Towards outcome-based English learning and computer skills training

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Background of the project

- The Curriculum Revision 2004 at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University achieved significant progress in defining intended student learning outcomes.
- The OBA Funding was first distributed to departments and programmes in 2007.
- Involvement of frontline teachers started in 2008: participation in the outcome-based initiative expands from the ‘core’ to the ‘mass’.
- Subject in the project: ENGL317 English for Technical and Web-based learning

A comparison

Outcome based education

- student-centred learning
- assessing student performance: ‘know and are able to’
- observable and measurable outcomes

Traditional education

- focus on the resources available to the student
- only assessing student knowledge without referring to attitudes, social skills, or moral values

Outcomes of language studies

- use of the target language for purposes of understanding, expression and communication
- intercultural awareness, understanding and competence
- explicit knowledge of language
- knowledge of aspects of the cultures, communities and societies where the language is used.
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Subject benchmark statement: Languages and related studies QAA 208, 2007, UK

http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/statements/languages07.asp

Intended learning outcomes

Category A

Professional / academic knowledge and skills

- Understanding discourse features of technical documents and online writing and their communicative functions;
- Building up confidence and competence in human computer interaction and bringing text and images together;
- Fostering creativity in writing and design;
- Building up problem solving and teamwork skills.

Category B

Attributes for all-roundedness

- critical analytical skills;
- global outlook and an awareness of cultural diversity constructed through web based texts;
- strategies for autonomous life-long learning

Issues identified

Who are you writing for?

Communication purpose in student work

Why do you work on this subject?

Awareness of learning outcomes

Change in teaching

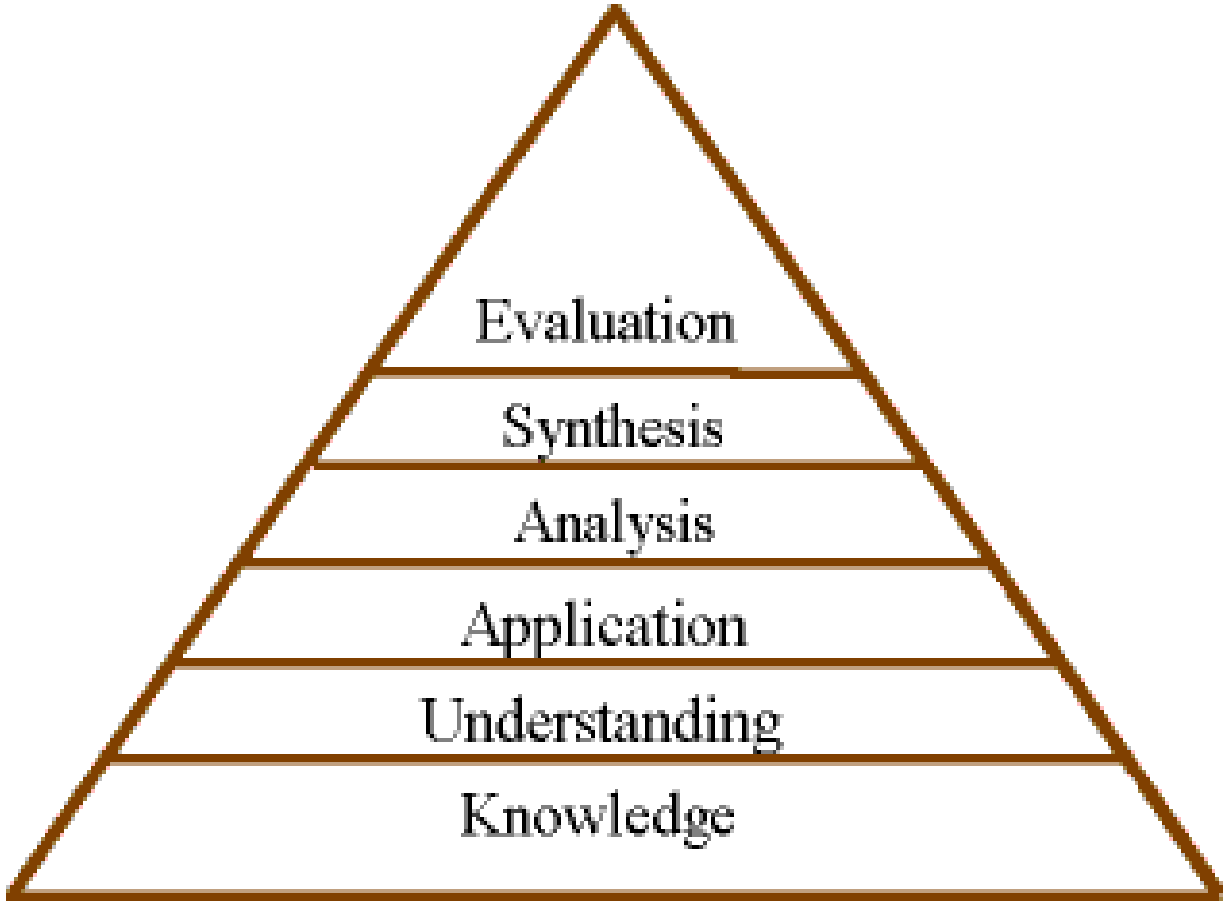
"It's not what *we* do,
but what *students* do that's the important thing."

