directly related to the syllabus of the institution. Final examinations, for instance, in secondary schools, are usually designed by teachers of a specific subject and are administered by them in order to know if students have reached the goals established at the beginning of the semester. *Proficiency* tests, such as the CAE, help to determine the candidate’s general level of proficiency in a language (Brown, 1995). According

to this author, these tests measure the candidates' language ability not based on any particular language course syllabus or objectives. Therefore, proficiency tests are not related to any program or syllabus of any institution, as in the case of the ELM of the UQROO. These tests are usually administered by companies to job applicants, or to students in the process of entering a university or a language program. Brown also highlights that these tests are useful if you want to evaluate the possibilities of your students to reach a certain level by the end of a language program, to determine the proficiency level of students when they are entering a language program, and the proficiency level they can achieve when they exit such program. Proficiency tests are "general in nature (and not specific to any particular program)" (Brown, 1995).

Hughes (1989) mentions two types of proficiency tests: those that are designed for a *particular purpose*, for instance, a test that evaluates a certain skill required for a job; and those with no particular goal. Furthermore, he states that international examinations, such as the Cambridge English: Advanced, fall into the last category. Additionally, like Brown, Hughes (1989) refers to the fact that proficiency tests are not designed according to a specific language course taken by test-takers. He mentions that even though these tests may affect the method and content of language programs, he considers that the backwash of using these tests tends to be negative.

CAE is an examination that "gives an in-depth assessment of your ability and fluency at level C1. Its aim is to qualify the candidate's *proficiency* in English. This examination may be used for different purposes and it does not test people in specific abilities nor is based on a specific syllabus. The CAE test is a proficiency test that is not designed to be used as an evaluation tool in a particular program. ELM students have to pass the CAE test after they have been in the English program for four and a half years. However, is this test suitable to evaluate students of the ELM? Is the syllabus of the ELM consistent with this evaluation? Is the

preparation students receive in the ELM leading them to reach a CAE level? These are questions that should have been made at the moment of selecting the CAE as exit examination for students of the ELM, since choosing an evaluation tool for students in a high-stakes situation should be carefully done. As Hall and Hewings (2001, p. 255) point out: “Evaluation must focus on both the means and the product of the learning process”. In the following section, there is a review of some studies on high-stakes testing and educational policies that are closely related to this investigation. There is a brief description of each study, the phenomena investigated, and the results.

2.2 High Stakes Testing and Policies

High-stakes testing and its relation to educational policies have been studied by many authors with a focus on those related to high failure statistics, mainly from Low English Proficiency (LEP) students. The following paragraphs summarize those studies on the relationships between policies and high-stakes testing contexts.

High-stakes testing policies have been implemented in the United States of America to ensure that institutions become more accountable for their students’ educational performances. High-stakes testing is expected to foster learner improvement and schools’ accountability, and has no further effect on many students. But it can become an impediment for minority students. However, there are not many studies on the negative consequences that these state and federal policies may have on minority students. A qualitative case study research was carried out by Johnson, (2004), to investigate the unintended negative consequences of high-stakes testing from the perspective of students and teachers, especially on economically disadvantaged and minority students. Johnson hypothesized that large scale testing and high-stakes testing had a negative effect on students, specifically on minority and disadvantaged students, and that high stakes testing policies do not result in benefits for all students. Data collection and analysis

were carried out using an Interactive Qualitative Analysis. She collected data by means of focus groups and semi-structured interviews with high school students and teachers.

The findings indicated that the negative consequences for students were: the use of test scores as the sole criterion for educational decisions, such as graduation; a narrowed curriculum; diminished post-high school educational opportunities for students; reduced opportunities to master higher learning skills; reduction of class time for ordinary instruction; instructional focus in the classroom being determined by what questions are perceived to be on the state assessment, not important skills and knowledge; state assessment failed to accurately measure student achievement; there was inadequate opportunity and time to learn information on the state assessment; and there was a possible increase in school dropouts (Johnson, 2004, p. 210-211).

Moreover, Johnson concludes that “if high-stakes testing does not promote learning, it must be reevaluated and changed (2004, p. 209)”. Moreover, she adds that “determining whether high-stakes testing of students’ produces better overall educational outcomes requires that its potential benefits be weighed against its potential unintended negative outcomes (p.210)”. All in all, Johnson states that high-stakes testing may be beneficial for it encourages a teaching environment that fosters educational development. But in schools where there is a misalignment among curriculum standards, instruction and assessment, high stakes testing can prevent students from graduating as well as hindering their educational progress.

Wun Han (2006) researched the effects of the status of a test on students’ test preparation behaviors at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU). The Graduating Students’ Language Proficiency Assessment (GSLPA), a test developed locally for this particular institution, was implemented in the PolyU with the objective of fostering students’ motivation for the improvement of their English proficiency. However, there was no plan regarding how students would improve their proficiency since there were no changes in the

syllabus or in the teaching practices regarding the test. Later, the GSLPA was replaced by the International English Language Test System for Hong Kong's territory, the English Proficiency Assessment Scheme (IELTS-CEPAS), which is an internationally recognized test.

Wun points out the agreement among researchers concerning the need to know students' perspectives and the need to be accountable to students as they are the main stakeholders. Wun acknowledges the fact that learners are the most affected by tests in high-stakes situations and their results. Thus, this research views the washback effects on learners from a humanistic perspective. The study addresses the necessity to approach high-stakes testing from the perspective of how backwash affects learners rather than from the effects it has on teaching and learning. The purposes of the study included how backwash works in relation to the tests' status, and students' attitudes and behaviors when preparing for each type of test (The GSLPA-English and the IELTS-CEPAS). Wun described his methodology as follows "to construct knowledge about the washback phenomenon through observing and describing reality... how learners reacted to an exit English test" (2006, p. 111).

Moreover, the ultimate objective of Wun's research was to find out whether implementing an internationally recognized English test resulted in improvement of the students' English level or not. In a mixed approach, Wun used survey questionnaires to collect quantitative data and semi-structured interviews for qualitative data. The participants were PolyU students; one group who took the GSLPA-English in its last year of implementation and another group who took the IELTS-CEPAS in the same year of its implementation. She used within-method triangulation of data to enhance validity and reliability. The findings indicated that a high percentage of students, 74.9% of the IELTS-CEPAS candidates had test preparation as opposed to the GSLPA-English group, where there were only 18.8%. Moreover, it was found that the 46.3% of the students who took the IELTS-CEPAS started to prepare approximately one week before taking the test. Wun also found that students were concerned

mainly about the high-stakes nature of the test rather than the status of the test. It was concluded that opting for an international test over a locally developed test was the appropriate choice, since students showed more motivation to prepare for the IELTS-CEPAS than for the GSLPA-English. The conclusion was reached regarding the objective of fostering students' proficiency improvement.

Giambo (2010) conducted a case study focused on the consequences of high-stakes testing for Low English Proficiency (LEP) students. Passing the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) allows students to get a Standard Diploma, which is a requirement for higher education. However, Giambo points out that for LEP students, the FCAT behaves as a test of academic English Proficiency test rather than a test which evaluates their knowledge of content. Regardless of students' performance and their grades during high-school, the FCAT defines whether they get a Standard Diploma or not. This fact results in students leaving high-school to pursue the General Education Diploma (GED) which enhances a decrease in drop-out statistics. The main objective of this research was "to examine (a) Florida's high-stakes testing requirements for LEP students; (b) trends in reported LEP students' grade 10 test scores; (c) options for LEP students who do not pass the high-stakes test; and (d) Florida's drop-out rate, especially for LEP students" (Giambo, 2010, p. 44).

Results revealed that the Florida Department of Education follows a regulation that allows states to recognize former LEP students when reporting general LEP scores statistics. As former LEP students have finished their program and are in a higher level of proficiency than regular LEP students, results become inflated, thus misleading policy makers. Moreover, representatives of Florida Public Schools send LEP students to GED programs disregarding their low rates of passing scores. As a student leaving high-school to enter a GED program does not reflect as a drop-out, there is no apparent reason to suggest that there is a problem in high-schools in Florida. All these factors may be hindering assistance from evaluators and

policy makers to face real drop-out and failure statistics (Giambo, 2010). Finally, Giambo suggested policy revisions in order to overcome the negative rates and offer more possibilities to minority students.

Davies, Hamp-Lyons and Kemp (2003) carried out a quantitative study concerning bias in English high-stakes testing situations with regards to international tests. The authors approached bias from the perspective of the different language contexts and exposure to the language among test takers. The authors' premise was that international proficiency English tests used old colonial Standard English varieties, which possibly placed in disadvantage test takers who used different English dialects or grew up in different English varieties speaking contexts. The authors state that this view of bias has become a polemic rather than being studied.

Davies, Hamp-Lyons and Kemp's investigation consisted of a seminar with representatives of India, China, Singapore, and Malaysia. The authors, as well, participated in the seminar as representatives of UK, Hong Kong and USA, and Hong Kong and UK; and their research assistant as representative of Hong Kong and Australia. The instruments used in the seminar were briefing documents on the use of English in each country they were representing, regional or national tests used within each country, analyses and critiques of each test, and analyses of two international English tests (The TOEFL and the IELTS). Using international and local test scores, they found that individuals are not subject to bias, but speakers with different dialects are in some way disadvantaged and have to adapt to the international tests when required. The authors also concluded that there is a need to study the extent to which these disadvantages matter in terms of differences in the test scores.

Baker (2009) conducted an ethnographic study on the effects of high-stakes tests and accountability-driven reform policies on low performing schools and, consequently, on its students. In 2002, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act started requiring elementary and

secondary schools to have students “master English as soon as possible” by implementing full English instruction. This applied equally for Low English Proficiency and minority students, English Language Learners, and other disadvantaged students. Thus, the act required every student to be at the same level of English Proficiency within a period of three years or less.

As a result, institutions began to implement their own measures in order to meet the NCLB Act standards. Baker addresses the issue by studying such measures and the effects they had on students, teachers, administrators, and the institutions. Focused on Dickenson High School, two hypotheses were addressed at first in Baker’s study. First, how is Dickenson High School interpreting and responding to external change mandates aimed at their significant English Language Learners (ELL) population? Second, how are these responses impacting the school experience of administrators, teachers and ELL? In this case study, Baker used structured and informal interviews, classroom observations, the institution’s policy documentation, test scores, students’ attendance records, surveys and focus groups.

Baker found that as an emergency strategy to meet the NCLB Act standards, representatives turned to focus the efforts on a sample of academically high achieving students who were considered more likely to achieve such standards in little time. They considered this group of students would show an immediate positive improvement in their reading proficiency, particularly. For that, the current ESL program, at that time, was substituted by the Read 180 program disregarding the effects this decision would eventually have on the rest of the students and members of the institution. Aspects such as the curricular implications, teaching time availability, teachers’ and students’ profile, resources and other limitations were not considered at the moment of choosing the Reading 180 program. Baker considered other aspects as well, such as an inexistent English department at the moment of the study, a sense of urgency to comply with the NCLB Act’s requirements, a lack of time and resources, a lack of integration of the rest of the staff, and a lack of thorough, up to date information and documentation on

students' academic proficiency. All these were limitations at the moment of choosing the Reading 180 program. Furthermore, representatives who assumed leadership of the implementation of such measures to meet NCLB's Act standards made this decision disregarding such elements in order to tackle the problem as soon as possible. As a result, the elements of their system's structure were misaligned.

Hassantafaghodtari (2009) used a mixed study to evaluate the alignment between policy and practice in an English Intensive Program, especially the listening part, from the perspectives, performance and criteria of the people in high stakes situations. Using questionnaires, interviews and class observations, Hassantafaghodtari studied participants, program leaders and adult students from six English Intensive Program (EIP) classes and concluded that policies and practice guidelines should be a balance between listening performance and critical listening.

The present study approached the phenomenon of failure from various perspectives but an emphasis was made in the analysis of the policies that guided decision makers to select CAE as a graduation requirement in the ELM. These studies showed a close relationship between high-stakes testing as a result of educational policies, and failure. They are examples of how educational policies tend to cause that leaders of the institutions feel under pressure and search for or create quick recipes to comply with policy makers. They demonstrated that, in such cases, high-stakes testing result in negative consequences for students, especially in the case of low proficiency, minority, and disadvantaged students. These studies were part of the basis to analyze the present case study. In the following paragraphs there is a description of studies regarding test validity.

2.3 Validity

Syrquin (1997) carried out a historical review of a test of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Israel with the purpose of discussing its validity, reliability, practicality and

washback effects through its existence. Syrquin studied the tension between the proficiency/achievement natures of the test. *Bagrut* (Hebrew for “formal high school examinations”) was analyzed through a sample of 40 EFL tests from 1932 to 1996 to find out if during its evolution it has been adapting properly in terms of measuring the achievement, instruction, and standards. The results revealed that the Bagrut examination, although it has been in existence since the 1930’s, has been updated and further developed appropriately.

Córdova (2001) studied the lack of consistency between classroom tasks and test tasks and its negative effect on test takers. A mixed study was carried out to investigate the tasks preferred by 257 students of Spanish classes and the ratings they give to the tasks they encounter in the midterm examinations. The instruments that were used included class observations, pre-test and post-test questionnaires, a midterm examination and surveys. The results showed that the negativity or positivity of the washback effect relies on the congruence between task method and task domain.

The organization ‘No Child Left Behind (NCLB)’ requires institutions to provide assessment to Low English Proficiency (LEP) students; thus, it allows them to use their own methods and evaluations even though some institutions lack the expertise to develop these according to LEP students’ needs. A cross-sectional, longitudinal study was carried out by Bracken (2009) to investigate the convergent validity of the New York state English as a Second Language Achievement test (NYSESLAT) and the Woodcock-Munoz language survey (WMLS-R), created to meet the policies of the organization No Child Left Behind. (NCLB).

Demographic data, testing and school archives were used as instruments and the population consisted of 50 students from an elementary school in Port Chester, New York. The results showed 1) that the overall proficiency on the WMLS-R and overall proficiency on the NYSESLAT were inconsistent, 2) that there was a significant correspondence between

performances on the Reading-Writing sections of both tests and 3) that there also was a strong connection between the Oral-Listening-Speaking sections of both tests.

2.4 Assessment

As mentioned before, according to the syllabus of the ELM, students are being prepared to reach an FCE level. If ELM students are expected to be able to take and pass the CAE test or its equivalent, they should be receiving adequate preparation to acquire the necessary skills for such aim. The following studies view failure in high-stakes situations from the perspective of assessment to illustrate the importance of consistency between evaluation and everything involved in the process of student formation, such as syllabus, teaching, materials, content, practice, and so forth.

Molebatsi (2001) conducted a case study about the high rate of failure in ESL examinations in QwaQwa, South Africa. His objective, as well, was to find the possible causes leading to such failure rate. With the objective of making recommendations to overcome this problem, he observed secondary students and teachers from QwaQwa. He found that in schools where there was a more liberal attitude towards teacher-pupil talk there were better results in the examinations, as opposed to schools where there was no student autonomy. Schools were also affected by poor facilities; teachers used the first language in the classroom and also exhibited a lack of professionalism. Although Molebatsi's approach was similar to the problem and objective in this study, the aspects analyzed were more focused on students' and teachers' performance rather than on the nature of the examinations and their perception of them. However, it does view the failure rate from another perspective, equally relevant.

Qian (2005) investigated the constantly declining English Language Proficiency results which have led to an inability of the workforce to find jobs in Hong Kong. A correlational study was carried out to compare the speaking and writing sections of the English Test of the Graduating Students' Language Proficiency Assessment and the Academic Version of the

International English Language Testing System in order to select an appropriate exit examination for Hong Kong university students. 240 students were examined in this quantitative study and results showed that there was a significant difference between aspects measured by both tests.

Fairbairn (2007) studied the challenges faced by learners in terms of language, tests accommodations and test/item format. A descriptive study was developed with the purpose to offer strategies to overcome these challenges and to provide help for a more accurate assessment of the students' abilities. The results suggested that teachers and test developers should endow students with the opportunities necessary to demonstrate their abilities.

Balaguer (2008) led a case study about the discrepancies between the examinations and the students' classroom tasks and the activities of a conversational course. The purpose of Balaguer's study was to discover the experiences of students who passed the conversational course examination in relation to their successful performance. Balaguer used instruments such as interviews, documents, observations, reflexive diaries, examinations, interviews and transcriptions, and investigated six students of academic programs of business administration. Balaguer discovered that students' interaction with the aspects of the examination enhanced their self-esteem resulting in a positive attitude and better outcomes. Balaguer referred to the importance of equating the ESL curriculum to the needs and interest of the students.

Lantolf (2009) questions to what extent it is "fair" to evaluate students on a solo performance. A qualitative research was conducted based on the assumption that development in formal educational performance differs in process from development that occurs in the everyday world. The purpose of Lantolf's study was to consider a new point of view on the relationship between language instruction and language assessment, in this case to consider the dynamic assessment. Documents were used as instruments and the participants were advanced

learners of French. The results gave rise to questions regarding fairness and ethics during the evaluation process.

Anton (2009) carried out a descriptive investigation to introduce the benefits of Dynamic Assessment (DA) on Language Instruction. The method consisted of a diagnostic test and dynamic assessment procedures as instruments with third year Spanish Language majors as participants. The problem addressed by this research was based on the fact that studies about the outcomes of Dynamic Assessment are rare. The results indicate that DA allows for richer and deeper assessment of learners' actual and emergent abilities enabling programmers to design individualized instructional plans in accordance with learners' needs.

To sum up, although a majority of the studies mentioned above are not directly related to this particular research, they are to some extent closely related to the aspects involved in the problem considered by it. High stakes testing, as its name points out, has a great impact on the stakeholder's life; policies, validity and assessment, are important factors that need to be studied in relation to high stakes testing in order to avoid the negative washback effect. Therefore, finding the causes of the failure of the CAE at the UQROO can lead to important changes, which would benefit the students of the English Language Major, as their failing restrains them from graduating, from doing postgraduate studies and from having greater job opportunities.

As the previous research review showed, an important number of qualitative studies related to testing have been carried out, in comparison to quantitative and mixed studies, and most of these have shown similar results and suggestions. Appropriate assessment is required to accomplish positive results for language learners. The learners' needs and backgrounds must be taken into consideration in order to choose an adequate test, and high stakes testing needs to be taken seriously as it directly affects the students' futures.

Although the majority of these studies were concerned with testing in high schools, they share many contextual characteristics with this study. Research on language testing in high-stakes situations for higher education was not found during the course of the present study. This might be evidence of the scanty use of language proficiency tests as exit examinations of majors in English teaching and others alike. However, this matter can be approached eventually in another research. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, ELM students of the UQROO need to pass the CAE test or the equivalent CAE test as a requirement to get a degree. Before that, ELM students were required an FCE certification for such aim. The problem investigated here is that a high percentage of ELM students are failing this test, which is affecting their personal and professional lives.

This study originated in a series of happenings that were believed to have influenced ELM students' performances in their final examinations. Some aspects that were considered as possible causes of this problem were: a gap between the level ELM students are ending the major and the one they are being evaluated in, a lack of reliability of the UQROO CAE equivalent test, a scarce familiarization of the ELM students with international proficiency tests, inconsistencies between assessment and evaluation, and further on. The previous literature review presented a set of factors involved in failure of high-stakes tests that are central to this study, such as testing, evaluation, educational policies, validity, and assessment. The results of these studies helped in supporting this research. Some of them also illustrated measures that might be taken to prevent further negative consequences of high-stakes testing.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The present chapter is divided in seven parts, based on Creswell's (2007) constructivist/interpretivist format for qualitative studies: first there will be an overall description of the characteristics of the research, followed by the characteristics of a case study design, the data collection and analysis procedures, the strategies for validating findings, the anticipated ethical issues and finally, the significance of the study.