Biggs, J. & Tang, C. (2007). *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*, 3rd Edition. Berkshire: McGraw-Hill, p. 19.

Change in teaching

- Incorporating analytical thinking in language study
- Adapting effective methods for integrating generic competences into the formal curriculum
- Building in student future needs, changing from ‘what should the student learn’ to ‘what is needed in the workplace’.

Bloom's taxonomy of thinking



Source: http://www.officeport.com/edu/blooms.htm

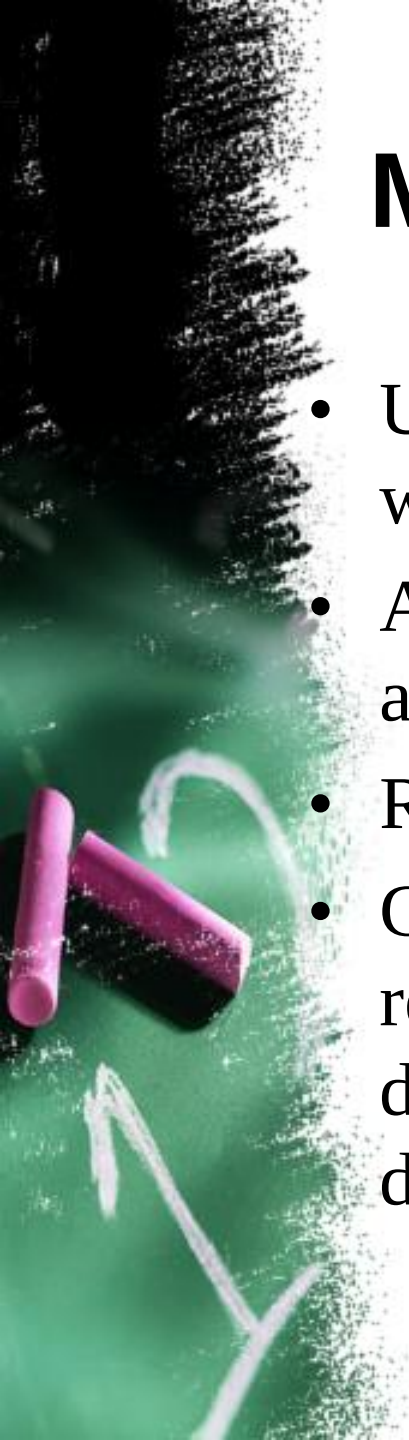
Levels of thinking

- **Knowledge**: recalling information; repeating information with no changes
- **Understanding**: understanding ideas; using rules and following directions
- **Application**: applying knowledge to a new situation

Adopted from : www.utmem.edu/sass/Analytical%20Thinking.ppt

Levels of thinking

- **Analysis**: seeing relationships; breaking information into parts; analysing how things work
  - (e.g. comparing two user guides by the same institution)
- **Synthesis**: putting ideas and information together in a unique way; creating something new
  - (e.g. planning and designing a new user guide)
- **Evaluation**: making judgements; assessing the value or worth of information
  - (e.g. evaluating the effectiveness of technical document on the same topic)



Method: deductive analysis

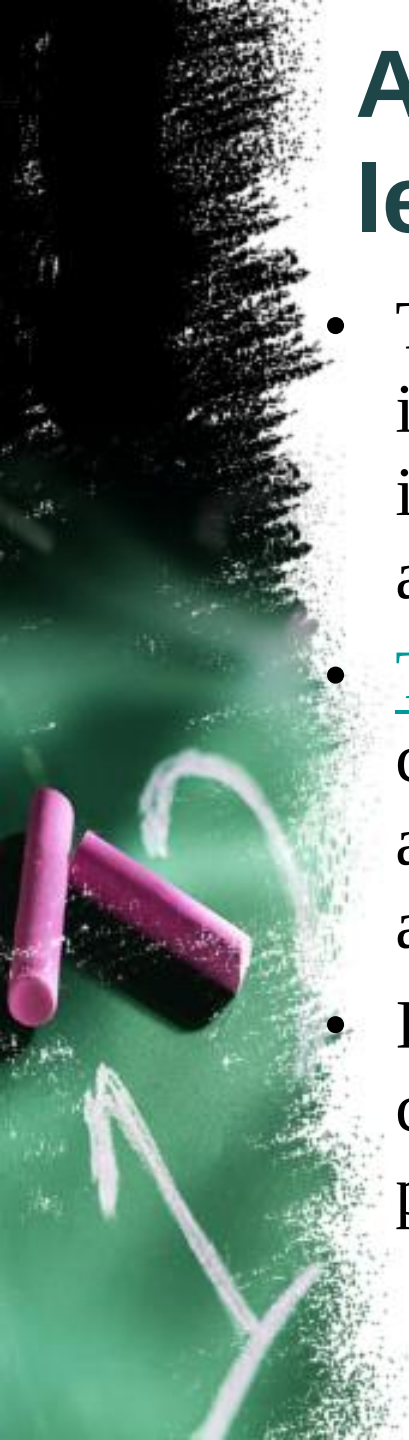
- Using technical writing samples from workplace and daily life
- Asking students to work out what knowledge and skills are embedded
- Raising audience awareness
- Critical problem solving in student project: recognise the problem;define the issue; gather data; rank the data; evaluate the data; use the data in the project; evaluate the project

Change in learning

- Critical judgement in technical documents
- Project-based learning
- Increased awareness of readership
- Improved tone and style
- Better quality of writing: logic organisation, error-free.
- Increased awareness of cooperation

Course-Embedded Assessment (CEA)

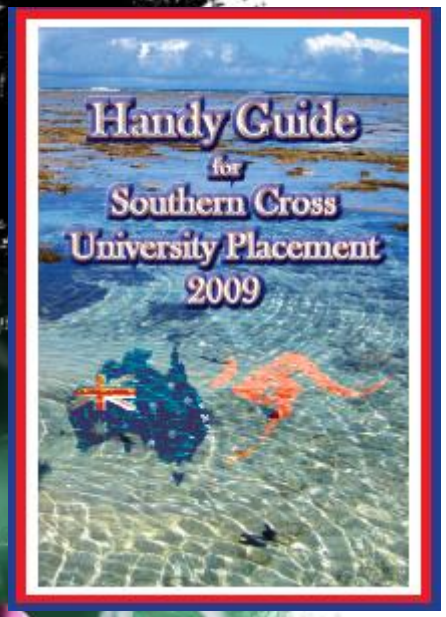
- It takes place in a class or a group of classes;
- It determines whether students are achieving intended learning outcomes;
- It takes advantage of pre-existing student motivation to perform well; and
- It assesses what is actually taught/learnt.

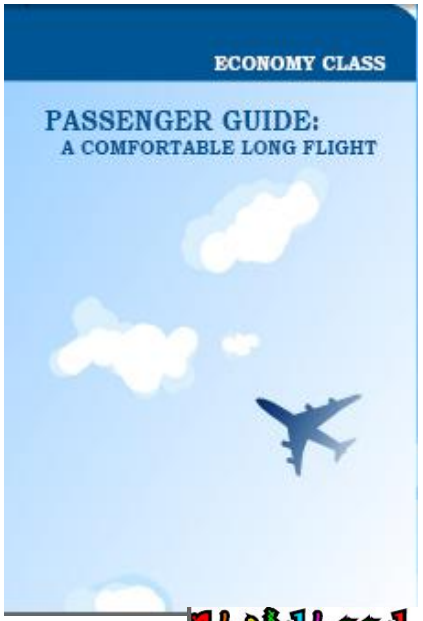


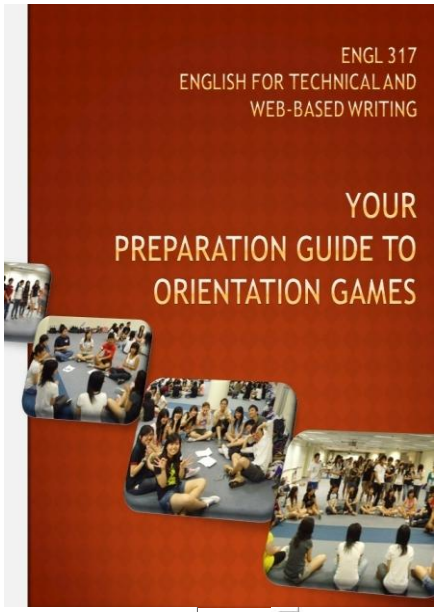
Assessment of subject learning outcomes (ENGL317-ETWW)