3.1 Interpretive framework

When undertaking any type of investigation, researchers proceed according to their own philosophies and worldviews. In reference to the relation between worldviews and investigation, Cobern (1996) states:

The concept of worldview brings under a single umbrella the philosophical issues of epistemology and metaphysics which respectively deal with arguments that provide explanations and understanding, and the presuppositions upon which epistemological arguments are founded and delimited. (p. 12).

Moreover, Cobern cites Meyer (1991) to explain the systematic quality of the human mind; how this is grounded on a particular perspective and how this perspective has an effect on the input received and the way in which the brain perceives it. In this way, in the area of research, worldviews form the basis of a study. Creswell (2007) mentions four worldviews regarding qualitative studies: Post-positivism, Social Constructivism, Advocacy/Participatory, and Pragmatism. This study is framed within the Pragmatist worldview. The following section gives a brief overview of the origins, definitions, uses, and other qualities of Pragmatism.

3.1.1 Pragmatism

Pragmatism is a philosophical perspective that centers its interest on finding practical solutions to real life problems. This philosophical view was first referred to by Charles Peirce (James, 1955) in the year of 1878. However, the term *per se* was coined by William James in 1898 (McDermid, 2006). The pragmatic method is defined by James as “a method of settling

metaphysical disputes that otherwise might be interminable (1955, p. 42)". Pragmatism is viewed as a perspective rebelling against philosophy. Its "modern" way of representing reality and ignoring the well-known nature of philosophy of wandering amongst ideas and conceptions, meanings, dichotomies, and so on, has grown into a kind of rejection by world scientists. However, Murray (1912) argues that these are all misconceptions and establishes that rather than being a "revolution" against philosophy, Pragmatism must be seen as an "evolution" of philosophy. Furthermore, Patton, in his work "Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods" (2002), refers to qualitative studies within a pragmatic view and states:

There is a very practical side to qualitative methods that simply involves asking open-ended questions of people and observing matters of interest in real-world settings in order to solve problems, improve programs, or develop policies (p. 136).

The major advocates and founders of Pragmatism are: Charles S. Pierce with his major work "The Fixation of Belief" in 1877; William James with works such as "Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking" in 1907, and "The Meaning of Truth: A Sequel to Pragmatism" in the year of 1909; finally, John Dewey with works such as "The Quest for Certainty" in 1929 (McDermid, 2006). Pragmatists choose the methods for data collection that best adapt to their investigation. The focus is on the practicality of the research procedures with the objective of assuring that the purposes of the investigation are fulfilled. To sum up, within the worldview of Pragmatism, researchers focus on the practical solutions to the problem being investigated rather than on proving the righteousness of a determined philosophy or theory.

3.1.2 Philosophical assumptions

Qualitative studies are framed within a set of philosophical assumptions: the ontological (nature of the investigation), epistemological (the relationship between the researcher and their object of study), axiological (the role of values), rhetorical (narrative structure of the study) and methodological (process of the study) assumptions (Creswell, 2007). These assumptions are related to the nature of the study and Creswell suggests one

should “take a philosophical stance on each of these assumptions” (p.30) when carrying out a qualitative investigation. The following are the philosophical assumptions of this study.

- Ontological assumption: One of the characteristics of Pragmatism is that the researcher does not follow a particular perspective nor believe in a single reality. The multiple realities and perspectives are means to reach the truth.
- Epistemological assumption: The researcher remains close to the participant when the procedure requires it.
- Axiological assumption: Pragmatism considers value as original source of experience; “experience which is not valued, is not experienced” (Patton, 2002, p. 147).
- Rhetorical assumption: The researcher employs a narrative format similar to a scientific report; this is in relation to the empiricist nature of Pragmatism.
- Methodological assumption: The researcher believes in the flexibility of the research procedure when necessary but tries as much as possible to maintain a rigorous method of data collection.

To summarize, worldviews are the foundations of the study and the philosophical assumptions are made according to these foundations. Their qualities are reflected throughout the whole qualitative study, from the choice of a particular design to the data collection and analysis procedures. Once the worldview and philosophical assumptions behind this study have been explained, its method will be described in the following paragraphs.

3.1.3 Methodological approach

Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning of individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2007, p. 37).

This and other definitions refer to qualitative research as the study of phenomena viewed within its natural environment from both, objective and subjective perspectives. The qualitative investigation is naturalistic. The objective is to observe the phenomenon without

upsetting, changing, modifying or applying new variables (Corbetta, 2003 in Hernandez, Fernandez and Baptista, 2006, p. 9). Moreover, the qualitative research is also *interpretive*; the reality of the phenomenon under study is constructed through the participants' and the researcher's perspectives and the meaning they give to it. This allows for the multiplicity of perspectives (Creswell, 2007) and facilitates the triangulation of the information (Hernandez, Fernandez and Baptista, 2006). It is also *inductive*; it is through the thorough analysis of the data that hypotheses are constructed and reconstructed.

There is a need for flexibility in the process or design of a qualitative research; it is possible that this process changes in order to adapt to the necessities of the investigation. This type of investigation is *not theory driven*; the qualitative researcher develops or looks for theories that back up his or her investigation. In a qualitative research, the investigator can choose from a wide range of instruments for data collection. The nature of the data collection instruments is not standard or statistical. However, some numerical or statistical instruments can be used to support or to corroborate information. A qualitative study can be generalized or not, be suitable for replica or not. As this type of research studies the phenomenon in its natural setting and within its particular context, and as the objective is to understand and interpret, it is not necessary to offer results that apply to a wider population. The qualitative investigator is allowed to have an internal perspective, but remains analytic and an observer of the problem from an external perspective (Hernandez, Fernandez and Baptista, 2006).

All in all, the previous paragraphs described the nature of the present study and its general characteristics. Moreover, this is a case study, research design that will be defined in the paragraphs below.

3.2 Case study design

A case study is a design that combines qualitative, quantitative and mixed research methods to study a particular phenomenon within specific boundaries "... through detailed, in-

depth data collection involving multiple sources of information, and reports a case description and case-based themes” (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). A case study research consists of studying a specific, bounded system or systems with unique qualities, context, situation or characteristics.

Stakes’ classifies case studies as *intrinsic* (the interest is on the case itself), *instrumental* (the case is used to study some related event) or *collective or multiple* (studies different cases surrounding the case) (Stakes, 1999). Thus, based on Stakes’ classification of case studies, this study is intrinsic since the focus is on examining a single case with no instrumental or mediation objectives.

As the object of study was already selected; the type of study to be carried out was self-evident. During the time I was a student of the English Language Major, I faced the fact that I was going to take a graduation examination (the CAE) which I felt I was not prepared to take. Some of my classmates at that time told me that the CAE was an examination whose nature was British English, that it was considered very difficult and that it was located at one of the highest levels of English proficiency. As I was still in the process of studying the basics of British English and was finding it very difficult - particularly vocabulary and listening skills - I started to feel anxious. In planning ahead, I took a CAE course which later on I found was not very helpful. It was during this process that I reached a point at which I considered that having to take this test was “unfair” due to the fact I felt well prepared to take a high status Standard English examination, but not a British one.

My question was: why would they apply a British examination to us if we had studied American English for six semesters and only two of British English? It was at that time that the present thesis became germane concerning the issues around the CAE test as a graduation examination. Some years later, I found myself trying to choose a phenomenon to investigate for my studies in masters and amongst various topics, my thesis director mentioned failure of CAE by students of the English Language Major at the UQROO. Consequently, failure of CAE

was the topic I happily chose. Furthermore, it became a case study after examining the type of phenomenon and the instruments that were going to be required if we wanted to find various perspectives of the possible causes of failure. In this way, the investigation would be more objective and would encompass all the aspects of the problem.

In this matter, Creswell (2007) and Duff (2008) would call the strategy that was used to select the case “Opportunistic sampling (taking advantage of opportunities that arise)” (Duff, 2008, p.115). There now follows a general description of the data collection and analysis procedures for this study.

3.3 Data collection procedures

As mentioned before, in qualitative studies, one of the major characteristics is the variety of instruments for data collection. Also, case studies can include both qualitative and quantitative data collection instruments and procedures and this makes it richer in possibilities for gathering information. Creswell (2007) describes the different procedures and instruments for data collection in a case study:

- Access and rapport: Gaining the confidence of the participants, becoming familiar with them.
- Sampling: Find a bounded, special case.
- Type of information/sources of information: Documents, records, interviews, direct/participant observations, physical artifacts, tests, elicited responses, stimulated recall, verbal reports and questionnaires.
- Recording information: Field notes, interview and observational protocols.
- Storing data: Field notes, transcriptions, computer files.
- Document analysis: Relevant paperwork and artifacts (textbooks, articles, students’ writings or assignments, course outlines, research journals).

The variety of instruments helped to triangulate the results and thus, achieve the validity of the investigation. Choosing an adequate approach and design for an investigation depends on various aspects. This investigation took many forms as previously noted. However, based on the type of information that was expected to be assembled and on the data collection instruments that were needed for it, the approach finally chosen was qualitative with a mixed-method case study design. Respectively, when referring to Stake's considerations for choosing a case study design, Creswell (2007, p.74) states:

A case study is a good approach when the inquirer has clearly identifiable cases with boundaries and seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the cases or a comparison or several cases.

3.3.1 Subjects of study

Regarding the present study, sampling occurred naturally. The selection of the participants for this study was based on availability and relevance to the project. In total, 18 individual interviews were carried out with 5 alumni, 8 students of the 10th cycle, 4 teachers, and 3 representatives of the English Language Major. Also, a triad and a dyad took place with 10th semester students. Amongst the alumni of the ELM who were interviewed there were participants who failed the CAE examination once, others who failed it more than four times, and one who passed it. In this way, the researcher could have a richer perspective and avoid bias. All the participants already mentioned were purposefully selected. Creswell (2007) calls this process of selection "maximum variation": It "consists of determining in advance some criteria that differentiate the sites or participants and then selecting sites or participants that are quite different on the criteria...it increases the likelihood that the findings will reflect differences or different perspectives" (p. 126). This facilitated the triangulation of the information and the approach to the phenomenon of study from different perspectives.

In brief, the participants of this study were:

- 5 alumni from the English Language Major of the University of Quintana Roo.
- 4 teachers of the English Language Major and CAE of the University of Quintana Roo.

- 8 students of 9th semester of the English Language Major of the University of Quintana Roo.
- The Head of the Department of Languages and Education (English for Departamento de Lenguas y Educación - DELED)
- The Dean of the Department of Political and Human Sciences (English for Departamento de Ciencias Políticas y Humanidades - DCPyH)
- The Head of the Language Center (English for Centro de Idiomas - CEI)

3.3.2 Access

Gaining access to the participants can be a delicate issue. The acceptance or refusal to participate in the investigation or to let the investigator carry out the study in an institution or workplace depends sometimes on the nature of the phenomenon being investigated, on the people involved or potentially involved in the investigation, on the outcomes of the research, on the risks involved in participating in the study, and a lot more possible factors.

However, a great deal of the possibilities of gaining access and rapport depends also on the investigator and his or her approach to the participants and decision makers. To facilitate the investigators duty when trying to gain access, Duff (2008) suggests the following: “Being familiar with the site and participants, having an “insider” status or having an ally on the inside, being clear about the research objectives and procedures, not placing unreasonable demands on one’s research participants, and offering some form of reciprocity...” (p. 126).

In this investigation, participants were approached personally or via e-mail to invite them to take part in the study. At that point, they were informed of the objectives of the investigation and the importance of their contribution. After participants accepted to meet the investigator for the interviews, all participants were handed in a copy of a that established the objectives of the research, the duration and procedure to be taken during the interview, and their rights as

participants such as leaving the investigation if they decided to do so. This document was signed by both parts; investigator and participant.

3.3.3 Instruments

There is a wide array of instruments that can be used in qualitative studies: journals, transcriptions, interviews, elicitation, picture description, letters, videos, observations, and so on. Creswell (2007) classifies the instruments into four types: observations, interviews, documents and audiovisual materials. However, there are other classifications by various authors (Yin, 2003; Duff, 2008; Hernández, Fernández y Baptista, 2006). Hernández, et al. (2006) mention that the researcher is also an important instrument of data collection, being that it is mainly through him or her that the data is being gathered.

Furthermore, case studies allow for the use of a large quantity of sources for data collection. Duff (2008) quotes Yin (2003) when he states that “Using multiple sources of data allows researchers to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources (p. 128)”. The researcher needs to take into consideration which instruments and/or techniques are suitable for his or her study, time and place restrictions. Thus, as in any study, data collection procedures and instruments must be chosen in terms of the outcomes the investigator expects from his or her study, the availability (considering economic, cultural, contextual aspects) of instruments and time limitations.

The type of instruments that were used in this study and their characteristics are:

1. Semi-structured interviews with teachers of the English Language Major and CAE of the University of Chetumal, Quintana Roo.
2. A semi-structured interview with the Head of the Department of Languages and Education (DELED) of the University of Chetumal, Quintana Roo.
3. A semi-structured individual interview with the Dean of the Department of Political and Human Sciences (DCPyH) of the University of Chetumal, Quintana Roo.

4. A semi-structured individual interview with the Head of the Language Center (CEI) of the University of Quintana Roo, Chetumal campus.
5. A dyad and a triad⁸ with students of the 10th semester of the English Language Major, of the University of Quintana Roo, Chetumal campus.
6. Semi-structured individual interviews with 4 alumni of the English Language Major, of the University of Quintana Roo, Chetumal campus.
7. Semi-structured individual interviews with 6 students of the 10th semester of the English Language Major, of the University of Quintana Roo, Chetumal campus.

It is important to mention that for the 10th semester students, information was gathered before and after they undergo the CAE at the UQROO. Therefore, some students participated twice. All the meetings were audiotaped and transcribed. In the following section, the procedure for the data collection will be described.

3.3.4 Procedure

It is worth remembering that in qualitative studies there are no ordered, specific steps to follow in order to achieve the expected results. During the course of a qualitative research some steps might be altered as new relevant information arises or changes need to be done in the methodology in order to adapt the study to expected outcomes, for instance. In this way, the procedure required for this investigation was intended first to include two focus groups with 10 students of 10th semester of the English Language Major (ELM) each. However, there were some time and availability constraints which led to carry out a dyad and a triad instead of two focus groups. Due to this, there was also a need to carry out individual interviews with 10th semester ELM students. Consequently, the procedure consisted of the following:

⁸ Dyads and triads consist of two and three participant discussion, respectively. These are similar to focus groups in procedure but are shorter in duration (an hour approximately). (Edmunds, H., 1999)

A dyad and a triad were carried out with students of 10th semester of the ELM of the UQROO campus Chetumal in order to discuss their feelings, motivation, preparation, perspectives and all aspects surrounding the CAE examination as one of the requirements to graduate from the ELM. The dyad was carried out before they took the CAE examination and the triad was carried out after the CAE examination, in order to discuss their experiences with the CAE and other aspects surrounding such examination. The meetings were video recorded and were moderated by the investigator.

Three semi-structured interviews were carried out with the representatives of the ELM; the Head of the Department of Languages and Education (English translation that stands for Departamento de Lenguas y Educación - DELED), the Dean of the Department of Political and Human Sciences (English translation that stands for Departamento de Ciencias Políticas y Humanidades - DCPyH) and the Head of the Language Center (English translation that stands for Centro de Idiomas - CEI) of the University of Quintana Roo, Chetumal campus, in order to find out the institutional policies surrounding the CAE as an exit examination for students of the ELM. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with teachers of the English Language Major in order to find out their views about the indices of failure of the CAE, as well as their observations and further information related to the matter. In addition, five semi-structured interviews with alumni from the ELM were carried out in order to know their points of view surrounding the fact of taking CAE as an exit evaluation.

All in all, the instruments and procedures for data collection in qualitative studies may vary or be adapted during the course of research as it was the case in this particular investigation. The three main instruments for data collection in this research were semi-structured interviews, a dyad and a triad. In the following section there is a description of the procedures for data analysis that were used in the present study.

3.4 Data analysis procedures

In case study research there are many types of data analysis; Creswell mentions: holistic, embedded, themes, within case and cross-case analyses (Creswell, 2007). Moreover, Creswell (2007) also mentions Stakes' (1995) forms of data analyses: Categorical aggregation, direct interpretation, establishing of patterns and making a correspondence (displaying data in a table), and making naturalistic generalizations. In addition, there are some computer programs created for data analysis in qualitative studies: Atlas.ti, QSR NVivo, HyperRESEARCH and MAXqda. Atlas.ti, direct interpretation, and identification of patterns were the methods of data analysis in this study.

Two main questions were posed in this research regarding the ELM of the UQROO in Chetumal: What are the causes behind the high rate of failure of the CAE? What are the educational policies behind the application of the CAE examination as a requirement to graduate from the major? To answer these questions, the current study used three types of data collection instruments: semi-structured interviews, a dyad and a triad. These were carried out with students, alumni, English teachers and three representatives of the ELM at the moment of the investigation. The variety of sources of information allowed a reduction of bias and helped provide a comprehensive perspective of the case being investigated. Moreover, "corroboration from different sources of data" (Duff, 2008, p. 177) or 'triangulation' gives reliability and validity to the study.

Hernández et al. (2006) refer to the process between data collection and data analysis as "receiving non-structured data so it can be structured" (p. 623). Data analysis was carried out according to Creswell (2007, p. 148), who describes three basic steps for data analysis based on concepts from different authors (Madison, 2005, Huberman and Myles, 1994, Wolcott, 1994):

- 1) Reducing the data into meaningful segments and naming these segments.

- 2) Combining the codes into broader categories or themes.
- 3) Displaying and comparing in data graphs, tables and charts.

Thus, information gathered in the field was fragmented, categorized and displayed in graphics for interpretation and analysis. The categories that were considered in the process of fragmentation and categorization are:

1. For research question number 1: What are the causes behind the high rate of failure of the CAE examination by students of the English Language Major of the University of Quintana Roo, Chetumal campus?
 - Beliefs about the CAE test: What is it? Where does it come from? What does it evaluate? How many points are needed to pass it? What type of English is evaluated? How many hours does it take?
 - Perceptions about the CAE test: Consider it difficult or not? Consider it important or not relevant? What is it for?
 - Before CAE: Feel prepared? What preparation strategies are being used? Feelings associated with taking the test
 - After CAE: Experiences taking the CAE, feelings associated with taking the CAE, were expectations met? Was it difficult/easy/regular?
 - Perceptions of CAE in relation to the major: Feelings and perspectives associated with taking the CAE as a graduation examination, suggestions, and complaints.
 - Other.
2. For research question number 2: What are the educational policies behind the application of the CAE exam to students of the English Language Major of the University of Quintana Roo, Chetumal campus, as a requirement to graduate from the major?

- Policies for the implementation of the CAE as final examination of the ELM:
Why CAE? How and why was the decision made?
- Decision makers: Who made the decision?
- Educational measures.
- Other.

However, many changes took place during the process of codification and categorization. As information was being reduced and codified, categories were being modified and refined according to the patterns noticed by the investigator. Duff (2008) mentions that qualitative analyses are often related to “iterative, cyclical, or inductive data analysis” (p. 159). In relation to this, Creswell (2007) refers to the process of qualitative data analysis as a data analysis spiral (Figure 3).

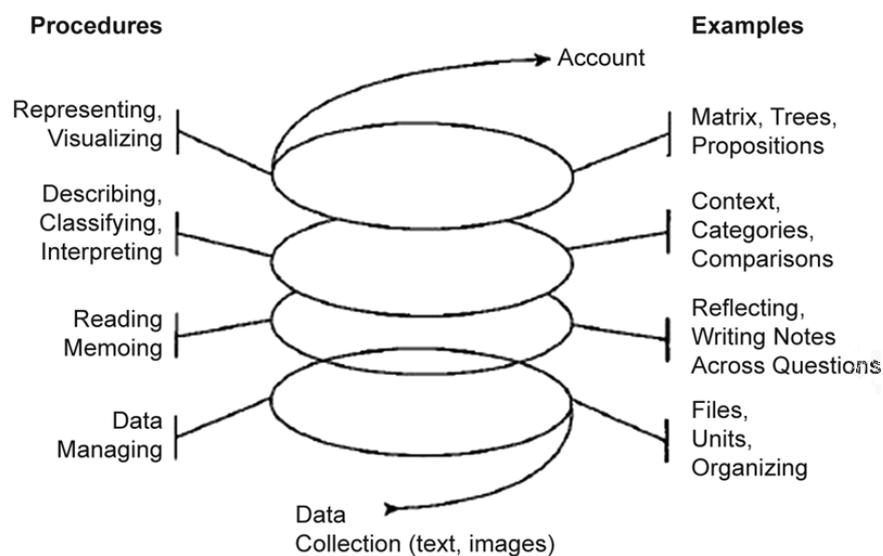


Fig. 5. *Data Analysis Spiral*. This illustration represents the flexibility of the process of data analysis in qualitative studies (Creswell, 2007).

The final categorization resulted in the following:

1. For research question number 1: What are the causes behind the high rate of failure of

the CAE examination by students of the English Language Major of the University of Quintana Roo, Chetumal campus?

- Preparation for CAE
 - Passing factors.
 - Students' characteristics.
 - Consistency between the ELM and the CAE.
 - Educational measures.
 - CAE: Communication and information.
 - Causes of failure.

- CAE Equivalent Test reliability.

2. For research question number 2: What are the educational policies behind the application of the CAE examination to students of the English Language Major of the University of Quintana Roo, Chetumal campus, as a requirement to graduate from the major?

- CAE: Policies of implementation
- Decision makers
- Educational measures.
- Other.

3.5 Strategies for validating findings

There are many aspects to take into account when it comes to the validity of a research and each author has his or her own classification (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982, Lincoln and Guba, 1985, Eisner, 1991, as mentioned in Creswell, 2007). In this study, LeCompte and Goetz's (1982 as cited in Creswell, 2007) classification was used to explain validity: Internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity. First, internal validity refers to the fact that the case to be studied has a value per se, this means that its value in the field of research

stands by itself. Secondly, external validity refers to the capacity of the research for its generalization. Furthermore, reliability consists of the research's potential for replication (Yin, 1984, as cited in Nunan and Bailey, 2009). Finally, objectivity refers to the empirical and provable aspect of the investigation; the avoidance of subjectivity, as a matter of fact.

However the validity measurements of case studies are not well defined. As case studies are individual, bounded to a particular phenomenon, external validity is not applicable. Case studies do not need to be generalizable. Moreover Gall, Gall & Borg (2003, cited in Duff, 2008, p. 175) state that since case studies do not need to find any patterns that connect them to any particular phenomena, there is no relevance in proving their internal validity. In addition, Stake (1988 in Nunan and Bailey, 2009, p.172) claims that "the principal difference between case studies and other research studies is that the focus of attention is the case not the whole population of cases." As regards to objectivity, Nunan and Bailey (2009) state that in the field of experimental research, there is a tendency to see subjectivity as threat to objectivity, while for a qualitative researcher, one of the advantages of carrying out a case study is that it allows them to "convincingly portray the individual or site under investigation" (p. 173). Moreover, Stake (1995) highlights the importance of subjectivity in case studies as it works as an "essential element of understanding" (cited in Duff, 2008, p. 56).

Nevertheless, in this case study, all strategies are considered important and were taken very seriously as the intention was to make this study as useful and reliable as possible. The strategies that were used for its validation are: triangulation - "corroboration from different sources of data" (Duff, 2008, p. 177), theory fundamentals (Duff, 2008), and internal validity (Nunan and Bailey, 2009). In this way, the intention is to combine both objectivity and subjectivity. Moreover, Gall, Gall & Borg (2005), as mentioned by Duff (2008), establish the criteria aspects to be considered when evaluating case studies. These aspects are various but are divided into three basic parts: Sensitivity to readers' needs, use of sound research methods

and thoroughness of data collection analysis (p. 177). Another aspect related to validity is ethics. Some ethical issues may arise as a result of neglected aspects of the investigation; some measures have to be taken in order to avoid possible negative circumstances that may impair the development of the study or that may harm the validity of the study's results. In the following chapter, there is a description of some anticipated ethical measures that were taken in the present study.

3.6 Anticipated ethical issues

Data collection procedures involve gaining access to many aspects of the participants' lives. Observation, for instance, requires the investigator to be 'there' during the participants' interactions and experiences, which can cause a little discomfort for them or people surrounding them. Thus, it is important that the investigator is accountable for all the permission requests needed by him or her to carry out the investigation in order to prevent any issues of non-ethical behavior. Ethics is a primary aspect of investigations in general. All procedures must be carried out legally, ethically and professionally. In case studies, as a lot of insight is required (the focus is on a particular case), all the necessary ethical steps need to be taken before starting the field work. In this matter, it was considered of great importance to inform all participants about the purposes, procedures and results of the study (Duff, 2008).

For this reason, all participants in the present study were made aware of these aspects before their interventions. Also, they were handed in a form of consent and a copy of said document which contained all the aspects regarding their participation in the study. It also contained a fragment establishing their rights to remain anonymous and to leave the study at any time. All participants accepted the implications of the study and signed the consent.

There are a lot of ethical issues that might arise when undertaking not only a case study but any study. Nevertheless, prior preparation and arrangements can absorb most of the possible obstacles for developing the study. Ethics involves a great number of aspects but good

common sense and respect between participants and investigator are two basic aspects to consider before, during, and after carrying out the study. In the following paragraphs there is a description of the way in which this study can contribute to the field of research.

3.7 Significance of the Study

Students of current and future generations of the English Language Major of the University of Quintana Roo, Chetumal campus, might directly benefit from this research as it may serve to find solutions to diminish the high rate of failure of the CAE examination as graduation requirement. As well, teachers and researchers of the English Language Major of the UQROO might benefit in terms of investigation, syllabus design, statistics and evaluation. Furthermore, the University of Quintana Roo can benefit in terms of increasing the CAE pass rates in the ELM, yielding good academic results, offering a better graduate profile, and winning recognition from other institutions and representatives. In addition, other English as a Foreign Language Teaching programs from national and international institutions and universities, may also benefit from this research. Although this research is not generalizable per se, the information provided here can be used to aid in academic decisions related to the matter. They can use it as a point of reference for further curricular or pedagogical modifications. Finally, this investigation may contribute to back up other research studies. Researchers can use this study for individual, specific or institutional purpose, or to develop investigations and projects related to the matter. In the following section there is a detailed description of the data analysis of this study.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis of the data was done by organization, codification, and categorization. The software Atlas.ti was used to aid the data analysis process. For the first research question, the two main categories were: *Preparation for CAE* and *CAE Equivalent Test Reliability*. The first category, *Preparation for CAE*, refers to all the factors that contribute to students' passing of the CAE examination. The second category, the *CAE equivalent test reliability*, emerged as data revealed that the majority of students and alumni in this investigation took the UQROO equivalent version of the CAE rather than the official version. Moreover, the CAE equivalent test was taken from one to seven times by some participants of this study. Only one participant took the official CAE and passed it the first time. This last category illustrates if this examination is reliable and thus, if it represents an important influence in the high failure rate. For the second research question, there is a description of the reasons for the implementation of the CAE as an exit examination and the institutional policies regarding its implementation.

4.1 Research question 1: What are the causes behind the high rate of failure of the CAE by students of the English Language Major of the University of Quintana Roo, Chetumal campus?

In relation to the first research question, two main categories resulted from the data analysis: *Preparation for CAE* and *the CAE equivalent test reliability*. The first category, *Preparation for CAE*, refers to the factors that contribute to the preparation of students for the CAE examination. These were the ones that were included in the results due to relevance: *Passing factors, students' characteristics, consistency between the English program in the ELM and evaluating with CAE examination, educational measures, communication and information, and causes of failure* (See figure 6). The second category refers to the characteristics of the

UQROO's CAE test equivalence and its relation to the high rate of failure. In the following paragraphs there is a more detailed explanation of each category.

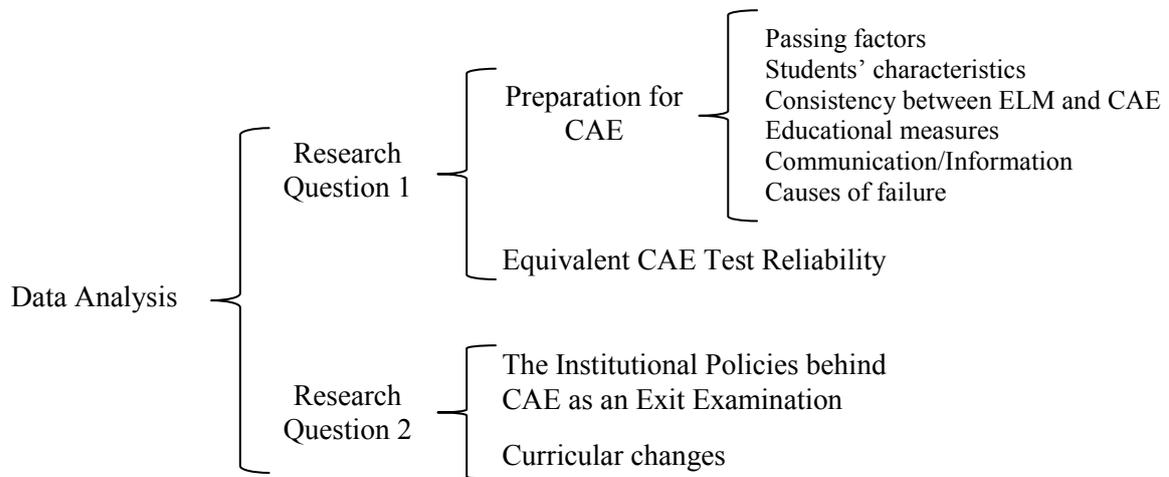


Fig. 6. *Data analysis distribution.* This figure illustrates how categories and subcategories are distributed in this study along the data analysis chapter.

Regarding the category *Preparation for CAE*, the first subcategory *passing factors*, refers to those aspects declared by alumni to have contributed to their passing of the CAE examination. Some patterns found in the data were in relation to the students' knowledge of and familiarization with the CAE examination and its format, anxiety, students' test taking measures and other. This subcategory was not included for Group 1 (students) since participants in this group were not aware of their CAE test scores at the moment of the interviews.

Furthermore, the second subcategory, *students' characteristics*, refers to what is considered in this study as related or influential in the students' passing or failing of the CAE examination. These factors include their perception of the CAE, aspects that influenced their behavior and test taking measures before taking the examination, and their academic accountability during the major. The latter refers to the participants' management of academic responsibilities, self-study, and their CAE preparation measures (or lack of them) during the major. Moreover, another aspect included in the *students' characteristics* is the English level

students had when they entered the major. This aspect is important since the effect English instruction in the ELM can have on students with a high English level might be different from those who entered the major with a low English level. Knowledge about the CAE or about the Cambridge examinations is another factor that can influence students in their preparation for the examination.

Moreover, the subcategory *consistency between the English program in the ELM and evaluating with the CAE examination* is a major factor that contributes to the preparation of students to take the CAE examination. This included aspects such as *material, English varieties, general preparation, teaching practices, teacher training, courses of CAE preparation, format, content, and curriculum*. It is worth mentioning that these patterns vary according to the group of participants since not all of these emerged in each group. Moreover, these are organized in each group by density of the data. Moreover, the subcategory *educational measures*, refers to those actions taken by the institution as a result of implementing the CAE as an exit examination in the major. The participants who acted as sources of information for this subcategory were teachers and representatives. Students and alumni were not considered for this subcategory since they are not official sources of information as regards to changes and decisions in the English Language Major.

Furthermore, the subcategory *communication and information*, refers to the flow or accessibility of information (or the lack of it) regarding the CAE examination in the English Language Major (ELM). It also refers to the importance attached to the CAE examination by students, teachers and representatives of the ELM during the major. Finally, *causes of failure* are those considered by the participants to have influenced their failing scores on the CAE examination. All these subcategories were determined from patterns that emerged during the data analysis.

The category, *Equivalent CAE Test reliability* describes the aspects related to the reliability of the UQROO equivalent CAE test. This test is taken from past versions of the official CAE test and is administered at the UQROO to English Language Major students at the end of the major for graduation purposes only. This CAE replica is referred to in this study as “the equivalent CAE test”. Moreover, the equivalent CAE test is an examination that is administered in the facilities of the UQROO and is scored by English teachers of the UQROO English Department. This examination is also known in the UQROO as the “institutional CAE”, the ‘home-made CAE’ or the “equivalent CAE”. The certification that the CAE equivalence offers is valid only at the UQROO and does not stand for an official language certification in any other institution.

The analysis of the reliability of this test was based on data related to the duration of the examination, the circumstances of its administration, the way in which it is scored, and its cost. These aspects revealed to what extent this examination has been reliable and thus, if it has been fair to the students. A description of the information provided by the participants regarding the aspects already mentioned is given in further paragraphs. The analysis of the data is displayed by groups of participants. Thus, each category and their respective subcategories are presented in the following manner:

- 1) Category 1: Preparation for CAE
 1. Group 1: Students
 2. Group 2: Alumni
 3. Group 3: Teachers
 4. Group 4: Representatives

2) Category 2: Equivalent CAE Test Reliability

1. Group 1: Students
2. Group 2: Alumni
3. Group 3: Teachers
4. Group 4: Representatives

4.1.1 Category 1: Preparation for CAE

This category, as mentioned before was divided into the subcategories *passing factors*, *students' characteristics*, *consistency between the English program in the ELM and evaluating with the CAE examination*, *educational measures*, *communication and information*, and *causes of failure*. However, for groups 1 and 2, students and alumni, the subcategory *educational measures* was not included as these participants were unaware of this information. Also, for group 1, students, *causes of failure* were not included as subcategory as the participants were interviewed before knowing their scores on the CAE. The analysis of data is displayed in the next paragraphs by groups and then by subcategories.

Group 1: Students

The participants in this group were eight 10th semester students of the English Language Major (ELM). There were individual interviews, a dyad and a triad. The interviews took place before and after students had undergone the CAE examination. In this section there is a description of the findings related to the CAE examination as an exit examination of the ELM from the students' perspectives and testimonies.

Students' characteristics (Group 1: Students)

One student was familiarized with the structure of the examination. Another student expressed that he had done little personal preparation for the examination. He explained that due to lack of time he did not study more for the examination. Another student noted that

reading in English, doing exercises, and studying vocabulary were part of his personal preparation for the CAE examination. He also explained that *speaking* could only be practiced in the classroom owing to our Spanish speaking environment. Another participant claimed that a teacher provided them with photocopies of practice exercises which were the only instruments for study that she used.

Moreover, another participant suggested that he had no knowledge about the CAE which led him to look it up on the Internet and find out more about it. He also explained that he looked for CAE exercises, occasionally used the Self Access Center (SAC) and also searched the internet for web pages that could aid him and his classmates in the preparation for the examination. Another student mentioned having bought some books to prepare on her own and practiced with reading exercises she found on the Internet as her main personal preparation for the test.

One student mentioned having practiced via the Internet and also having asked some teachers for help. She also pointed out that if students need help with the CAE, they have to approach teachers and ask them. Another student mentioned having practiced repeatedly with textbook CAE exercises he borrowed from a friend. A different participant expressed that he was already familiar with the Cambridge examinations because he had studied in a language institution and had taken the FCE there. He also described some test-taking strategies he learned in that institution. He added that they could not do self-study in the SAC because the material they required for their individual study was no longer available.

Another student mentioned she had taken the CAE Preparation courses offered at the UQROO, she had also studied vocabulary and had searched for more exercises on her own. She mentioned, as well, listening to the BBC radio station and renting British movies in order to practice listening. She mentioned that such preparation was not on a regular basis.

All in all, the test taking strategies that these participants used for taking the CAE were practicing with CAE exercises, looking for information about the CAE test, reading English texts, studying vocabulary, doing exercises on the Internet, asking teachers for help, taking CAE Preparation courses at the UQROO, looking for material in the SAC, listening to the BBC Radio station, and watching British movies.

The consistency between the ELM and the CAE examination (Group 1: Students)

The following paragraphs describe students' perceptions of the consistency (or the lack of it) between the ELM and their final evaluation. These are subdivided into: *material*, *English varieties*, *teaching practices*, *general preparation*, *format*, *content*, and *curriculum*.

Material (Group 1: Students)

With reference to the didactic material, three participants stated that there are not enough resources at the Language Center of the UQROO. These participants claimed that the books that are available in the Self Access Center (SAC) are scarce in comparison to the number of students that require such material. Moreover, they mentioned that said books do not have their respective audio CD which is needed to do the listening activities and that they are incomplete. One student expressed that such material is not designed to prepare students for the CAE examination. In addition, in the SAC, students are not allowed to borrow the material for self-study at home. Participants also mentioned that during the semester before taking the CAE, the SAC was closed two weeks before the examination. With relation to the material, one student expressed the following:

In the SAC there are several books but it appears that, it isn't... it isn't the same type [of exercises] that they have in the exam... Then, it's like they are useless for CAE.

Moreover, three participants were discussing:

Participant 1: I wanted to use them [the materials], I mean, when it ended [the academic term], I wanted to finish the semester first... and then start [using the materials in the

SAC]; finally, there were two weeks, right? left like.. before the CAE. But it turned out that the Language Center was closed...

Participant 2: Yeah, it was closed...

Participant 1: Because they were on vacation, and I said to myself “I mean they are definitely not helping us... I mean, definitely” and the only thing I could do was borrowing a CAE book that they had here at the library, and in fact, as she [referring to the other participant] says, I think is 2002 or 2003 edition...

Participant 2: Then if they don't come with audio, or with answers, you cannot do it [study] on your own, then... I think there is a need... maybe... for more material or... organization...

Participant 3: More love for students...

(Own translation)

On the other hand, another student expressed that there are books in the Language Center that are in British English that could be of help to study for the CAE.

In sum, data suggested that students outnumber the resources at the Self-Access Center (SAC) for preparing for the CAE; materials that are available are obsolete and are incomplete; materials are only accessible at the SAC – students cannot borrow or make copies of the materials and exercises – there are no CAE exercises or guides, and there is some material in British English that can be useful to students.

English varieties (Group 1: Students)

All students agreed that two courses of British English are not enough to prepare them for the CAE examination, with reference to the subjects of English Language VII and English Language VIII. One student, for instance, pointed out:

I don't think two courses are what is needed, why? Because in one semester, clearly they are not going to... focus only on a single ability, they have to focus on all of them...
(Own translation)

When asked if the courses in British English were sufficient to prepare students for the CAE, another student said:

No, I think it's very, very little time because... um... there should be more preparation for... for the CAE preparation being that... it is not an... exam where you can say "well! No problem if you pass it or not" don't you think? (Own translation)

Moreover, four students expressed that all English subjects in the major should be in British English to be consistent with the CAE examination. In relation to this, one student claimed:

If... CAE is what we're going to take, it should be since the beginning... to focus the major more on that type of English... (Own translation)

Another student said:

I think it's difficult that... we've been instructed in American English throughout the entire major, um... and suddenly they evaluate us with a British exam. (Own translation)

In addition, they expressed that the sudden change from American to British English affects their learning and motivation. With reference to this, the participants mentioned issues such as:

Participant 1: ... we have been instructed in American English almost all of the... my major... and suddenly they switch to British English and it's a very drastic change...

Participant 2: We were studying American English... and suddenly we started to study British English as if they were forcing us into it. And then... that required a... a bigger effort from us.