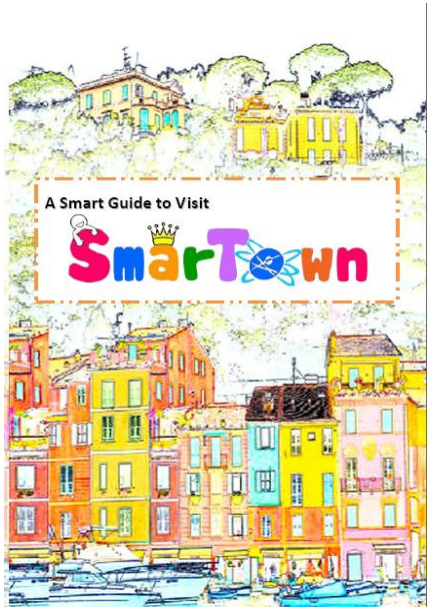
- To assess outcome based learning, a number of instruments were adopted, including team project, individual project, class presentation, self-reflection, and peer critique.
- The rubrics of course-embedded assessment cover 1) communicative competence in English, 2) creativity and innovation, 3) critical thinking/problem solving, and 4) teamwork/interpersonal skills.
- In addition to grading criteria for each assignment, a common set of rubrics is also used for overall performance of the students in the subject.

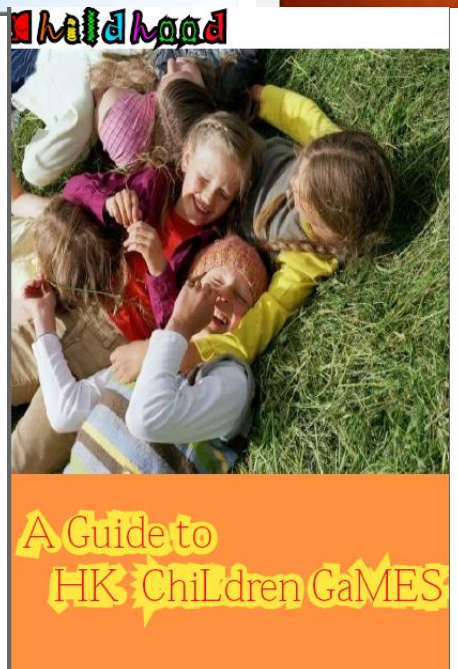
Student projects



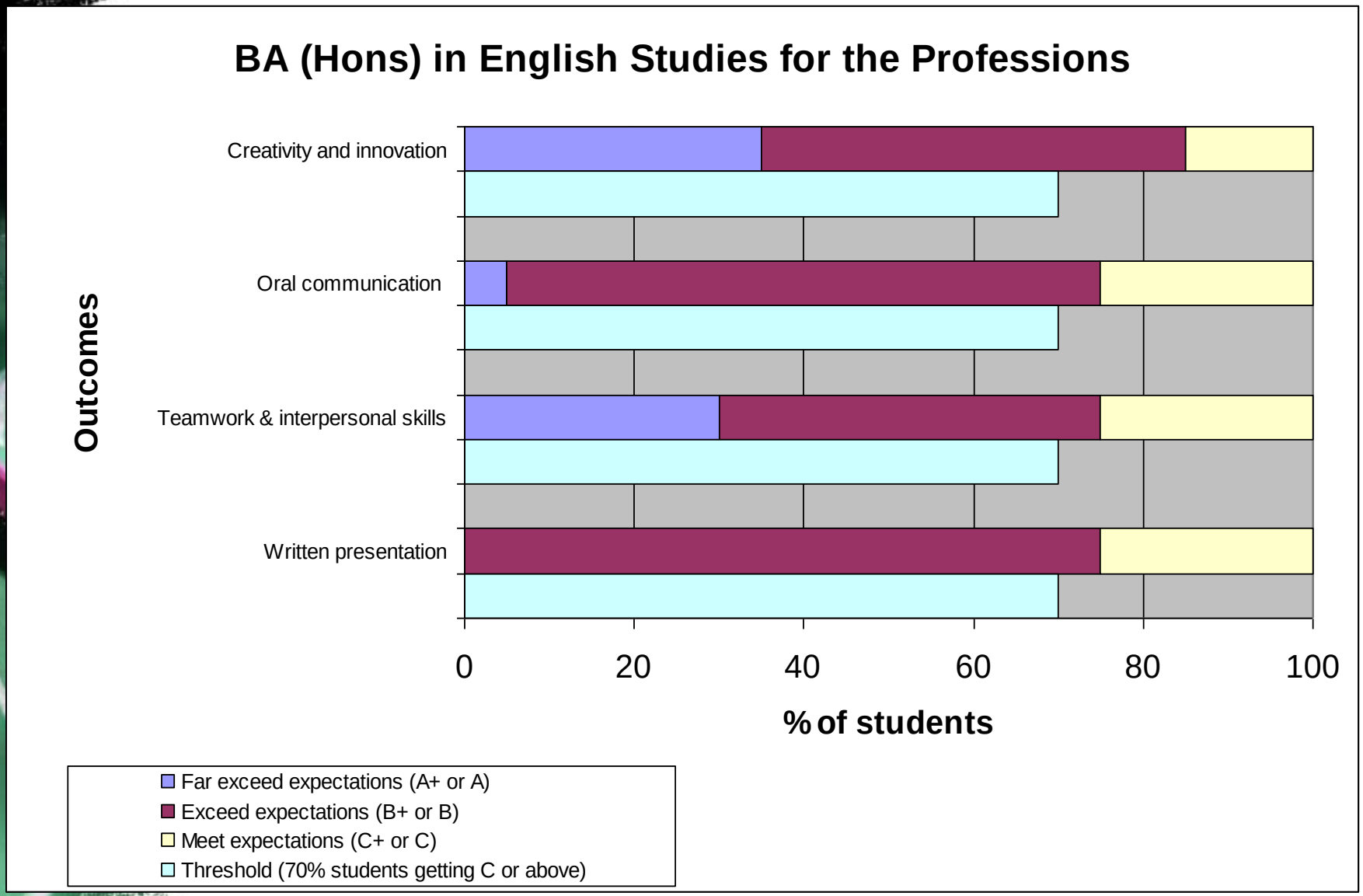