Participant 3: I've been practicing and studying all the time... and suddenly, ha! I'm very good at it, right? But suddenly they give me those types of exercises... and it's like I went backwards again, right? And back to practice again...

(Own translation)

Other aspects mentioned about the two courses, English Language VII and VIII were that there are less hours of instruction (twice a week), that some classes become part time lessons, and that exercises are not constant.

To sum up, all students think that the amount of time of British English instruction is not enough to prepare them for the CAE. Moreover, it was evident that the real amount of instruction was less than that established in the curriculum since some teachers only gave part-

time lessons. As well, the amount of hours of instruction in the syllabus decreases when British English is introduced. Furthermore, the exercises and material of instruction during the two semesters of British English are from the FCE, so students are prepared for a FCE level during that time. Thus, students finalize their last English course in the English Language Major with a FCE level. In addition, the majority of students considered that British English should be taught during the entire major. Finally, the change from American English to British English is too drastic and it has a negative effect in their motivation.

Teaching practices (Group 1: Students)

This section provides a description of the data obtained from students about the teachers of the ELM and their teaching practices regarding the preparation of students for the CAE examination throughout the major. Six participants mentioned that generally some teachers help them to prepare for the CAE though not all of them. Four participants claimed that some teachers, on a few occasions, used exercises related or focused on the CAE. From these participants, one mentioned that a teacher brought them exercises with the objective of preparing them for CAE. Another participant mentioned that these exercises were related to the CAE though not all of them were CAE exercises. Another student mentioned that one teacher used to ask students to solve CAE exercises at home and bring them to class. Another student claimed that the same teacher brought them listening exercises in British English. Moreover, four participants said that teachers used to remind students to study for the CAE. These are some students quoting teachers of the ELM:

In terms of “you ought to have more vocabulary...” or “you must study more...” or “you must be prepared in British to be able to take CAE” but that was around the last semesters... around the sixth semester maybe.

Every other minute they told us... “Keep in mind that when you finish the major you’re going to take the CAE and you’re going to fail it if you don’t prepare yourselves well because it’s very difficult...” Not all of them [the teachers] but most of them.

He [the teacher] saw that we were not doing well and said... “You have to be concerned about it [studying] because this is not the only [English] level... this is the beginners level so you have to get your acts together if you don’t want to stay behind.”

(Own translation)

As well, three participants talked about teachers’ practices related to the way in which they prepared students for the CAE. One student claimed that the preparation they received from teachers was limited, although their accessibility and willingness to help students compensated for such lack of preparation for the CAE. Two different participants, when referring to one teacher in particular, expressed that he had prepared them specifically for the CAE and showed willingness to help them when they required it. Three participants expressed dissatisfaction with teachers for not preparing them enough or not preparing them at all for the CAE. However, one participant stated that the preparation he received from teachers was enough for him to take the CAE.

Summarizing, generally some teachers help students prepare for the CAE. One teacher was repeatedly mentioned to have helped students by bringing them CAE exercises and preparing them specifically to take the test. Evidence suggested that some teachers were willing to help students if they approached and asked for it. There was no evidence of a preparation for the CAE test involving more than one teacher.

General Preparation for the CAE (Group 1: Students)

Furthermore, six out of the eight participants expressed that the preparation they received in the major for the CAE examination was not enough or consistent with said examination. A different participant first mentioned that she considered the preparation for CAE was not consistent with the examination. However, she changed her mind after taking the CAE examination and considered the CAE itself as the major problem for candidates. She claimed that receiving preparation for the CAE examination was not going to help them develop communicative skills in English. All eight students thought that the general

preparation they received in the ELM was not related to the CAE examination. Participants stated that the English program was not consistent with preparation for the CAE examination. They agreed that they received preparation in English though it was not sufficient to pass CAE. Moreover, they claimed that they had to do their own preparation for the CAE. Participants expressed:

Participant 1: They [the teachers] tried in matters of "... let's prepare them for the CAE"... but for one thing or another they didn't focus on that... in reality... we never had like... a deep preparation regarding the CAE.

Participant 2: In the major they say: "it is a requirement"... but it is not in the... program... it's [the program] more focused towards... subjects related to grammar, education... teaching... It disregards... the exam... that it's on your own... in the exam there's nothing like... what we learned in the major. (Own translation)

In addition, two participants said it was important that students prepared themselves for the CAE examination and that they become more autonomous in their study. Finally, participants also referred to the courses of Preparation for CAE that are offered in the ELM. All participants agreed that these courses are not adequate due to various aspects. Among these, they mentioned that Preparation for CAE is not available when they need it, that the time when it is offered is not adequate, the courses are not 'entertaining', the contents are more related to the format of the examination rather than preparation for the examination.

All in all, the participants agreed that the English Language Major offers a preparation that is not consistent with what the CAE requires to obtain its certification and a majority considered that the preparation is not sufficient as well. A number of students consider that the CAE is not related to what they learned in the major. Data from students reveals that although teachers help students in acquiring language proficiency, the level and proficiency they acquire at the end of the major is lower than what the CAE requires. Moreover, data revealed that although taking the CAE is a requirement, there is no related course established in the syllabus of the ELM or a specific program to prepare students for the test. Thus, teachers do not feel

obliged to prepare students for the CAE. Therefore, students end up looking for ways to prepare on their own right before taking the test. Lastly, CAE Preparation is the only ‘official’ course for preparing students for the test. However, it is not compulsory and students do not consider these courses are what they need to take to pass the CAE.

Format (Group 1: Students)

Furthermore, in relation to the format of the exercises, two students mentioned that they had only practiced with exercises similar to the ones in the CAE for the abilities of reading and listening, on a few occasions. Two other students mentioned that it was not until the last semesters that they were introduced to the format of exercises used in CAE and that they were not constant. Two participants mentioned that the nature of the exercises they saw in the major was different from that in CAE exercises. Moreover, the three students who were interviewed after taking the CAE examination expressed that there were exercises that they were not familiar with, and two of them were not aware of the way in which the *writing* section of the examination was going to be assessed. On the other hand, the three participants who were interviewed after CAE expressed that the CAE examination was not as “difficult” as they had expected and all of them passed the CAE examination. Therefore, to sum up, evidence indicated that students did not have a regular access to CAE exercises to practice before taking the test. However, although students had not had constant access to the format of the CAE exercises, for the three participants who were interviewed after taking the CAE this seems to have not affected their final scores or their performance during the test.

Content

Four out of eight students mentioned the importance of the nature of the content taught in the ELM in their preparation for the CAE examination. Three of these participants mentioned that the content taught in the major helped them in their preparation for the CAE examination. Three students claimed that although the content taught in the ELM was useful in

their preparation to take the CAE examination, it was not enough nor was it intrinsically related to it. One student did not mention if the content taught in the ELM was useful for the CAE but considered the variety of content important for their preparation and motivation. It was observed, then, that an important number of students considered content as influential in their performance on the CAE, although the rest of the participants did not referred to the topic.

Curriculum (Group 1: Students)

Two students mentioned that the organization of the subjects in the ELM was not adequate for their English preparation. In the ELM the English subjects start in the second semester since the first semester only includes core curriculum subjects. One participant considered that the core curriculum subjects were barely related to their object of study. Both participants claimed that the English subjects in the ELM should start from the beginning of the major and considered the organization of these subjects unfavorable for their English preparation and consequently for their preparation for CAE. Thus, although the curriculum was considered by some participants as influential by some students, this was not a strong pattern for this group. Nevertheless, it holds a relation with the data about the English varieties in the major. The following section provides a description of the findings related to the communication among students and teachers and the accessibility of information about the CAE examination to students of the ELM throughout the major.

Communication and information (Group 1: Students)

Six students were aware of the difference in cost between the institutional and the official CAE. Five students were aware of the differences between the UQROO CAE and the official CAE with regard to the validity of the UQROO equivalent CAE test certification. Five participants were conscious of the differences between both examinations in terms of acceptance of the certification. Five participants knew that the CAE is a British examination.

Five more expressed confusion related to the way in which each examination (the official CAE test and the UQROO equivalent CAE test) was evaluated.

Four participants stated that the CAE is an examination that is scored by abilities, although they expressed not being certain about this information. Four participants were familiar with the format of the CAE. One of these students was familiar with the CAE before entering the UQROO. Another one had already taken the CAE a year before. Three participants were aware of the high English level demanded by the CAE. Three other participants expressed confusion about the differences between the UQROO CAE equivalence test and the official CAE. The three participants who were interviewed after taking the CAE examination knew the scores required to pass each examination. These, in addition, complained about the lack of information available at the UQROO related to the CAE examination. Participants who were interviewed before taking the CAE were not aware of the points or scores required to pass the examination.

Five participants claimed they knew through the teachers of the ELM about the requisite of CAE, two through their classmates, and one heard of it during the *rally* which consists of introductory activities carried out at the UQROO to invite students to the major. Moreover, three participants claimed they had found out about the CAE requirement between the second and third semester of the major, two more at the end of the major, two during the first semester, and one about the middle of the major. When asked if they attached importance to the CAE during the major three participants expressed that at the beginning of the major they were not aware of the importance of the CAE. It was not until the last semesters that they began to consider it important due to comments they had heard from classmates and alumni. In relation to this, one student expressed:

You know you have to take the examination... but it never... dawns on you... and it's when you're already in the seventh or eighth semester that... you notice that it's getting closer. (Own translation)

Seven participants considered the CAE of great importance. One student said it was just another requisite to get a degree. However, this student claimed feeling worried about it. Moreover, participants were asked if teachers of subjects other than English mentioned or reminded them about the CAE during the major. Regarding this, four participants said no, two said that in one or two subjects, and one said yes. All participants agreed that teachers of subjects other than English showed interest in their English level by correcting them or helping them improve their English. Six participants claimed that preparation for CAE is not given enough importance during the major. Students argued that teachers reminded them about CAE and mentioned it from time to time or when students were not showing good performance in English. However, no real CAE preparation was given to them, apart from what was mentioned in the *teaching practices* subcategory (See p. 58). Two other participants claimed that CAE had not been taken into account until the last semesters, when the date to take the examination was getting closer. Some students expressed:

They only tell you “Well, you have to pass the CAE examination” and you... continue going to your classes and that’s all... when you’re in the seventh or sixth cycle... it’s like, you start to worry about it right? And it’s when teachers start to tell you about it.

I heard some rumors, right? that you have to take a final examination... but I didn’t know what type of examination, or how it was... or anything else... it is until the last semesters that one starts to notice that “Well, you have to pass this exam” and if you don’t... well, you can’t get a degree. (Own translation)

Moreover, one student complained both not being aware of the CAE requirement, since it caused her not to seek information, and not being informed about the PET and the FCE, which students can take as equivalence for the corresponding English courses. In sum, the majority of students were aware that there was a difference in cost (although were not aware of the cost per se), the length, and acceptance of both the UQROO equivalent CAE test and the official CAE. The majority of the students was also aware of the nature of the official CAE test and was familiar with the format of the CAE. However, an important number of students were not sure about the way in which the UQROO equivalent CAE test (the one they were going to

take at the moment of this investigation) was scored or the score they needed to pass it. Most students found out about the CAE requirement through their teachers and a majority found out about it after the second semester of the major. However, some of them only discovered the importance of the CAE at the end of the English program of the major. Furthermore, the majority of students claimed that preparation for CAE is not given enough importance during the major.

Thus, it can be concluded from the *communication and information* subcategory that although a number of students might be aware of the general aspects of the test (such as cost, dates, length, acceptance of the UQROO version) there is a lot of disinformation regarding the CAE as requirement to graduate from the major. The tendency shows that half of the students are aware of the requirement during the major but the majority are not conscious of the high-stakes testing situation until they are months away from taking the CAE. In addition, data suggest that teachers only mention the CAE to students from time to time without getting very much involved in the matter. The following paragraphs describe the students' perspectives of the causes of failure in the CAE examination.

Causes of failure (Group 1: Students)

Students, as well as the second group (alumni) were not asked about the causes they considered could lead students to fail the CAE as a graduation examination in order to avoid biased answers in the interviews and also to avoid influencing their performance on the CAE. Data that was considered as possible causes of failure resulted from patterns in the statements of the participants from Group 1 and Group 2. Some of these patterns did not emerge for one group but were included because they appeared in the second group data. These patterns were named as follows: *Anxiety, language skills, test taking preparation and responsibilities, format of the examination, ambiguity of information, the English program, and overconfidence.*

In the following paragraphs there is a description of the data found in Group 1.

Anxiety

Seven participants expressed having negative emotions before the examination. Students illustrated it as it follows:

Participant 1: I've been told it's very difficult... [I feel] very, very nervous.

Participant 2: People... tell you it is very difficult... that it is very long, that it is very tiring, that it is very tedious... then, I don't have a positive feedback about it.

Participant 3: One becomes more stressed out... you say "if I fail it, I won't get my degree".

(Own translation)

Four of these participants also expressed not being affected by the negative comments. One participant declared:

To me it is something... is a challenge... umm... of personal growth as much as educational... to me it is something that will take me... one step ahead, right?

(Own translation)

Language Skills

Six participants expressed not feeling prepared for the CAE for the ability of *listening*. However, the three participants interviewed after taking CAE expressed that *listening* seemed easy for them or not as difficult as they had expected. Moreover, the skills that they found difficult were *use of English* and *reading*. Two participants were concerned with the ability of *reading*. Two of them noted having difficulties with vocabulary. Two more expressed being comfortable with *writing* because they were accustomed to writing formal and informal texts. The abilities in which participants felt more prepared were *speaking* and *writing*.

Format of the examination

Participants who were interviewed after taking CAE had trouble with the type of exercises for the abilities of *reading*, *writing* and *listening*. One student mentioned that "the questions were tricky". Some students were not familiar with the format of the CAE. With respect to this, one student said:

The reading was difficult; there was a section about the paragraphs where... you could put any paragraph... Supposedly I ordered them correctly and... for me it was a logical order because I read them later... but... supposedly not. (Own translation)

Moreover, two participants declared they believe the format of the examination is a possible cause of failure. One participant suggested that the problem might be that the CAE is not suitable for them due to the type of exercises.

Test taking preparation and responsibilities

Two participants mentioned that they did not agree that a lack of self-study might be a cause of failure of the CAE. They argued that the English courses they took in the ELM should have been sufficient disregarding whether they had done personal preparation or not.

Material

One participant mentioned that he considered that one of the major causes of failure of the examination was the inadequacy and lack of material available for students to prepare for the CAE.

Ambiguity

One participant declared that the lack of up to date information about the examination might be one factor that influences failure of the CAE. He argued that if students knew more about the CAE from the beginning of the major they would start studying and preparing beforehand.

In sum, the aspects that students repeated the most during the interviews that were considered as potentially influential on their performance on the CAE were *anxiety*, the *language skills*, and the *format of the examination*. A majority of the participants mentioned feeling worried or stressed before the examination. This might have been due to the students hearing about the difficulty of the CAE from different sources. Moreover, regarding *language skills*, the majority of the participants did not feel prepared for the *listening* section of the CAE, although this did not seem to have affected some students on their performance in that section.

Students felt more prepared for the abilities of *speaking* and *writing*. Finally, with regard to the format of the examination, students had problems with some sections of the examination due to lack of familiarization with the type of exercises. Some overtly expressed that the format might be causing students to fail the CAE. In the following paragraphs, data obtained from the second group, *alumni*, are described by category and subcategory.

Group 2: Alumni

Five alumni from different generations were interviewed in order to know their perceptions, experiences, feelings, recommendations and opinions surrounding the CAE examination as a graduation examination with the objective of finding the factors influencing failure. Participants from this group have taken the CAE at least once. Interviews were carried out individually. Subcategories were determined by patterns emerged from the data of the interviews. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the resulting subcategories were: *passing factors, students' characteristics, educational measures, communication and information, consistency between the English program in the ELM and evaluating with CAE examination, and causes of failure*. The subcategory *educational measures*, was not considered for this group as *alumni* are not official sources of this information.

Passing factors (Group 2: Alumni)

When asked which aspects they believed had helped them pass the CAE examination, all alumni mentioned knowing the format of the CAE. Two alumni mentioned that knowing the format of the CAE and test taking strategies is important for students to feel confident before and during the examination. Three alumni mentioned that after failing the CAE they studied more on their own which helped them pass the examination. Two alumni claimed they passed the examination after having asked one teacher for help (both participants referred to the same teacher), who sent them information, activities, Internet links, and other material for them to prepare for the CAE. One participant mentioned that having studied English for ten years in an

English academy that prepares them for Cambridge examinations helped her pass the examination. She also mentioned that another aspect that helped her was the lack of pressure to take the examination since she took the CAE as a personal choice, years before the rest of her classmates.

As data revealed, all alumni reported that the aspect that helped them in passing the CAE was familiarization with the format. The two participants who took the CAE on more than five occasions stated that asking a teacher for help led them to pass the CAE. Moreover, in their individual interviews, both alumni referred to the same teacher who is the only certified CAE examiner in the English Language Major.

In the next paragraphs there is a description of the alumni's profiles as ELM students regarding their previous knowledge about the CAE or about Cambridge examinations, their English academic backgrounds, self-study, CAE test preparation, and their academic performance during the major.

Students' characteristics (Group 2: Alumni)

Two participants took the UQROO equivalent CAE test on more than five occasions before passing it. Two other participants passed the equivalent test the second time they took it. One participant took the official CAE and passed it the first time. These participants hold several characteristics in common except for the last one, whose academic background and context was very different from the rest. Two participants are similar in that they took English courses in other institutions apart from the UQROO. One of them studied at an English academy that has a focus on Cambridge Examinations including the CAE. She was a student in that academy for ten years before entering the English Language Major (ELM). Therefore, she was familiar with the CAE before entering the major. Moreover, she was aware that CAE was a graduation requirement from the beginning of the major unlike the other participants. One participant entered the major before CAE was established as the graduation examination in the

ELM. She was registered as a member of the 2003-2008 generation due to some academic changes in her student profile during the major. She had the certainty that her graduation requirement was the FCE and was surprised after being informed that she would be required to take the CAE examination instead.

Therefore, the only participant of this group who passed the examination the first time had a ten year preparation in an English teaching institution which specializes in teaching Cambridge test taking strategies. More importantly, she took the official CAE rather than the UQROO equivalent test.

The consistency between the ELM and the CAE examination (Group 2: Alumni)

The following paragraphs describe perceptions of the alumni regarding the consistency or lack of consistency between the ELM and the final evaluation. These are subdivided in: *General preparation, courses of CAE Preparation, teaching practices, content, English varieties, material, format, and curriculum.*

General preparation for CAE (Group 2: Alumni)

Four participants stated that the English program of the ELM does not prepare them for the CAE. In relation to this, one participant claimed that the preparation they receive in the ELM is not enough because the last two English courses (English Language VII and VIII) were only a review of the former English courses. However, he stated that the other ELM subjects were more demanding which helped him in his preparation. He also argued that what they needed was to practice more with CAE exercises and sample CAE tests. Another participant stated that the CAE demands a higher level than what students achieve at the end of the major. She argued that English VIII prepares students for a FCE level and no preparation is given to reach the next level which is required to pass the CAE. Another participant claimed that there is no consistency between what they were taught in the major and what the CAE evaluates. One participant stated that she received a good preparation in grammar for the CAE, but she

claimed there is a need for more practice and that the vocabulary is difficult. Regarding these matters some alumni stated:

They should raise the level... it's not only... finding an exam with a higher level and... have students take it to see who passes, who are good... If they don't know how it's going to be, and they were never... taught a strategy, it seems unfair to me that they establish something that is not familiar to them.

I've seen various people who had taken it up to three, four times and they keep... failing the exam, and it's not because they don't know English or because they can't understand it but because... we haven't been adequately prepared in the major to do the exam.

(Own translation)

Thus, the majority of the participants agreed that the syllabus of the ELM is not consistent with the CAE examination. Alumni mentioned various reasons such as the limited hours of British English instructions, a higher level of the CAE in comparison with the students' level, the inconsistency between the preparation given to students in the major and the level of the CAE, and a general lack of preparation for the CAE.

Courses of CAE Preparation (Group 2: Alumni)

Only three participants took the courses of CAE Preparation imparted at the UQROO and two agreed that they were useful for them. One of them claimed that the book they used was 'good' and the other participant commented that the course helped her get familiar with the format and exercises of the CAE. However, one of them complained that the CAE Preparation courses are not always offered due to a low demand. Two participants did not take CAE preparation courses. Another participant, who took the course, expressed that it was not useful for her. She claimed this was because it was mainly about answering book exercises rather than being taught strategies for doing the CAE.

Teaching practices (Group 2: Alumni)

One participant claimed that he needed more preparation from the teachers although one of the teachers had helped them by using listening exercises in British English. Four

participants stated that teachers did not prepare them for CAE. They expressed that they were well prepared in some areas, but they needed more CAE preparation. Three alumni claimed that teachers complied with the subject, but did not prepare them for CAE. Some participants quoted teachers:

Participant 1: They say “Oh! You’re going to take the CAE at the end, get ready.”

Participant 2: They used to say “You have to take the CAE” and that's it.

(Own translation)

Participants claimed that only one teacher helped them during the major and also complained about other teachers not preparing them for CAE. Regarding this, these were some comments by alumni:

Participant 1: The last semester, the last English teacher was the one who gave us CAE exercises.

Participant 2: The last English teacher yes, he was focused on our preparation for CAE but... I mean, he wanted to do the job that was supposed to be divided among all the English teachers from English I... to the last level...

Participant 3: Not all of them, really, there were those who... focused a lot on... the books and that’s it. There were others that... helped you more. If you asked for help they would offer you more help... but, well, you have to ask, it’s not because they wanted or that they said ‘Ok, let’s help them for the exam’. No, you have to ask... for them to help you.

(Own translation)

Content (Group 2: Alumni)

All participants agreed that the content of the ELM subjects did not prepare them for the CAE. The participants claimed that the content was useful to them. However, they ascribe their utility to the general cultural and English knowledge, which they explained coincided with those in the CAE examination. One participant added that they were well prepared in the area of investigation and English teaching. Another participant considered that the content was useful on account of the hours of training recommended for a CAE level but argued they

needed to cover more content and more grammar training. In relation to the content taught in the ELM, some expressions by participants were:

Participant 1: They [the contents] are there but in a mess, you don't know which ones are in CAE and which are not.

Participant 2: It coincides only in the grammatical area... There was specific... vocabulary, um... of certain topics in the exam that we never saw, never checked them, then, you had to read them on your own... To take the exam you have to read about various... topics... and if you don't know the vocabulary then the less you'll be able to do the exam.

Participant 3: It is not related, I mean... what you learn, yes it's true, it comes in the exam... but there isn't a link that... that... you say "oh, well, it in this way I can relate it to what I'm going to see in the exam", I feel that there is no such relation.

(Own translation)

English varieties (Group 2: Alumni)

Four participants agreed that the difference between the American English and the British English affect students in the CAE examination. One participant claimed not being sure. The participants claimed that the sudden change from American English to British English in the seventh cycle affected them. They claimed the differences between both varieties in vocabulary and in the listening skill, confused them as well as the drastic change from American English to British English from one cycle to the other. They used the following expressions: 'it was a shock', 'it blocks you', 'it affects you' and 'it is forced'. One student stated with respect to this:

Well I don't... I feel that... it's an obstacle, at least I saw it like an obstacle because... from English VI to English VIII... there's a switch. Then, it's an obstacle because you can't move on, even though you had had very good grades... if you don't make it in that English [course], you're stucked there because you can't take the next [course] and therefore, you can't get a degree. (Own translation)

One participant also claimed that some grammatical structures are different in both varieties. Moreover, four participants agreed that the amount of instruction in British English they receive in the major is not enough for students to pass CAE. One participant claimed two

courses of British English are enough to be prepared for the CAE considering that there is time to cover content and grammar, to study and to check vocabulary.

Material (Group 2: Alumni)

Only three participants made comments about the teaching materials and other materials available for students of the ELM. One participant claimed that the book they used for CAE Preparation courses was very useful for him. Another participant, referring to the course given by one teacher of English VIII, explained that the sample examinations he used to give them were for the FCE rather than for the CAE. Another participant complained that in the SAC students are not allowed to borrow the books. She also claimed that during the time she was in the major there was only one book for CAE preparation. Moreover, she argued that teachers were willing to provide students with material to prepare for CAE only if they were asked to.

Format (Group 2: Alumni)

Three participants claimed that students need more CAE exercises or sample CAE tests to practice. One of them expressed that students need exercises and also strategies to take the CAE. Another participant claimed that all exercises from English Language I to VI are focused on American English rather than British English as in the CAE. Two participants stated that they only received preparation for CAE from one teacher during the time they were in the major. As well, both participants expressed that the exercises and activities in the major hold no relation with those in the CAE.

Curriculum (Group 2: Alumni)

Finally, as regards to the *curriculum*, one participant claimed that the English program should be rearranged in order to include more preparation for the CAE. Another participant suggested that the amount of hours of English instruction is enough for students to be ready to take the CAE. One participant claimed:

It does seem kind of... difficult for us because... we were prepared for... First [Certificate], because even the courses... I think up until the ninth semester we had English VIII and... when we took the CAE exam obviously it wasn't what... we really learned or were taught. (Own translation)

Communication and information (Group 2: Alumni)

When asked about how they found about the CAE requirement, two participants claimed that it was through a teacher. One participant claimed she knew about it through her classmates who had asked for information at the SAC. She complained that students are not aware of the amount of time the UQROO equivalent CAE test is valid (2 years) unless they ask. Moreover, four alumni found out about the CAE requirement at the end of the major. One participant found out about it during the second year of the major. Another participant knew about it at the beginning of the major. All participants agreed that there is not enough importance attached to the CAE during the major. Three participants pointed out that this occurs only during the last two English courses of the program. When asked if there was awareness about the CAE requirement some of participants said:

Participant 1: No, only in English VIII when teachers tell you “guess what? You are going to take the CAE... and these are some sample tests but they are of a lower level. So, you have to prepare in this moment because... the exam you are going to take is more difficult.”

Participant 2: Only at the end, they tell us “There is a CAE [examination] and those who want to take it... these are the schedules and it costs this much.”

Participant 3: It is at the end that they hurry us into [it], like “Well, take the exam and... Let's see what happens.” They used to tell you “you have to take the CAE” and that's it.

(Own translation)

Moreover, one participant did not know that she could have taken the official CAE examination which affected her choice of examination.

Causes of failure (Group 2: Alumni)

When asked which aspects contributed to their failing of the CAE, two alumni explained that it was the lack of self-study and preparation. One student mentioned that this was due to the fact that he was very confident in his language skills and that caused that he did not take further measures. He explained that failing the CAE was demotivating which affected negatively his performance in the subsequent examinations. Two alumni mentioned that feeling pressured was another influential factor. One of them also mentioned not knowing the format of the CAE was an aspect that affected her performance on the examination, as well as not having taken the CAE Preparation courses.

Moreover, what these participants mentioned are referred to in the next paragraphs as *language skills* (what participants expressed about their language skills in relation to failure of the CAE), *self-study and preparation* (what participants mentioned about their academic performance in relation to failure in the CAE), *format of the examination* (what participants mentioned about the format of the examination in relation to failure), *ambiguity* (participants' statements about disinformation during the major regarding the CAE examination), *the English program* (comments about the English program of the ELM in relation to failure of the CAE), and *overconfidence* (comments of participants related to a possible negligence in their efforts to study for the CAE as a result of being overconfident in their abilities). These data are described in the following paragraphs.

Regarding *language skills*, two participants mentioned they had problems with the writing section. One of them claimed it was owing to a lack of time for answering that part. Two participants reported that they had problems with the reading section of the CAE. One claimed this was due to their lack of practice with academic readings. The other participant argued there was too much reading for the time they were allotted. One participant claimed the vocabulary of the CAE was a little complicated for her. She claimed she needed to study more

for that part. One student expressed that she had problems with the listening part. She claimed she had failed the CAE examination various times as a result of not being able to pass the listening section. Moreover, when asked which skill they had felt more worried about before taking the CAE, three participants answered listening. One participant claimed it was the reading section that had worried her.

With reference to *self-study and* preparation, the four participants who had failed the examination at least once noted that they should have studied more in order to pass the CAE. One of them claimed that one reason for not having passed the CAE the first time she took it was that she did not take the CAE Preparation course. Another participant expressed:

I should have made a bigger effort or have studied more on my own... apart from everything I learnt in the... University so I could pass the exam. (Own translation)

Another alumnus claimed she needed more practice on her own to pass the examination. Furthermore, all participants illustrated feelings of insecurity before taking the CAE examination. After being asked about their expectations before taking the CAE examination, participants used expressions such as:

Participant 1: I thought it was going to be very difficult.

Participant 2: That it was going to be... complicated... and I was going to run out of time, I don't know, I was very nervous.

Participant 3: You have the pressure of passing the exam; because it is a requirement to get a degree... it's not like "if you can or if you want to..." You feel pressured already... to, to reach the level. If not, well, you can't get a degree.

(Own translation)

However, one of them felt just a little nervous before the examination. Another participant claimed having felt very comfortable during the examination. Another participant claimed having felt more relaxed after taking the CAE Preparation course.

In relation to the *format of the* examination, one participant explained not having followed the directions in the CAE exercises which, according to him, made him lose points

from his final score. Another participant claimed some people had trouble answering the CAE due to the fact that they did not know the format of the examination. Another participant considered not knowing the CAE as one of the major reasons she failed the first time she took the examination. Another participant expressed that the first time she took the CAE she had not noticed that it followed a special way of answering the exercises. One participant said:

Several people who took the exam with me, that were teachers, ran out of time... in the exam... they were horrified because they had never seen the format [of the CAE]. Therefore... they just rushed into the exam without knowing the format.

(Own translation)

Finally, regarding *ambiguity*, *the English program* and *overconfidence*, two participants claimed that not knowing about the examination affected them in that they did not prepare well enough for the CAE. Moreover, two participants expressed that students fail the CAE examination because they are not well prepared in the English program. Finally, two participants claimed that feeling overconfident about passing the CAE led them to prepare less for the examination. They said:

Participant 1: I failed because I didn't... um... well I had a very high self-esteem [laughter] so I didn't want to study the first time.

Participant 2: Well I thought it was... not that difficult... so when... I took it [the CAE], well I (felt) like I didn't know anything... I mean, as if the five years I spent in the major had been useless because I felt that I didn't know anything in the exam.

Participant 3: I used to think that, well, it was easy for me... so I used to say "well, I've been studying it during the whole major, it's supposed that I know... how to answer the exam."

(Own translation)

Group 3: Teachers

The participants in this group were four teachers of the ELM: one was teaching English subjects at the moment, two teachers of other subjects who had imparted English subjects before, and one who was teaching both English subjects and other subjects in the ELM at that time. In the following section there is a description of the findings related to the CAE

examination as an exit evaluation of the ELM from their perspectives, opinions and experiences.

The consistency between the ELM and the CAE examination (Group 3: Teachers)

In the following paragraphs there is a description of teachers' perceptions of the consistency or lack of consistency between the ELM and the final evaluation. These are subdivided into *general preparation, courses of CAE Preparation, curriculum, content, format, English varieties* and *teaching practices*.

General Preparation for CAE (Group 3: Teachers)

When asked if they considered that the ELM prepared students for the CAE examination, two participants answered "no". One of them argued that the preparation given to students is not enough regarding the number of hours of instruction and the teaching approach. The other participant stated that in the English courses there is not a focus on preparing students for the CAE. This participant also claimed that, generally, the courses are based on the text book which is not leading students to pass the examination and that within the hours of English instruction given to the students the preparation is not enough for them to pass the CAE.

The other two participants were not sure about whether the major prepared students for the CAE examination. One teacher claimed that it prepares students in terms of providing them with knowledge related to general culture and language enough for them to take any examination. However, this participant also claimed that the Department has failed in teaching students to be autonomous students. Also, that there is a lack of consistency regarding the English varieties taught in the English program which affects students. The other participant claimed that the number of hours of instruction allotted for the English courses is adequate as well as for the other subjects in the major. However, he claimed that the problem might be the teaching methodology and the activities carried out in the classroom. He also pointed out that it

is questionable whether teachers help students get familiar with official high level English examinations. Regarding this, the participant expressed:

What activities they do so the student... gets used to doing official English examinations? How much content do they see there? In what way these courses help students reach the English level? if the student felt like he didn't learn... anything in English V, like he finished [the course] in the same way as he finished English IV, then it means that... a semester was wasted, [a semester] in which we didn't help the student take one step ahead, to increase his level.

(Own translation)

Moreover, when asked about the options students have to prepare for the CAE examination, two teachers claimed that students are not provided with any. Both participants said that the CAE preparation courses are not sufficient. Another teacher claimed that the two last English courses were focused on their preparation for the CAE. She also mentioned the CAE Preparation courses represented another resource and that students sometimes approached teachers to ask for help. Another participant suggested that students should take advantage of the English courses. He claimed that besides the English courses there are no other options for the students, and that CAE Preparation courses are not part of the English program. He stated that the major prepares students to reach the desired English level. He added that the major is focused to prepare students to be English teachers and due to the fact that other skills, besides the language, are required from them, the CAE is adequate to evaluate their linguistic and teaching abilities.

Courses of CAE Preparation (Group 3: Teachers)

Furthermore, regarding the CAE Preparation courses, three participants agreed that these courses are not always available for students. One of them also claimed that these courses are short in time and do not fully prepare students for the CAE. Two participants claimed that the CAE Preparation courses are not satisfactory for students in terms of teaching practices and accessibility. Two participants argued they were trying to open this course again the summer before the interviews. One participant claimed that they were trying to open the course since

the students' English level at that moment was low. She also claimed that it had been a long time since they opened the last course. The other participant claimed that a large number of students deserted these courses and that there were complaints about the CAE preparation teachers. Another teacher expressed:

Preparation for CAE only exists when students complain that they need one... and then it is given over a short period in the summer...

Curriculum (Group 3: Teachers)

When asked about the adequacy of the syllabus for the final evaluation and the organization of the English subjects in the major, one teacher said that although there is a need to focus the curriculum to prepare students for the CAE, the current syllabus is focused on preparing students in the four language abilities. Another teacher claimed that the syllabus is not consistent with the CAE evaluation because the teaching approach and the subjects in the English program are not adequate for them to pass it. Regarding this, one participant stated:

They take... many different courses which... try to give the students... ah, a wide background in attaining the English language, and... that is commendable, when you look at the courses, am... there are pure English courses, levels one to eight, ah... and in... those courses there should be, more of a precise ... focusing, on preparation for CAE but there isn't because... generally speaking, a particular book is followed, during the course, and although these books, do introduce elements of the CAE, obviously reading, listening and so on, am... you would, you suppose that by, ah... using these elements eventually the students are able... to... take a CAE exam and pass... However, the sorry truth is by the end of their degree, they still not ready, they still do not have, the... sufficient English to take a CAE exam and pass it.

Two teachers claimed that the organization of the subjects in the English program is adequate. One of them claimed that the problem might be the content or inadequacy of the English instruction. The other argued that although teachers are making an effort, students are still failing the CAE.

Content (Group 3: Teachers)

One teacher noted that in the first levels of English, the language aspects covered in the subject are very basic and thus cannot be really focused towards the CAE. Another teacher

claimed that the content seen in the major is not enough for students to pass the CAE because of the low level. One teacher stated:

All the courses are very admirable, Literature, Culture, Linguistics and so forth, any of those... ah, are intended to broaden the mind of the student, which is a worthwhile aim, ah... for a university... am... so, you... realize that there is a difficulty, in the time given... to... know... where... to put a focused course on CAE, so much sold that it will be successful, and that the students will have a very high rate of passing.

In relation to this, another teacher expressed that the content prepare students for the CAE in that there are other subjects that support the ones in the English program.

Format (Group 3: Teachers)

Regarding the format of the exercises in the English program of the ELM, all teachers agreed that it is until English VIII that students start to get familiar with the format of the Cambridge examinations. One teacher explained:

As regards to the preparation for the exam... I heard that... in English VIII they already have like... practice tests but... I think that's until English VIII; by then... it's a lot [of time] to improve their level... but not to prepare them in the sense of... the CAE format. (Own translation)

Moreover, this participant added:

There are no activities to infer... there are no different activities that you can find in the CAE. (Own translation)

Another teacher claimed:

The professors who teach these subjects... include new exercises, new topics... according to the established program, right? ... Generally, they take a program using Interchange, from English I to VI. The last two levels... the orientation starts to change, now towards CAE and in British English. (Own translation)

In addition, one teacher said that students are given exercises like those in the Cambridge examinations but they are only up to the FCE level. With respect to this, one teacher commented:

I consider that... maybe the type of exercises they have... in their English subjects... the variety is not very wide, right? That they [exercises] looked like the ones the CAE demands... I believe that this is something that the teachers... who give these courses... should revise. (Own translation)

Other teachers included Cambridge exercises and testing in their courses in order to help students become familiar with the examination. However, these practices were personal choices. With regard to this, some comments were:

Participant 1: In English III, I have them take a PET test... to see how they do in the test and... I remind them... that at such level... after taking English III they should already have the level to pass the PET. (Own translation)

Participant 2: That is just a part of my teaching, it may not be explained in the program but I do that as part of my teaching, but often it's not in the program, I just do it.

English varieties (Group 3: Teachers)

Two participants claimed that the differences between both varieties can affect students. One of them claimed that it affects students in terms of difficulties with understanding different accents. He also explained that it can affect them in the CAE writing section due to the lexical and morphological differences between both varieties. He also claimed that it is hard for students to adapt to another English variety after taking all the English courses in American English. He argued also that as students were not exposed to the British accent throughout all the courses, they are in disadvantage in terms of their language performance. The other teacher expressed:

If you have a Cambridge exam, you must know British English, if you don't wish to have a Cambridge exam, then you are free to choose another.

One participant argued that although students feel that the differences between both varieties affect them, these differences could be overcome by both student dedication to the language and additional effort on the part of the teacher. Moreover, two participants claimed that two courses in British English are not enough to prepare students for the CAE. One claimed that this amount of time is not enough to get familiar with the CAE and acquire the

range of vocabulary and expressions required for a CAE level. Another participant claimed that it is not whether the instruction is in British or in American English but that all the subjects in the major should contribute to help students develop a good language level. One participant stated:

If the abilities of the test taker... are stronger in American English though, and he takes... an examination in British English well, obviously um, it shouldn't affect him much [emphasis], it shouldn't. However... it is true that it affects them, um... experience says the opposite... for students... whose mother tongue is different, from English... it's very difficult for them to know the difference and, um... identify when to use British, when to use American [laughter]... sometimes they mix them and that is penalized in the examinations, right? (Own translation)

Teaching practices (Group 3: Teachers)

One participant explained that when teaching beginners English levels there is not a focus or an orientation on the preparation for the CAE. This teacher explained that she helps students by providing them with information and language input and by highlighting the differences between the British and the American English varieties as well as their cultures.

Another teacher stated that English Language VIII is focused on the development and practice of certain strategies for the different language abilities and there is not a focus on the advancement or improvement of the English level. This teacher added that this is not sufficient for students to reach a CAE level. As CAE strategies are not part of the English program, this participant explained having given general language tips and strategies to students *ex officio*.

Another participant expressed using extensive reading and extensive listening in their English Language III courses, which is not part of the program, to offer students access to more language input. This participant also mentioned having had students take the PET examination during English Language III in order to assess their English level. This teacher explained that although some Cambridge exercises are used in the English courses, there is not a focus on the preparation for the CAE examination and most of the exercises they do in these courses are not related to the CAE.