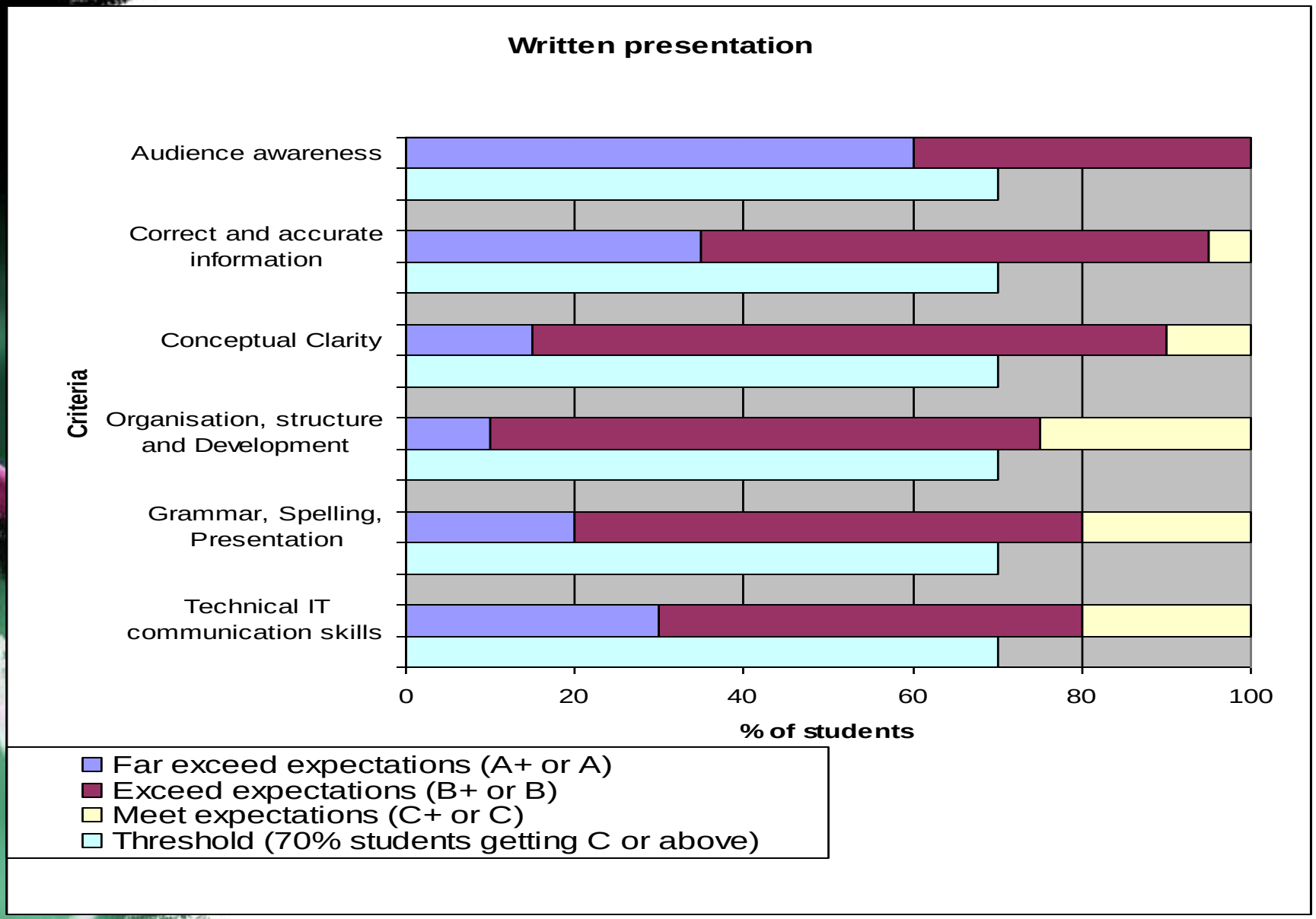




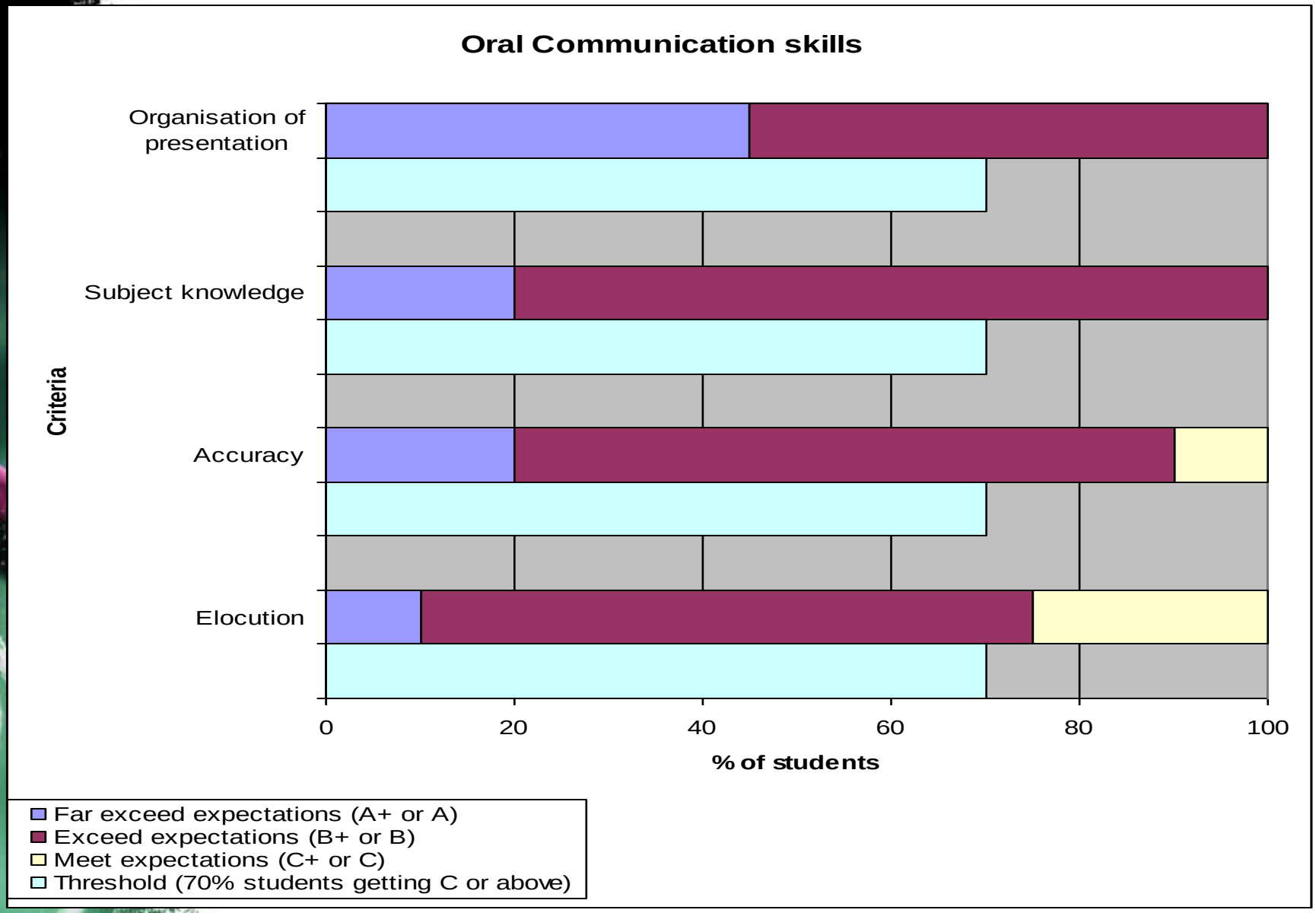
Intended learning outcomes in the pilot study



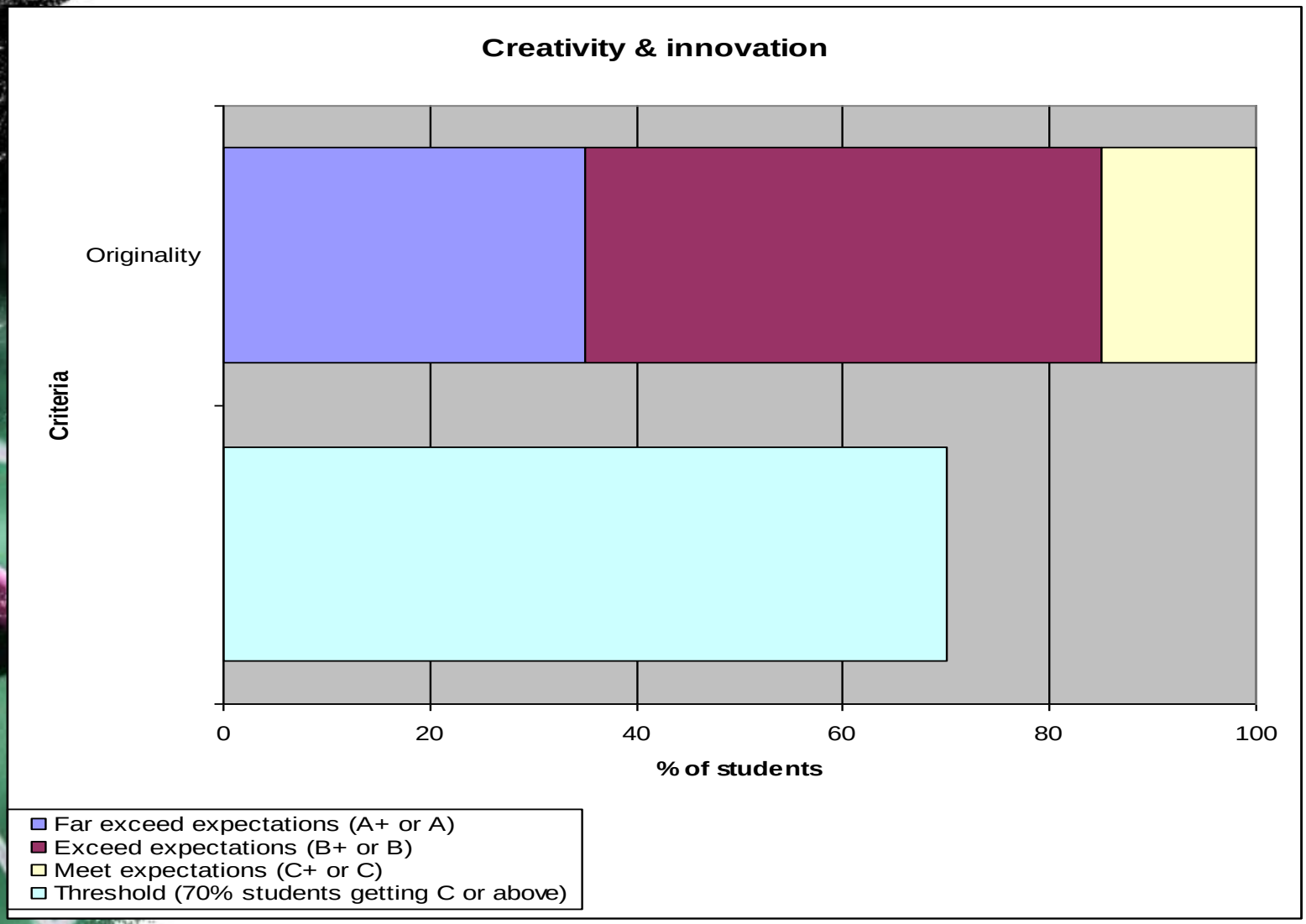
Competence in English (1)