Another teacher stated having focused on vocabulary by using academic wordlists to aid students' long term memory. This teacher also taught test taking techniques and strategies focused on the preparation for the CAE examination to students of different English levels. This participant explained that although these are not part of the English program it is beneficial for the students. This teacher also explained that teachers in the English Language program may not have the sufficient English level and preparation to help students reach a CAE level.

Educational measures (Group 3: Teachers)

One participant explained that the way in which they support students is through the different subjects in the major although there is a lack of a clear orientation towards preparing students for the CAE examination. Another teacher believed that there had been modifications in the type of classroom activities. Another teacher expressed not being aware of any changes or measures taken with the implementation of the CAE as an exit examination. This participant also explained that there are no academic measures to enhance the advancement of the students in their English level. Another participant mentioned that the only educational measures are the partial and final evaluations which are designed and prepared by the teachers imparting the subjects. This teacher explained that this does not allow constancy in the way in which students are evaluated since examinations and teachers are different every year.

Communication and information (Group 3: Teachers)

One teacher stated that students are informed of the CAE requirement through their English teachers. Another participant claimed that students find out about it through their academic tutors. A third participant claimed that they are informed at the University Introductory Program (PIU), through their classmates, and that it has become of general knowledge among the members of the major. The fourth participant was not sure about it but believed it is when students apply for the courses.

Three participants agreed that CAE is not given enough importance during the major. One claimed that it is only until the last semesters that they begin to worry about the CAE. Another participant noted:

In terms of... that they have to take it, I believe they are constantly being told “Remember that you are going to take the CAE, remember...” In terms of... the preparation for the examination I believe we are missing that part, too. (Own translation)

This participant also claimed that students become familiar with Cambridge examinations until they reach English Language VIII; but that there is not enough time both to improve in their language level and to get to know the format of the CAE. Another participant noted:

I... think when teachers are given a course; they look at the course outline, which is based on a certain book, which... UQROO happens to have in stock, and so the teacher teaches from that book. If the book shows elements of... things that are good for...CAE; then you're lucky. But if not, then... It's a winding road, some is good for CAE and some is... not.

Moreover, three participants were aware of the large number of students of the ELM failing the CAE. The fourth participant mentioned not being aware of the high rate of students failing the CAE examination.

Causes of failure (Group 3: Teachers)

Teachers were asked about the reasons they believed were leading students of the ELM to fail the CAE examination. In this section there is a description of the factors considered by teachers as possible causes of failure of the CAE as an exit evaluation.

One participant mentioned that the possible causes are that students do not have enough English knowledge and vocabulary and culture of work that is required for a CAE level, and that there is a lack of a well-trained teaching personnel for the English courses. Another participant claimed that what might be causing students to fail the CAE is the switch from American to British English in the English program and the short amount of time of British English instruction. This participant also mentioned that another reason might be that students

lack motivation and dedication to the major, and that they are not autonomous students. Another reason mentioned by this participant was an inadequate planning of the courses by them in the English Department. Regarding this, this interviewee expressed:

There is a need to organize better... all the elements so, when we ask them to take the examination, they can pass it easily. (Own translation)

Another participant mentioned three possible reasons for failure. First, that the English program does not offer enough preparation for students to reach the required level. Secondly, students are not autonomous enough to reach that level. Third, students do not know the format of the CAE and the strategies to do the examination. The fourth participant claimed that one reason why students might be failing was that they have not sufficient exposure to the language. He also mentioned that maybe students do not attach enough importance to seeking such exposure.

Group 4: Representatives

The participants in this group were the Head of the CEI, the Head of the *División de Ciencias Políticas y Humanidades* (DCPyH) and the Head of the *Departamento de Lengua y Educación* (DELED). In the following paragraphs there is a description of the findings related to the CAE examination as an exit evaluation of the ELM from their perspectives, opinions, and experiences. Findings related to *the consistency between the syllabus of the ELM and the CAE examination, educational measures, communication and information, and failure factors* are described in the next paragraphs.

The consistency between the ELM and the CAE examination (Group 4: Representatives)

Following there is a description of the findings concerning participants' perceptions of the consistency or lack of consistency between the ELM and the final evaluation. These are subdivided in *general preparation, curriculum, English varieties, teaching practices, format, teacher training, evaluation and material*.

General Preparation (Group 4: Representatives)

When asked about the options students have to prepare themselves for the CAE examination, one participant claimed that there are only a few. He stated that one option was that teachers of English Language VII and VIII were asked to prepare students specifically for the CAE. Regarding this, he claimed that he has lost track of teachers' performance in terms of complying with that requirement. All participants claimed that another option for them were the CAE Preparation courses. However, one of them claimed that these courses were not being offered at that moment due to the fact that the CEI was moving outside the UQROO. Regarding this fact, he claimed that only the SAC would remain as support for students. The second participant claimed that the amount of hours of English instruction provided to students is sufficient for students to prepare for the CAE. A third participant argued that students have also the option to use the material available in the SAC. He added that no special preparation specific for the CAE is given in the ELM.

One participant claimed that although Cambridge ESOL University recommends a certain amount of hours of English instruction to reach a CAE level, there is a need to investigate whether this applies to students of the major. This, in order to find out if these hours are enough for them or if there are teaching issues. He also claimed that these hours of instruction should be well organized in order to allow students to take advantage of them. Another participant claimed that, although the CAE is a high level for students, according to the CEFR, the amount of hours of English instruction given to the students was enough for students to reach a CAE level.

Moreover, one participant was not aware of whether CAE Preparation courses were being offered to students at that moment and knew that these are opened only during summer. He also claimed that there is a need for students to demand these courses. He argued that this demand is required in order to inform the administrators of the necessity of such courses. This

participant stated that CAE Preparation courses are not part of the English program due to the fact that it is not worth any credits⁹ and that there are no professors available to teach the subject. He claimed that this could be compensated by having the courses of English Language VII and VIII aim towards the preparation of students for the CAE examination.

When asked if teachers prepared students for a CAE level, one participant said no. He claimed that there is a need for English courses to provide an orientation towards a CAE level from the beginning of the major and to provide students with more support in that area. He also argued that from his perspective, students were being taught little vocabulary. He claimed that a CAE Preparation course was not enough to help students pass the CAE. He added that there is a need to help them in terms of format, content, and writing skills.

Another participant explained that the subjects in the English program are organized in a way that students can reach level B2 or C1 of the CEFR. However, there was uncertainty of the consistency between the level students reach at the end of the major and the CAE level. He explained that if these are according to the CEFR students should have no problem in passing the CAE examination. One participant mentioned that there is a need also to have teachers standardize their way of evaluating students in order to make sure teachers comply with the requirements in terms of general student preparation.

Curriculum (Group 4: Representatives)

When asked whether the syllabus of the major prepared students to pass the CAE, one participant stated that both, teacher and student were responsible for this. This participant claimed that there was a need to develop strategies as teachers and as students in order to reach that level. Regarding the syllabus, this participant claimed that there is a plan for restructuration:

⁹ Students of the English Language Major of the University of Quintana Roo, Chetumal campus, have to achieve 335 credits, which are distributed throughout the subjects of the major, in order to graduate.

The CAE is... a good level. It isn't too high because there's still the Proficiency¹⁰, it's a level that stands out but something... something has to be done in terms of... syllabus redesign, and I think this is being done. (Own translation)

It was also stated that the problem was the teaching practices rather than the organization of the curriculum. The interviewee claimed that teachers showed a tendency to be guided by the book rather than by the English program and argued that there was a need for teachers to analyze the necessities of their students in order to help them reach the desired English level. Another participant stated that the fact that the English courses do not start until the second semester might affect students' English level since some of them enter the university with a very low level. The participant stated that students do not show much language development between the fourth and fifth English courses and that there is a high rate of failure in such courses. She also claimed that the subject Reading and Writing in English should include academic writing which is still not included in the English program. A third participant explained that no special preparation specific for CAE is given in the ELM.

When asked whether there is consistency between the objectives of the syllabus and evaluating with the CAE, two participants stated that there was consistency in terms of objectives and English level. However, one of them claimed that there is a lack of consistency in that the CAE evaluates proficiency unlike the English program. However, this participant also argued that the objective is that of students mastering the language and thus passing the examination. All participants explained that students in the major are being evaluated by abilities during the major.

Moreover, all participants claimed that there have not been any modifications to the syllabus since the implementation of the CAE examination. One of them claimed that all the

¹⁰ The Cambridge English: Proficiency (CPE) is located in the level C2 of the Common European Framework of References (CEFR) for languages and it is the most advanced qualification provided by Cambridge University (Cambridge ESOL, 2012).

subjects remain without any change since the implementation of the CAE. He also claimed that this might be because they assumed that, as the syllabus contains the amount of hours of English instruction recommended by ALTE to prepare students for the CAE, there would be no need for further curricular changes. He also claimed that when the CAE was implemented there was an implementation also of an equivalence of English subjects. The latter consisted of students passing their English subjects automatically if they presented a document validating the corresponding level. He also claimed that although these changes were documented there remained a need to take care of various aspects related to the syllabus.

Another participant claimed that there had not been any curriculum modifications since, according to him, it was supposed that students ended the major with a CAE level even before of the implementation of the CAE as an exit examination. He stated that curriculum modifications were to be done with the redesign of the English program which, he argues, was planned to be concluded the same year the interviews took place. He explained that this program redesign was being done as general improvement rather than as an educational measure to prepare students for the CAE.

English varieties (Group 4: Representatives)

With regard to the amount of instruction students receive in British English, two of the participants stated that two courses are not enough for students. One of them stated that the English classes are more oriented to American English than to British English and there is a need for more preparation in terms of language and culture. Both participants stated that students need more input. One of them claimed that there is a need of input in terms of British pronunciation, including materials. A third participant claimed that students should have no problem in terms of English variations and that there is little difference between them.

Regarding the English varieties in the English program, one participant stated that the organization of the English subjects, in a way, hindered the students' development of the

English level demanded by the CAE. He added that there was also a need for students to seek out more input in British English. Another participant claimed that from English I to VI they use American English material and the classes were focused on that English variation. She argued that students were affected by the sudden change from American to British English, and at the same time, by the reduction of hours of instruction a week. Regarding this she said:

The decrease from, from eight to four hours, um... which implies that the student becomes more independent, that he has to work much more... outside the classroom, well he is not... used to it, right? And also the fact of switching, from American English to British English, well... it is, um, drastic, right? (Own translation)

She claimed, as well, that the amount of instruction in British English was not enough to prepare students for passing the CAE because of the need for more exposure to the British pronunciation. She also argued that they are considering restructuring the syllabus and by doing so, implementing the use of more British books which, she states, is required to get a degree. She stated that generally, teachers complement their classes with some British material. She explained that students claim that the TOEFL examination is easier than the CAE or the FCE due to the difference in accents and the type of examination. Thus, she considers that there might be a difference in terms of language varieties. A third participant stated that any problem students could have with English variations could be overcome in the CAE Preparation course.

Teaching practices (Group 4: Representatives)

Regarding whether English teachers of the ELM prepare students for the CAE, one participant claimed there is rather a focus on complying with the program. For this, the participant expressed:

I don't think it is overtly taught... "Hey, look, this is going to be useful for your upcoming CAE" No, I don't think it reaches that point. (Own translation)

Moreover, this participant claimed that there was a tendency to teach guided by the text book rather than by an analysis of students needs in accordance with the program. In relation to this, he said:

It's ...has been done like following a custom, without a deep analysis, in fact, not even... to select a book... "I need a book that fulfills my... my students' needs" (Own translation)

In addition, it was stated that several teachers do not teach vocabulary to students assuming that they will learn it on their own. The interviewee argued that there is a need to teach them learning strategies. Another participant claimed that it is not until English VII and VIII that students are given more preparation in the type of activities and exercises like the ones in the CAE, as well as test-taking strategies.

In terms of importance attached to the CAE examination, one interviewee argued that it seemed that students and teachers alike do not show interest until the last English course rather than from the beginning of the major. This representative also claimed that teachers attach importance to informing students about the CAE requirement only during the introductory course but that there is a need for more explicitness and constant student preparation throughout the major. A comment regarding this was:

It's like this phrase "it's supposed that they know... supposedly..." I mean, we get stuck on that and... we need to be more explicit... um... to prepare them constantly for that. But no, it hasn't been enough [the importance attached to the CAE] (Own translation)

Format (Group 4: Representatives)

With regard to whether there was a consistency between the format of exercises in the major and the ones in the CAE, one participant argued that in the CEI the materials are not related to Cambridge examinations. This participant also claimed that there is a need to assess students with sample Cambridge tests in order to help them get familiar with the CAE examination format and level. About this, he noted:

Can you imagine if... if we analyzed the structure of the CAE? The ideal thing would be... well having them become familiar [with the format]... having them do similar

exercises... all of this would be of great help and I assume that that's not the way is being done here because... there we go the results, right? I mean, a large number of students aren't passing... the CAE. (Own translation)

Another participant claimed that on several occasions during the courses students are given activities from both CAE and First Certificate in various abilities. Further in the interview, she stated that only when students reach English VII and VIII they are given more preparation in the type of activities and exercises like the ones in the CAE, as well as test-taking strategies. A third participant argued that students were supposed to end with a CAE level because they used a CAE textbook which prepared them for the level. However, he explained that this text-book had a different format of exercises from those in the CAE examination. With respect to this he said:

They don't have the... level that is being evaluated in the CAE... But, rather... it has to do with the... format of the CAE... if they are not familiar with it, even though they know English, they probably won't get good marks, right? ... Not knowing the format of the examination can cause [test takers] some sort of complications... I believe students need to... develop ability by ability according to the format they are going to be evaluated in. (Own translation)

Teacher training (Group 4: Representatives)

One interviewee stated that there has not been any teacher training for CAE preparation and/or setting since 2005. He explained that only one teacher from the ELM in Chetumal had received such training and that there was a need for these courses. Another participant explained that there had been a CAE training course for teachers to get an official certification as Cambridge examination invigilators. She stated that this was before 2008 and that she believes some teachers got the certification or took the course. Further in the interview, she argued that teachers in the ELM who administer the UQROO CAE test are not certified which she believes could result in variations in the examination results. A third participant explained that to present the CAE teachers must have passed the CAE examination. He claimed that

teachers who administer the CAE examination at the UQROO have already passed the CAE and have received training to be evaluators of the CAE.

Evaluation (Group 4: Representatives)

When asked if the objectives of the current syllabus were consistent with evaluating with the CAE, one participant said:

I believe yes, in a certain way... the objectives of the syllabus [are] in a sense... that when the student finishes his studies becomes an English teacher, right? ... For that we have to measure... the English [level]... because it [the CAE] measures the English knowledge... It measures other abilities, right? Proficiency... maybe there's a little variation in the way of evaluation. (Own translation)

Moreover, further in the interview this participant added:

Although [the CAE] is not evaluated by abilities, I think one step... taken was... the fact that we evaluate students by abilities... I think this has an indirect effect in the students' performance in the CAE test. (Own translation)

Furthermore, another participant stated that there is no consensus in the evaluation tools that professors use during the English courses. Although all students are evaluated by abilities, there is no knowledge regarding whether the examinations they use are similar or related to the Cambridge examinations. This participant suggested further study in this area in order to find out if there is consistency between the way students are evaluated in the ELM and in the CAE.

In addition, this participant added:

You talked to me about evaluation right? About the exams... the formats, I don't think that they are... I think that... in the Language Center they use the tests that come with the textbook, I mean; they are totally different from what could be a CAE, right? A PET, a KET... where everybody gets good marks because these are exams... that are like very easy. (Own translation)

Material (Group 4: Representatives)

Regarding the material used in the classroom, one participant claimed that there were difficulties regarding the choice of adequate text books for the English courses. He stated that usually teachers do not carry out an analysis to find out whether a book fulfills their students' needs or not. He claimed that, on the contrary, it is the textbook which guides teachers'

planning of the courses. Regarding this, another participant explained that students are prepared for the CAE in an indirect way because the basic materials they use are from Cambridge.

Educational measures (Group 4: Representatives)

One participant stated that there are no academic measures in the ELM to ensure students' English development. Another participant explained that one academic measure to ensure the students' English development was that they had started to evaluate the four abilities. She states that this was in order to make sure that students develop the four abilities, that teachers do not neglect any ability, and that this has an effect on students' performance in the CAE. She claimed that there is a need to work on creating measures and teaching strategies to students in order to help them improve their English level. A third participant explained that one academic measure was the teaching of strategies. He claimed that it is also the responsibility of students to do self-study in order to improve their English level. He also said he was not sure whether academic measures were taken as a response to the failure of the CAE or not, or if there was a measure to make sure that students reach the desired English level. He added that the Academy was likely to have noticed the high rate of students who fail the equivalent version of the CAE in the UQROO.

Communication and information (Group 4: Representatives)

Regarding the means through which students find out about the CAE requirement, the three participants agreed that this information is provided to students through their tutors and when they enter the PIU. Two participants claimed that this information was also stated in the syllabus. In addition, one participant claimed that students were informed about the CAE and the demands regarding the English level.

Causes of failure (Group 4: Representatives)

Representatives of the ELM were asked about the reasons they considered were leading students to fail the CAE examination at the end of the major. In the following paragraphs there is a description of the factors they considered as more influential.

One participant stated that one of the major causes of failure is the inadequacy of the organization of the subjects, the content and the way in which these are taught, and both the teacher' and student' classroom practices. He argued that some possible causes could be the lack of explicitness of the information about the CAE to students, and that no modifications were made to the program to adjust to the CAE.

Another participant claimed that one of the major causes of failure was the students' low English level, which is a responsibility of both teachers and students. She also claimed that one of the reasons why students have not developed a higher English level is due to the lack of implementation of educational and curricular measures. Also, she added that the program is not completely responding to the failure of students. She claimed that there is a need to standardize teaching and evaluation criteria. As a possible cause of failure she also mentioned the teaching methodology, and the lack of self-study and autonomy in students. Regarding this she said:

There is a need for that... willingness... to work more in an independent manner, for not having to wait until the teacher "gives me something"... if I know that I've been having problems with listening in the exam, then I don't need the teacher to tell me that I have to go spend two hours in the SAC... to do listening exercises, right? (Own translation)

She also mentioned that other important factors which related to students' failure of the CAE might be the lack of appropriate facilities for the application of the equivalent CAE examination, the lack of exposure to the British English, the lack of student preparation in test-taking strategies and the format, and the inadequacy of content in the program. A third participant considered that one of the major causes was that students do not know the format of the CAE examination. In relation to this, he observed:

If they don't know it [the format], no matter if they know the language, there are probabilities that they won't reach good results, right? (Own translation)

He mentioned that another important factor might be the inconsistency between the language abilities students have at the end of the major and the ones being evaluated by the CAE. He claimed that the CAE evaluates specific abilities for each language skill and that students are not being prepared in those areas.

4.1.2 Category 2: Equivalent CAE Test Reliability

Earlier in this chapter it was mentioned that the CAE equivalence is an examination that is developed, administered in the UQROO and scored by teachers of the English Language Major. The CAE equivalence is also known in the UQROO as the “institutional CAE” or “the home-made CAE”. The CAE equivalence is taken from sample papers and past papers of the official CAE examination and the certification it provides is accepted only at the UQROO for graduation purposes. This category emerged since data revealed that the majority of participants took the CAE equivalence rather than the official Cambridge examination. Evidently, what students were failing was the CAE equivalence not the official CAE. More importantly, data suggested a lack of reliability from the equivalent examination and the circumstances of its administration. Thus, it was considered relevant by the investigator to treat the CAE equivalence as influential on the high rates of failure and a necessity of analyzing such examination. This analysis includes the duration of the examination, the conditions and context of its administration, the way in which it is scored, its cost, and other relevant aspects. The data reveals to what extent this examination is reliable and thus, if it is fair for the ELM students. In the following paragraphs there is a description of the information provided by the participants regarding the CAE equivalence reliability. The analysis of data is displayed by groups and by subcategories.