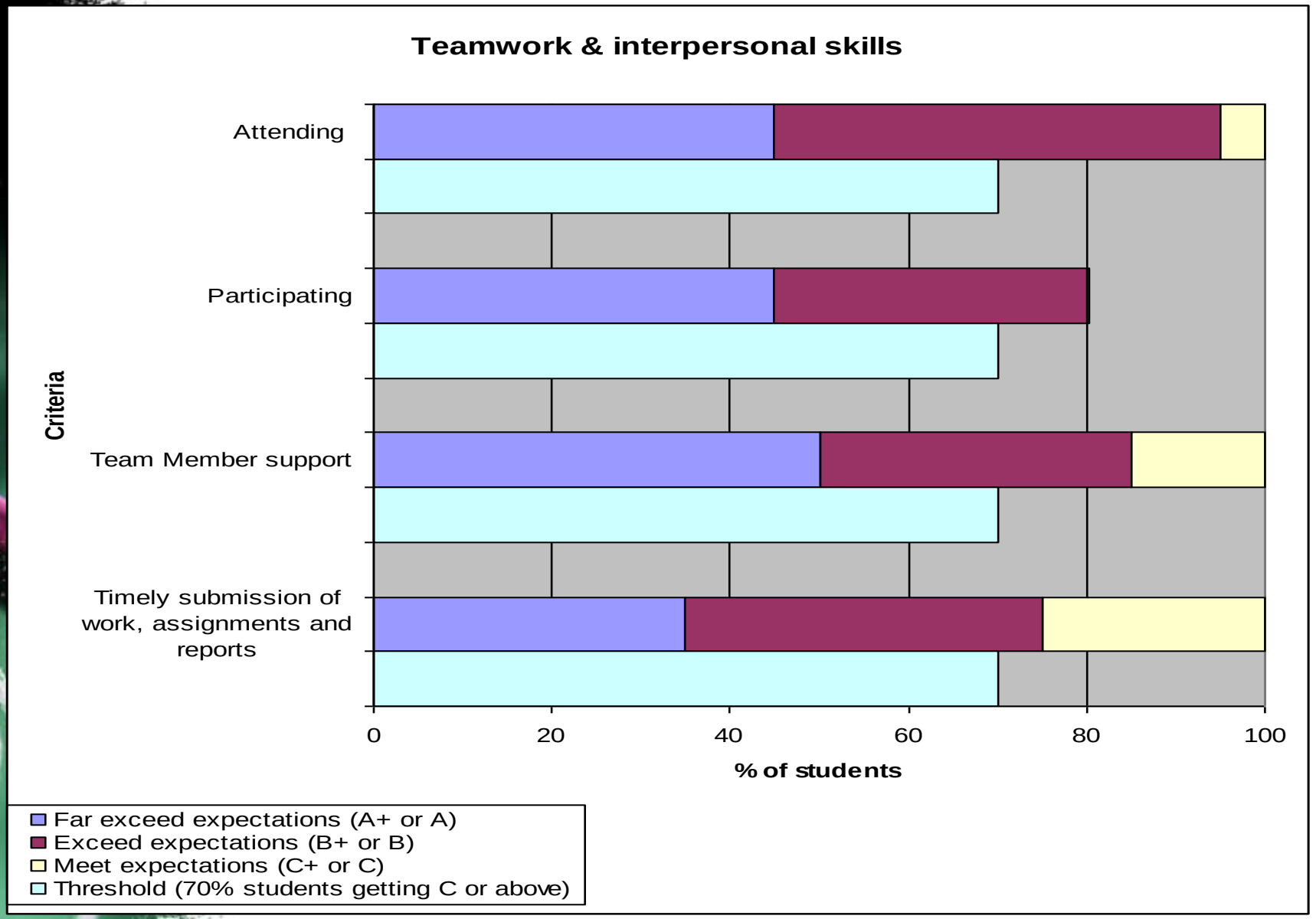
Competence in English (2)



Creativity and innovation



Teamwork and interpersonal skills



Preliminary achievement of the project

- The elements of learning outcomes have been embedded in teaching and learning of the subject ENGL317 (2009-2010).
- Both students and the teaching team (3 tutors) have raised their OBE awareness and have been involved in the assessment.
- Course materials, teaching practice and assessment methods have been improved with a focus on training the students' generic professional competences.
- With the help from the EDC staff at PolyU, the rubrics of course embedded assessment (CEA) have been created and tested.
- The objective of the subject (academic/professional) is clarified: to help students develop a high level of communicative competence which incorporates linguistic skills, computer skills, and web writing skills for effective communication in the workplace.

Student feedback

No.	Statement	Mean	SD
1.	I have built up confidence and competence to bring text and image together for effective communication.	3.88	0.54
2.	I regard the language skills and computer skills learned in the subject to be useful in my future work.	4.41	0.74
3.	The subject has helped my critical thinking in evaluating user manuals and other technical documents.	4.12	0.77
4.	The projects in the subject have increased my creativity.	4.00	0.74
5.	My awareness of cultural difference in language and images has been increased.	3.44	0.86
6.	My teamwork skills have been improved.	4.12	0.48
7.	I now care more for audience needs in professional and technical communication.	4.15	0.70
8.	My research ability has been improved in selecting and evaluating information.	3.91	0.68

Conclusions

- The essence of outcome-based education is the linking of academics and workplace to create a new and powerful environment that provides opportunity for enhanced student learning.
- Outcome-based language study should not be limited to linguistic competence only.
- The challenge of the project is that compared to the subject knowledge, how to assess abstract entities, such as critical thinking and creativity, in OBE.

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Q & A

Thank You!