Group 1: Students

All participants were interviewed before taking the equivalent CAE test. None of them decided to take the official Cambridge examination. In reference to their decision of taking the equivalent CAE, the majority of the students expressed this was due to economic reasons. In relation to this some students said:

Participant 1: Oh! Well... first, if the equivalent CAE... a lot [of students] have failed it! Can you think of taking, and spending my money in something that I'm not even going to pass [referring to the official CAE]? That I'm not even sure about? No, I prefer the equivalent version, really.

Participant 2: Um, well, first, you can take it here [at Chetumal] so you don't have to travel... it's simpler, it's more economical (giggles) and... well, I mean, it's more practical, right?

Participant 3: Well, number one, well for the cost. I think the equivalent CAE costs \$200 or \$300 and the other one [the official CAE] it's nearly \$1700, \$1800. If... I take the equivalent [test] and pass it... then I'll take the international one and well, because I'm certain I'm going to pass it and not going to be wasting my money.

(Own translation)

Only three of them were interviewed after taking the test since some of the rest of the participants had not taken the test by the time of the interviews and others could not be reached. Participants from group 1 who were interviewed after taking the test were not aware of their scores by the time of the interviews.

Two participants claimed that the institutional CAE is made of copies of the papers of previous examinations. Three students claimed that some activities of the reading were omitted from the examination. In relation to the scoring of the CAE equivalence, three students claimed that they took three sections of the CAE examination one day and were told that the ones who were going to be allowed to take the second part of the examination were going to receive an email from them. They explained that this was due to the fact that a score is assigned to the first sections and based on such scores examiners decide if candidates are eligible to take the speaking section of the CAE equivalence. They also explained that they were asked if they

wanted to take the first part one day and the second part the next day or all at the same time. Regarding this, the participants complained that people who were not eligible to take the speaking should be informed as well.

Moreover, the participants agreed that they needed a score of 70 to pass the examination as it was the minimum required by the UQROO. Another student explained that the way in which the examination is scored varied from one year to the next. She explained that the year before they needed a number of points in some sections in order to be able to take the speaking section and the following year they needed a different number of points. Moreover, two students suggested that the criteria for scoring the reading section and the section of *use of English* in the UQROO may differ from the one evaluators of the official CAE use. One of them also mentioned that the speaking section may be evaluated differently in the official CAE.

Moreover, with relation to the conditions of the application of the examination, two students claimed that the institutional CAE lasts the same as the official CAE. One of them also explained that sometimes they take all the sections of the examination in one day and sometimes they divide them in two days. This participant also explained that he was allowed to take the examination one week before the rest of his classmates because he was going away and he would not be able to take it on the same date as the rest. Furthermore, three students claimed that students that arrived after them and were admitted to take the examination. Two of them claimed having arrived late for the examination and being admitted to take it.

With relation to the facilities where the UQROO CAE test was taken, the three students who were interviewed after they took the CAE examination commented they took the examination in a room of the SAC. Two students claimed that the room was 'Ok'. One mentioned that the illumination was a little poor. Three students claimed that they could hear the noise outside the room where they were taking the CAE and that they could even listen to

the students who had finished taking the examination while they were discussing the answers. They also explained that the room where they took the examination was next to the reception desk so they could hear people talking all the time. They stated that the wall that divided the room from the reception was very thin and people outside were knocking on the wall to make noise. They added that they were very distracted by the noises and could not concentrate on doing the examination. Regarding the listening section, the participants explained that they used a mini tape recorder for its application. One participant expressed that the audio was not sufficient and that he could not hear very well. On the other hand, another student said that she was at the back and she could hear well.

Group 2: Alumni

Regarding the facilities of the CAE equivalence, all participants explained that they took the examination in one of the rooms of the SAC. One participant described the facilities as ‘pretty bad’. He explained that in the contiguous room they were taking the FCE at the same time they were taking the CAE so they could hear noise from the audio in the next room which was very distracting for them. He explained also that as a result of them complaining about the noise, they were moved to another room, which resulted to be much smaller. He commented as well that on a different occasion they took the CAE in the auditorium which was more comfortable.

Another participant described the facilities as being ‘kind of nice’. She explained that there were approximately 15 students, that the room was ‘relatively spacious’ and that each student had their own cubicle. She also reported that the seats were uncomfortable. Another participant explained that there was a lot of disorganization for the application of the examination. She also explained that they were moved from one room to another. She stated that people at the SAC used any room that was available on the day of the examination. Another participant explained that they were accommodated in cubicles and that the room was

very small so they were crowded together to take the examination. Moreover, she explained that they were distracted by the people who worked there at the SAC since they were arriving at their workplace at the same time of the examination. She explained that the person who was administering the CAE left the room during the listening section so many students were trying to copy somebody else's examination and some were sharing the answers of that section. She added that on another occasion she took the examination in a more comfortable room with fewer distractions. She suggested that the whole administration of the examination lacked organization. She explained that three out of the four times she took the examination they used the same papers for some sections, which were also available at the SAC. Three participants claimed that they used a tape recorder for the application of the listening section and explained that students at the back could not hear very well. Moreover, one participant who took the examination repeatedly complained about the following:

I remember that in the results I generally had 60 or 63; I think 65 was the highest score I got... So I didn't have access to the speaking section... They told me "Well, you got 63 so even with the speaking you won't pass." Though, I believe the official CAE, I believe it is with 60 the... the minimum score to pass. (Own translation)

As well, one participant claimed that they took the examination two days in a row; they took the speaking section the second day.

Group 3: Teachers

One participant mentioned that the CAE equivalence is scored in the same way as the official CAE since the scorers were taught how to evaluate each section of the examination. This participant also mentioned not having been trained for the application of the CAE or taken the CAE examination. Another teacher expressed having administered the CAE examination to students without taking any training for it. This participant was also sent an email during the course of the interview where he was asked to administer the CAE examination, to which he added that they felt compelled to say yes. Another teacher mentioned that the CAE equivalence

at the UQROO contains the same parts as the official CAE. This participant also referred to the fact that teachers who administer the CAE at the UQROO are not certified as evaluators of the CAE examination. Moreover, this teacher mentioned being certified by Cambridge as an official examiner. Furthermore, this teacher mentioned that many teachers took the same course for the certification as official examiners but only a few obtained it. This participant also explained that to evaluate or administer the CAE equivalence, they are only required to be English teachers at the UQROO and to be familiarized with the format of the CAE examination. With relation to the last factor, this teacher also mentioned that this may affect the students' results in the examination.

Two participants also expressed that the speaking section of the CAE equivalence is scored and applied in a different way than for the official CAE. They mentioned this may affect the students' results in the examination. They explained that there must be two evaluators for this section which is not always the case for the CAE equivalence. One of them explained that the speaking section of the official CAE is evaluated by native English speakers as opposed to the CAE equivalence. This teacher mentioned that this may affect students' results in the examination because a variety of the teachers evaluating the CAE equivalence do not have a sufficiently high enough English level. This teacher also said that as the equivalence CAE is applied and scored by teachers of the UQROO the results could be biased as opposed to the official CAE where evaluators and examiners are neutral as they do not know the candidates. One teacher also explained that students need a score of 70 to pass the CAE equivalence while they are required 60 to pass the official CAE.

Group 4: Representatives

Regarding the equivalent and the official CAE examinations, one participant claimed that students are not encouraged to take one examination or the other due to economic issues. He stated that the UQROO is a public school and teachers cannot force students to spend a lot

of money on an examination. Two other participants also explained that students tend to choose the equivalent version of the CAE examination due to its accessibility and economic cost. One of them explained that students should be encouraged to take the official CAE rather than the equivalence due to its international validity. He also explained that students who take the official CAE generally pass the examination. On the other hand, they tend to fail the equivalent version.

Furthermore, one participant mentioned that the CAE equivalence and the official CAE differ in the way they are administered. This participant mentioned being a certified Cambridge evaluator and explained that the protocol for the administration and application of the CAE is not being followed at the UQROO. With relation to this, this participant added that there may be a lack of objectivity. This participant also mentioned that there must be two evaluators for the speaking section of the CAE which is not always the case in the CAE equivalence. This affects the way in which this section is evaluated and scored and subsequently the students' results in the examination. This participant stated that he ignores whether the passing scores for the CAE equivalence are the same as in the official CAE test but assumes that they are the same and explained that these should be respected. This participant also pointed out that there have not been any courses for the certification of teachers as official examiners and that only one teacher is certified as an official examiner.

Another participant also stated that teachers who administer and evaluate the CAE equivalence are not certified as examiners and that some of them have not taken the CAE which may cause a variation on the students' results in the examination. This participant explained that evaluators of the CAE equivalence are only required to have taken the CAE or to be familiarized with the examination. It was also mentioned by this participant that there was a course for the certification of teachers as official examiners but only a few obtained it. This participant also mentioned that the CAE equivalence is usually given in a room of the SAC

which is not adequate to take the examination since it is situated in an area which is usually crowded and noisy thus, affecting the candidates who are doing the examination. This participant stated that it is known that the CAE equivalence is made of sample tests or papers from previous examinations. This participant also explained that generally there are 20 or 30 candidates who take the examination at the same time. This participant assumed that the score required to pass the CAE equivalence is the same as in the official CAE.

Another participant stated that the CAE equivalence is given, evaluated and scored in the same way as in the official CAE. This participant claimed that all the equivalence test papers are different each time and that teachers who score the examinations are the ones who are qualified to do so. This participant alleged that the results of the students in the examination are similar to the ones they obtain in the official CAE. This participant also claimed that teachers who administer the CAE equivalence are required to have passed the CAE examination and that the teachers who administer the examination at the UQROO have already taken an official course for the administration of the CAE, especially for the speaking section.

This participant also explained that the rooms in which the CAE equivalence is taken depend on their availability at the moment. This participant added that these rooms are not consistent with what the Cambridge University considers adequate conditions for the application of the examination and that generally there are groups of up to 25 candidates. It was also mentioned that the audio for the listening section is adequate since they do not use regular tape recorders and that when there are external distractors students are moved to other rooms. This participant also explained that for the speaking section there are always two examiners. Moreover, this participant stated that the score needed to pass the CAE equivalence is 70 while in the official CAE they require 68 to pass the examination. However, it is worth mentioning that the minimum score required passing the official CAE is 60 (University of Cambridge: ESOL Examinations, 2011).

4.2 Research question 2: What are the educational policies behind the application of the CAE examination to students of the English Language Major of the University of Quintana Roo, Chetumal campus, as a requirement to graduate from the major?

High-stakes testing as a result of institutional policies can result in benefits for the institutions and their members, especially for students, if the objectives of these policies are aligned with the actions conducted to attain them (Johnson, 2004; Wun Han , 2006; Giambo, 2010; Baker, 2009; Hassantafaghodtari, 2009).

On the other hand, policy implementation can have negative results for students depending on how leaders of the institutions approach the new challenges presented by these policies. Test selection procedures, particularly with high-stakes tests, need to include a careful study of factors such as the syllabus, the teaching methodologies, the resources of the institution and other related aspects. However, if leaders of the institutions focus on accomplishing superficial, quick results rather than real results, the outcomes tend to be negative for students.

As mentioned before, policy implementation was considered in this research as a one of the possible factors influencing the high rate of failure of the CAE by students of the ELM. For that, there was a need to find out the aspects involved in the selection of the CAE as the ELM exit test. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were carried out with representatives of the ELM in order to gather data regarding the implementation of the CAE as the ELM exit examination in the year of 2003. The other three groups of participants were not included in this section as only representatives were considered as official sources of information regarding institutional policies.

4.2.1 The institutional policies behind CAE as an exit examination

The representatives who participated in this investigation were asked what they knew about the implementation of the CAE as an exit evaluation for students of the ELM. In the following paragraphs, there is a description of the policies behind the application of the CAE examination as a requirement to graduate, according to the representatives of the ELM.

All participants agreed that the English Language Major had the Cambridge English: First or First Certificate in English (FCE) as graduation examination until the year of 2003. Moreover, they stated that during the course of 2002 and 2003, other majors in the University of Quintana Roo added the FCE as a graduation examination which motivated representatives of the ELM to adopt the CAE instead of the FCE. Although the participants of this study were not present at the moment of the implementation of the CAE, they claim that the reason for this change was that there was a need for the ELM, whose students were to become experts in English Language teaching, to require undergraduate students to achieve a higher English level than those in the other majors. One participant stated:

One of the arguments was that, since the other majors... RI (International Affairs) specifically, was asking the FCE as graduation requirement, how could it be possible that in the English Language Major, which is their subject matter, had the same level?
(Own translation)

According to the participants, the decision of using CAE instead of the FCE as a graduation examination was made during a collegiate reunion by the Head of the Department of Languages and Education at that time and various members of the Language and Education Department.

4.2.2 Curricular changes

Regarding measures taken at the moment of implementing the CAE as a graduation requirement, all participants agreed that there were no modifications to the syllabus of the ELM as a result of the modification in the requirements to graduate. In relation to this, when asked if any curricular changes were made to the syllabus of the major, one participant stated:

No, none. Not at all... those subjects have been there... with respect to languages... everything has remained intact. (Own translation)

Furthermore, it was claimed that although there were no modifications to the syllabus, there were some adjustments made unofficially during the year of 2005. With respect to this the participant explained:

I remember when I was in the directorship, in 2005... I insisted “this is the moment” in English VIII, to take advantage of this... closure period to prepare the student for the CAE... The professor who was teaching that subject... “I’m asking you this: your English VIII course is going to be focused to prepare them for the CAE”... I don’t know what’s being done nowadays. (Own translation)

Moreover, this participant added that the syllabus offers the amount of hours of English instruction required to achieve a CAE level, and that this might be the reason why no further modifications were made to the syllabus. Furthermore, two participants argued that there was change in the way of evaluation, although it was not made in relation to the implementation of the CAE. Regarding this, one participant commented:

Although [the CAE] is not evaluated by abilities, I think one step...taken was... to evaluate students by abilities... because... there was stagnation of some abilities... and it had reached the point where this... didn’t allow [the student] to perceive improvements... in his knowledge, is his language learning, right? So it was decided to evaluate by abilities... in a way that there weren’t [any]... English professors who failed to teach certain abilities, right? (Own translation)

In addition, they stated that students were informed verbally about the graduation requirement changes during the introductory program of the major, though it was not specified in the English Language Major syllabus or in the official website of the University of Quintana Roo. It is worth mentioning that the syllabus of the ELM continued intact up to the moment of this investigation.

CHAPTER 5: INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

The present study has the objective of finding the causes of failure of the CAE examination as a final evaluation of students' English level in the ELM. A second objective was to identify the institutional policies and factors that led to the decision to implement the CAE examination as the final evaluation for the students of the ELM. In this chapter there is an interpretation of the findings related to the causes of failure of the CAE examination as an exit evaluation for the students of the ELM. The interpretation is accompanied by a discussion of the findings. The interpretation of findings is organized by group of participants followed by a general perspective of the findings.

5.1 Research question 1: What are the causes behind the high rate of failure of the CAE by students of the English Language Major of the University of Quintana Roo, Chetumal campus?

5.1.1 Category 1: Preparation for CAE

Group 1: Students

All students felt unprepared or insecure in one or more language skills. The skills that students stated that they had more problems with were listening, reading and writing. After taking CAE, the skills students had more trouble with were the same. Regarding the format of the CAE, students declared they considered this factor as one of the main possible causes of failure of the examination. It was found that students were not aware of the format of the CAE.

Students noted feeling insecure during and after the CAE examination due to their little knowledge of test taking strategies or about the CAE itself. Most of the students discarded the lack of self-study and preparation as a possible cause of failure of the CAE arguing that they had already passed the eight English courses of the major. Moreover, participants showed dissatisfaction regarding the inadequacy and lack of accessibility and availability of the

materials in the Self-Access Center (SAC). One participant considered that one of the major causes of failure of the examination was the inadequacy and lack of material available for students to prepare for the CAE. Although this seemed to worry them before taking the CAE examination, none of the students who were interviewed after taking the CAE failed the examination. Another cause of failure considered by students was the lack of explicitness and accessibility of the information related to the CAE. However, only three students of the 10th grade could be interviewed after taking the CAE examination and all of them passed the CAE examination. This leaves room for doubt concerning whether these factors really affected students as to lead them to fail the CAE. Something that was noticed was that all students were having problems with the language skills except for speaking. Therefore, students need more preparation in such areas.

Group 2: Alumni

Alumni considered the lack of knowledge of the format of the CAE, lack of self-study, and lack of preparation for the CAE as the major causes that led them to fail the examination. Another main cause that was considered influential was negative washback. The only participant of this group who was familiar with the format of the CAE passed the examination the first time. Moreover, this participant had also studied English ten years at a private institution which prepares students for Cambridge examinations. This seems to indicate that knowledge of the sections of the CAE, the type of exercises and the abilities needed for each section might lead students to improve their performance in the examination. However, this student took the official version of the CAE, as opposed to the other students, who had failed the CAE at least once. These participants took the equivalent version of the CAE examination every time. The minimum grade required by the equivalent version of the CAE for students to pass is 70, as opposed to the official CAE which requires 60 as minimum grade. Thus, the

factors that could have enhanced this student to pass the CAE examination were knowledge of the format, familiarization with the Cambridge examinations, and fairness in the evaluation.

Furthermore, one of the participants who passed the CAE the second time declared that her passing scores were due to the fact she was already familiar with the examination. She explained that as a result of knowing the test she was less nervous. Thus her negative washback effects diminished. She also mentioned it helped her being aware of the amount of time that was allotted for each section of the examination. Moreover, the two students who had failed the examination up to four times passed the CAE immediately after being instructed and prepared specifically for the CAE by a certified examiner. All these factors indicate that being familiarized with the CAE, its format, its sections, the type of exercises, the specific abilities it evaluates, and receiving preparation for it, enhances students' passing scores in the examination. Thus, a lack of knowledge of the format and a lack of preparation for the CAE examination, for alumni, are considered as main factors influencing failure of the examination.

Furthermore, three out of the four students who claimed not having prepared personally or studied for the examination failed the CAE. A lack of a proper preparation and self-study could have affected the participants' performance in the test. The three participants felt they had the abilities and the level to pass the CAE. Alumni claimed that five years of study were useless when taking the CAE test. They considered that they did not know how to do the examination and felt insecure while doing the CAE.

However, these factors interact. Students who have reached 10th grade in the ELM have already passed all eight English subjects. They have already completed the English program of the ELM and are supposed to have the desired English level. Consequently, they are supposed to be able to pass the CAE examination. However, there is a gap between the time they finish the English program and the time they take the CAE examination. They finish their English subjects in the ninth semester and it is not until the end of the tenth semester that they take the

CAE. Although the language of instruction of their remaining subjects is still English, students are not being prepared in the language per se. This separation from the language instruction requires students to prepare for the CAE on their own. However, if students lack autonomy and motivation, this preparation is likely to be absent. Therefore, a short absence of English teaching and a lack of self-study skills could be considered as factors influencing students' failure of the CAE examination. Moreover, the two participants who failed the CAE up to four times began to study after failing, but this did not ensure their passing of the examination since they failed it again. They only passed it after being assessed by a certified CAE examiner who provided them with test-taking strategies for the CAE examination. Thus, a lack of self-study for the examination, in the case of the alumni, was not considered as a main cause of failure as such preparation alone was not sufficient for students to pass the CAE. On the other hand, student assessment by an expert in the matter seems to be absent in the ELM which was highlighted by alumni's testimonies and further corroborated by participants of the other groups. Although self-preparation habits and skills are of importance when preparing for a test, in this case a lack of student assessment in the language and particularly in the language level evaluated by the CAE, is more likely to be affecting students' final scores.

Group 3: Teachers

The main cause of failure considered by teachers of the ELM was the lack of dedication from the part of the students to their preparation. Other important factors were the lack of curricular and educational measures in response to students' failure of the CAE and to their general low English level, and a lack of preparation from the part of the teachers.

Teachers believe students need to be more autonomous in their study and show more effort in their English learning. However, there is a question regarding whether students are being trained towards becoming autonomous students. A lack of curricular and educational measures to prepare students for the CAE and to improve their English level, and a lack of

effort on the part of the teachers to prepare them for the CAE can be limiting students' performance in the CAE. Moreover, UQROO lacks enough or appropriate resources for students to prepare on their own. Thus, although there is a need for students to become more autonomous, the lack of resources for self-study, strategy training, and guidance, are not characteristics of an environment that promotes student autonomy. Thus, a lack of autonomy, self-study, and personal preparation are considered as factors influencing failure of the CAE, although these appear to be related to a lack of student formation towards autonomy on the part of the ELM.

Group 4: Representatives

The main factor considered by representatives regarding failure of the CAE examination was the inconsistency between the English program and evaluation with the CAE. Representatives mentioned that an inadequacy of the organization of the subjects in the syllabus, the lack of implementation of educational and curricular measures, the lack of response from the program towards students' failure of the CAE, and the inadequacy of the contents taught in the major were influential in the failure of the CAE. Another factor considered as a main cause by representatives was the teaching methodology. The main argument was that although the English program of the major covered the hours of English instruction recommended by the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) to prepare test takers for a CAE level, there remains a question of whether these hours are being put into good use.

Teachers of English Language VII and VIII were instructed to prepare students for the CAE but there is unawareness regarding whether these instructions have been carried out. Another aspect that was considered important as a failure factor was the students' general low academic level which is reflected in their failure of the General Subjects (Asignaturas Generales). If students' general academic level is low then this reveals that the problem might

be larger than their general low English proficiency, since they are failing not only English but the rest of the ELM subjects. However, further studies need to be done corroborate and analyze this issue.

Furthermore, representatives agreed that no curricular measures have been implemented in different areas of need in the ELM. Students are failing the General Subjects and show a low English level at the end of the major. Moreover, although students who take the CAE have already passed the eight English courses of the major, the way in which they are evaluated throughout the English program is different from the way in which their performance in the CAE is evaluated. Also, data revealed that there is no consensus in evaluation in the English program. Since English teachers are free to choose their own evaluation method, there is no knowledge of how students are being evaluated or if their evaluation methods agree with the CAE.

Additionally, another aspect that is ignored is whether students are passing English courses with general high, medium, or low scores. If most of the students are completing the English program with a low English level, then the final evaluation cannot be the CAE as it certifies students who have reached a high English level and proficiency in the language. Regarding this, Hughes (1989) states that there is a need for consistency between the syllabus of an institution and the evaluative tool they use for their students to avoid negative effects on students' performance. This implies that there is a need for the ELM syllabus to be adjusted to prepare students for the abilities and level required by the CAE, or to evaluate their students with an examination that goes in accordance with the level the program is, in reality, preparing them for.

Regarding the aspects that caused students to fail in the CAE examination, all groups mentioned the lack of preparation from the English program and the inconsistency between the examination and the way in which the English varieties are taught in the major. Another factor

that was mentioned by most of the groups was the inadequacy of the material (type, format, level of the exercises) used in the ELM as it does not prepare students to take the CAE and pass it.

5.1.2 Category 2: Equivalent CAE Test Reliability

Most of the students consider that the official CAE is too expensive for them and as it is not mandatory to take this version, they choose to take the UQROO equivalent CAE rather than the official CAE examination. Thus, since UQROO accepts the certification provided by the equivalent CAE, they prefer to take this version rather than the official CAE for economic reasons. Cambridge University does not encourage the use of the CAE test as an evaluation tool for an English program. However, it advises institutions that if they are to use it as an evaluation tool, then students should undergo a preparation towards the examination. As well, they state that they cannot answer for the reliability of the test if administered and evaluated by people who are not officially prepared and certified by Cambridge ESOL (Cambridge ESOL, 2012). The CAE version of the UQROO is not being administered nor evaluated by certified teachers and the whole process of administration is questionable. A test is reliable if it is constructed, administered, and scored in such a way that students' results have minimum variation (Hughes, 2003). However, students' scores in the equivalent CAE test, which is being used in the UQROO as an achievement test, indicate the opposite. Moreover, Cambridge ESOL ensures the reliability of their tests by fulfilling a list of characteristics and procedures for administration and scoring; procedures that are not being followed in the context of the UQROO CAE test.

Additionally, Cambridge ESOL, as a member of The Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) contributed to develop a list of standards and principles to ensure fairness in language testing. The equivalent CAE of the UQROO does not fulfill such procedures and principles. The facilities where the equivalent version of the CAE is administered, fail to

accomplish not only the characteristics required for a test such as CAE but for any high-stakes test or evaluation. There are a lot of distractors for students who take the CAE such as noise, uncomfortable and crowded areas, and people entering and leaving the rooms, to mention some of them. In addition, data indicates that some of the people who administer the test behave unprofessionally during the examination. Test administrators yelling at students, leaving the room during the test, allowing candidates to enter the classroom after the test has begun and letting candidates take the test before the official date; these have been some of the testimonies provided by participants and witnessed by the investigator.

Moreover, the test papers have been the same on several occasions. More importantly, students are denied the section of *speaking* if they do not achieve a certain quantity of points in the other sections, and are also required a minimum of 70% of the test to pass it. To pass the official CAE students are required to achieve a minimum of 60% which allows them to be certified with a CAE level.

To sum up, the aspects that had more relevance for the majority of the participants were students' lack of autonomy and test taking responsibility, and a lack of student preparation for the CAE on the part of the teachers, and their teaching practices. Three other important factors were the lack of knowledge of the format of the CAE examination, inadequacies in the English program, and a general low English level from students of the ELM.

Although each group showed a tendency towards noting different causes of failure, two major causes were repeatedly mentioned; students' lack of autonomy and test taking responsibility, and that the major and teaching practices do not prepare students to reach the English level and proficiency required to get a CAE certification. These were determined to be the most important causes by the four groups. These findings are in accordance with previous studies concerning syllabus inconsistency with the evaluation tool and their negative effects on students' performance on tests in high-stakes situations (Hughes, 1989). Moreover, a lack of

autonomy and self-study from students and inadequate teaching practices result in a high rate of failure of examinations (Molebatsi, 2001). The inconsistency among the elements of a particular educational system has negative effects on students' performance in high-stakes tests (Baker, 2009). The application of high stakes tests to disadvantaged students has negative effects on students' performance, and high stakes testing policies do not result in benefits for all students (Johnson, 2004).

Students are not being prepared to reach the English level and proficiency required to achieve a CAE certification. The syllabus of the ELM is unrelated to the CAE and there are data indicating that the teaching practices do not lead students to reach the desired level. Moreover, students are unfamiliar with the Cambridge examinations and with the British variety of English. However, adjusting the syllabus and aiming to prepare students to pass the CAE, although it may result in increased numbers of CAE certifications in the ELM, it may also lead to different but negative consequences as "teaching to the test" (Johnson, 2004; Swain, 1985 in Wun Han, 2006). Adjusting the syllabus to be consistent with the CAE might fulfill the ELM's desired academic status. However, the CAE test, which is an English examination indeed, is still a proficiency test which is not designed to meet any teaching program's objectives.

Furthermore, a list of flaws in administration unfortunately reveals that the equivalent version of the CAE fails to achieve reliability and fairness; necessary features for an evaluation to succeed as being valid for students and for the institutions relying on its certification. The UQROO requires that students of the ELM pass the CAE since this helps the ELM achieve status among all the other English programs in different universities. However, if students are not taking the official CAE, then why ask students to take its equivalent version whose value is only recognized in the UQROO? More importantly, if the majority of students are not passing the equivalent CAE then such status is deceptive. Not only is such a status illusory but students

and alumni are being seriously affected by the consequences of not receiving a preparation that is consistent with that in which they are being evaluated, and of not passing an evaluation that does not suit their level.

As Johnson (2004) and Giambo (2010) state, high-stakes testing although it can be an efficient measure, can affect students and institutions severely if neglected or employed inappropriately. If status is what the UQROO is seeking for, then it would be more appropriate if students were really taking and passing the official CAE, which implies that they receive a preparation for it and a syllabus that is consistent with the CAE. However, this would lead to “teaching to the test” as was mentioned before. More importantly, the CAE does not match the level students of the ELM are reaching at the end of the major. As established in the current syllabus of the ELM and corroborated by the participants, students are finishing their English courses with a preparation for the FCE. “The CEFR describes language ability on a scale of levels from A1 for beginners up to C2 for those who have mastered a language” (Cambridge ESOL, 2012). There are a number of abilities required for each level. To reach a CAE level, students need to be competent in specific abilities and areas of the language (See figure 2, page 4). Unfortunately, students are not being assessed in those abilities during the major. Consequently, these abilities are not present in the students’ performances in the final test. The majority of students go through the process of taking the CAE various times without success which affects their personal and professional lives, limiting them professionally and adding a burden to their academic requirements to graduate. An evaluation that constantly results in failure for most of the students reveals that something is not working and that it does not fit the students’ level.

High-stakes testing, as mentioned before, can have positive results in appropriate circumstances. The implementation of international tests in institutions can have positive effects such as teacher accountability and learner improvement. However, in the phenomenon

being studied here, testing does not have an effect on teacher accountability since teachers are not affected by students' scores on the CAE. On the other hand, students are being seriously affected by their scores in such a test as it can decide whether they can continue their studies, whether they can get a scholarship or not, or more importantly, a job. As for learner improvement, it is clear that ELM students are not showing a language improvement and their general English level is low.

All in all, the CAE test is not suitable for the ELM students or the ELM syllabus. Students are not taking the official version and are failing the equivalent version, so there are more negative than positive effects. Moreover, students who take the CAE to fulfill the requirement of the UQROO have already passed all the English courses in the English program which should mean that they have already reached the English level required at the end of the major, as established in the ELM syllabus, a level that is not consistent with the CAE level. These students are being denied the opportunity of getting a degree for not passing the CAE test; most of the time they take the equivalent version which is not reliable or fair to the students. Moreover, the score required to pass the equivalent version is higher than the one required for passing the official version.

5.2 Research question 2: What are the educational policies behind the application of the CAE examination to students of the English Language Major of the University of Quintana Roo, Chetumal campus, as a requirement to graduate from the major?

Finally, regarding the educational policies behind the application of the CAE examination, data from representatives indicated that the decision of implementing CAE in the English Language Major was made without a previous study of the needs of the students. This decision was made in a collegiate reunion as a reaction to the implementation of the FCE as final evaluation in the other majors of the UQROO. Decision makers at that time considered that students in the English Language Major would need to have a higher level certification than those in the other majors. Therefore, the CAE was selected as it is the next in level. The selection of the CAE as the ELM exit examination was not accompanied by any measures or modifications to the syllabus of the major and the ways in which students were going to reach that level were not established at that time.

Eventually, a modification that was made in the English program method of evaluation consisted of students having to achieve a minimum score in each of the four language abilities (In the ELM the four main language abilities are reading, writing, listening and speaking.) in their partial and final tests in order to pass their English courses. If a student, for example, got a passing score in listening, speaking and reading but failed speaking, this would automatically be a global failing score. This was in order to encourage students to take measures to become equally competent in the four language abilities. However, this measure was not taken as a result of the implementation of the CAE or to help students reach a CAE level. In addition, we cannot be sure of whether this measure had the expected results on the students' English level, as it would require a different study. However, this measure had no effect on students' performance on the CAE, as students of the class of 2003 – 2008, who were the first to take the

CAE as an exit examination, and the subsequent classes, have been presenting a high rate of failure in the CAE test (the UQROO equivalent test).

The syllabus of the ELM remains the same since times before having the CAE as an exit examination. This syllabus describes the student's exit level as FCE which should have been modified along with its content and material if the aim was that students reach a CAE level. The only action taken as a result of the implementation of the CAE requirement was the creation of the UQROO equivalent CAE test in order to provide students with a more economical and accessible option than the official CAE. However, said equivalence differs from the official CAE in important aspects such as the passing score and international validity, among others. Although the UQROO accepts either the official CAE or the UQROO equivalent CAE test certification, the majority of the ELM students and alumni have taken this equivalent CAE in order to comply with the requirement.

All of this suggests that at the moment of the implementation of the CAE, there was not a plan to raise students' English level but a necessity to demonstrate that the ELM students had the highest English level in the UQROO, Chetumal campus. Students were considered as able to pass the CAE without any previous study that proved that. On the contrary, the syllabus of the major suggested that students were being prepared to reach a lower level. Disregarding the reasons why the CAE was chosen as the certification required for students to graduate, the further actions should have been aimed towards their preparation for such level. It was suggested during the interviews that this might have been due to a lack of time and resources to carry out such actions. As time has passed by, the situation remains unchanged.

Using the CAE test as a graduation requirement examination for students of the ELM in a high-stakes situation is affecting their personal and professional lives. As Johnson (2004) states "if high-stakes testing does not promote learning, it must be re-evaluated and changed (p. 209)". Moreover, she adds that "determining whether high-stakes testing of students' produces

better overall educational outcomes requires that its potential benefits be weighed against its potential unintended negative outcomes (p.210). Therefore, conscious, studied decisions must be made regarding the use of the CAE as the ELM exit examination to avoid continuing a cycle of failing scores.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research was to analyze the causes of failure in the Certificate in Advanced English (CAE) as an exit examination of the English Language Major (ELM) of the University of Quintana Roo (UQROO), Chetumal campus. In order to understand the circumstances under which students are required to pass the CAE, a second purpose was to identify the institutional policies behind the choice of the CAE examination as a graduation requirement in the English Language Major (ELM). A qualitative case study was developed using semi-structured interviews with final year students, alumni, teachers, and representatives of the ELM of the UQROO. A dyad and a triad were carried out with 10th grade students. Findings revealed that although participants hold a number of personal perspectives, there was an agreement among groups in a variety of aspects related to failure in the CAE. This study demonstrated that there was a combination of inconsistency between syllabus and evaluation, unfairness in evaluation, and harmful backwash as consequence of weak policies in a high-stakes testing situation. The findings are summarized as follows; regarding research question number one: What are the causes leading to students' failure of the CAE?

- Students are being prepared to finish the major with a FCE level rather than a CAE level.
- ELM students are not autonomous enough to prepare on their own for the CAE and lack sufficient resources to become autonomous students during the major.
- The English Language Major syllabus is not consistent with its evaluation tool, which is the CAE test.
- The majority of the ELM students take the UQROO equivalent CAE test. A majority of test takers fail the UQROO equivalent test. This test is unreliable and thus, it is not valid or fair to the students.

Regarding question number two:

- The CAE was implemented since all other majors in the UQROO changed their evaluation to FCE. The motive was that students of the English Language Major required a higher English level in comparison to students of the other majors. As CAE is the next in level, it was chosen to replace the FCE.
- No modifications were made to the syllabus after increasing the level of the final evaluation.

The results of this study reinforce evidence by other studies (Davies, Hamp-Lyons and Kemp, 2003; Johnson, 2004; Wun Han, 2006; Balaguer, 2008; Baker, 2009; Giambo, 2010) regarding failure of high-stakes tests. However, all these studies have focused on high-school exit examinations. Moreover, the majority of such studies approached phenomena in contexts where English acts as a first or second language. This study approaches failure in a high-stakes testing situation from the perspective of university education in a Spanish speaking context. Teachers and researchers of the English Language Major of the University of Quintana Roo might benefit in terms of investigation, syllabus design, statistics and evaluation. Furthermore, UQROO can also benefit from this study in terms student profile, and recognition from other institutions and representatives. However, further quantitative research might be needed to complement the study. In addition, insight from inside the teaching classroom of the English Language Major English program might as well be useful. The latter, with the objective of identifying the strengths and the flaws of the syllabus regarding the general proficiency of the ELM students at the end of the major and to identify the needs of the students in terms of academic preparation, motivation, and autonomy, as well.

CHAPTER 7: RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings in this study illustrated how using the CAE as a final evaluation of the English Language Major has resulted in negative outcomes since the majority of the ELM students fail the test. Moreover, the CAE is being taken in a high-stakes situation since students need to pass it to get their university degree. Data revealed that years can pass by before obtaining a passing score in the CAE for alumni of the ELM. Some alumni have taken the CAE more than five times before finally passing it. Thus, this is seriously affecting their professional and personal lives at various levels. Students are not required to take the official CAE as they can take the UQROO equivalent CAE which is more attractive to students as it has a much lower cost and is available in the city. Students who pass the UQROO equivalent CAE test get a certificate that is only valid at the UQROO and that does not aid students in getting an international scholarship, acceptance in higher education programs, or in getting a job that requires them to have a university degree. For that matter, it would be advisable to replace the CAE by another evaluation that suits the level and needs of the students and of the institution.

Another recommendation is to adapt the English program of the English Language Major to fulfill the necessities of the students to pass the CAE. As mentioned before, the CAE is a proficiency examination and as such, holds no relation with any English program in any school or institution in the world. However, if, in spite of this factor, it is decided to use the CAE to evaluate students at the end of the English Language Major in the UQROO, the organization, The Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) developed a list of “Can Do statements for each of the CEFR levels” as well as for each particular purpose (Association of Language Testers in Europe, 2012). ALTE’s list can serve as a basis to develop an English program that contains language objectives directed to reach a CAE level. Therefore, if the CAE is to be used as an achievement examination, then the instructional materials and content need to be consistent with the examination as students should not be taught in one way and

evaluated in a different one. This also applies for the English variety. Students need to be familiar with Cambridge examinations since evidence shows that students who know the format and have experience with these tests are more advantaged than those who are not familiar with them. Therefore, it would be advisable to offer students the opportunity of taking Cambridge examinations from the beginning of the English program which was not an option at the moment of the investigation and the years before that. This can also be helpful in monitoring students' language progress during the major in order to identify their needs and take measures to help them reach the desired level at the end of the major.

Furthermore, there is a need to analyze the real need of a test as a graduation requirement. The CAE as final evaluation in the English Language Major has resulted in more negative than positive outcomes since the majority of the students fail the test. The majority of the students take the UQROO equivalent CAE and the students who pass this version of the test have the only advantage of getting their degree as its certificate is not valid elsewhere. If developing an English program that prepares students to reach the CAE level would require resources that are not at the institution's disposal, a final recommendation would be to remove the test as a requirement to graduate from the major. Obtaining a certificate that is recognized internationally should be a personal choice and according to the students' needs. Students indeed undergo an English program in the English Language Major that should ensure the language level required to perform adequately in their professional lives.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A: List of Abbreviations

ALTE	Association of Language Testers in Europe
BULATS	Business Language Testing Service
CAE	Cambridge English: Advanced Certificate in Advanced English
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
CEI	Centro de Enseñanza de Idiomas
DCPyH	Departamento de Ciencias Políticas y Humanidades
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELL	English Language Learners
ELM	English Language Major
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
FCE	Cambridge English: First or First Certificate in English
GSLPA	Graduating Students' Language Proficiency Assessment
IELTS-CEPAS	International English Language Test System for Hong Kong's territory Common English Proficiency Assessment Scheme
PET	Cambridge Preliminary English Test or Cambridge English: Preliminary
PIU	Programa de Introducción a la Universidad (University Introductory Program)
PolyU	Hong Kong Polytechnic University
SAC	Self Access Center

SEP	Secretaría de Educación Pública
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
TOEFL-IBT	Test of English as a Foreign Language (Internet-based Test)
UQROO	University of Quintana Roo