

*UNA EXPERIENCIA COLABORATIVA INTERNACIONAL EN RELACIÓN CON LA EDUCACIÓN
DEL IDIOMA INGLÉS: EL RENDIMIENTO DE ALUMNOS DE SECUNDARIA MEXICANOS
DENTRO DE UN PROGRAMA DE INGLÉS DE UNA UNIVERSIDAD PÚBLICA*

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Resumen: *Este trabajo presenta el impacto de dos proyectos de formación en inglés, English Access Microscholarship Program y Access More, auspiciados por la Embajada de los Estados Unidos en México y llevados a cabo entre 2012 y 2014 por la Coordinación de Enseñanza de Lenguas Extranjeras de la Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana Iztapalapa. Ambos proyectos estuvieron dirigidos a adolescentes de bajos recursos provenientes de escuelas secundarias de la Delegación Iztapalapa en la Ciudad de México. El análisis se centra de manera particular en el impacto de la segunda fase (Access More). A partir de datos longitudinales del desempeño de los estudiantes, se correlacionan los resultados con información proveniente de estadísticas nacionales de competencia en inglés en estudiantes de secundaria. Específicamente, se hace evidente un incremento significativo en la competencia en inglés en los alumnos formados a partir del Programa Intercultural e Interdisciplinario de Inglés de la institución.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: APRENDIZAJE; LENGUA EXTRANJERA; ADOLESCENTES; LONGITUDINAL; ACCESS

A COLLABORATIVE INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE
EDUCATION: MEXICAN SECONDARY STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENT
IN A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY ENGLISH CURRICULUM

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Abstract: This study analyzes the impact of two English language learning programs, English Access Microscholarship Program and Access More, sponsored by the United States Embassy in Mexico and carried out between 2012 and 2014 by the Coordination of Foreign Language Education at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, campus Iztapalapa, in Mexico City. Both projects were addressed to economically disadvantaged adolescents from public secondary schools in the Iztapalapa sector of the city. The analysis centers on the impact of the second phase (Access More). Based on longitudinal data of students' achievement, the results are correlated with national statistics concerning English language competence in secondary students. A significant improvement in English language competence was found among students participating in the Intercultural and Interdisciplinary Program of English created by the institution.

KEYWORDS: LEARNING; FOREIGN LANGUAGE; ADOLESCENTS; LONGITUDINAL; ACCESS

BACKGROUND

Education in modern times has been considered a key force in creating democracies and promoting social and economic equity. More than ever, the current world circumstances demand that every nation prepare its future generations to successfully meet the ever-evolving complex challenges inherent in personal, work, community, regional, and global spheres. Hence, we witness a plethora of world-wide and binational initiatives aimed at planning and providing for this new educational context, emphasizing the formation of a literate workforce and promoting international student mobility. We can observe such trends in the publications from policy and research institutions such as the Woodrow Wilson Center Mexico Institute (Wood, 2013), Inter-American Dialogue (Fiszbein and Sucre, 2014; Fiszbein, 2014; and Fiszbein, 2015), World Education Services (Choudaha and Chang, 2012), the James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy (Vassar and Barrett, 2014), the Emerging Markets Forum (Puryear, Santibañez and Solano, 2012), and the Mexican Consultation Group of the Bilateral Forum on Higher Education, Innovation and Research (2013).

Significant elements that have come out of the above proposals are the emphasis on the improvement of the quality of primary and secondary education in Latin America, both public and private; the extension of the curriculum at all levels to include critical thinking abilities, foreign language and culture education (especially a high level of English); and the development of socio-affective perspectives and skills.

A corollary to the improvement of education in Latin America is the current emphasis on international mobility for students, teachers, and researchers. Therefore, it is considered of utmost importance to promote foreign language and culture education at all levels of the instructional ladder based on a comprehensive and integrative curriculum. According to Pavlenko and Norton, to acquire another language differs radically from the more common linguistic approach; it is transformed into an existential one: “a process of becoming, or avoiding becoming a certain person, rather than a simple accumulation of skills and knowledge” (cited in Ryan and Irie, 2014: 117).

For the last twenty years, the European Union, Canada, the United States, and Australia have showed a widespread interest in the promotion of linguistic and intercultural competences as a response to globalization. While

most of their foreign language curricula had traditionally stressed language ability, there is now a new focus on the need for intercultural attitudes and skills, defined generally as the “ability to ensure a shared understanding by people of different social identities, and [the] ability to interact with people as complex human beings with multiple identities and their own individuality” (Byram, Gribkova and Starkey, 2002: 10).

Thus, in order to equip university graduates with the above skills, the *Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Unidad Iztapalapa* (UAM-I) in Mexico City created an English program in 2007 that would offer low-income public university students the same opportunities for empowerment that are given at private Mexican universities. Major characteristics of this curriculum are its foundation on international standards for language and culture,¹ its interdisciplinary and intercultural character, and the development of an articulated technological platform for its support.

Concerning its structure, our English language and culture program comprises twelve trimesters with five curricular strands. The first strand, communication, centers on the development of linguistic competences in accordance with the *Common European Framework of Reference* (CEFR) (2001). The other four strands —culture, comparisons, connections, and communities— are based on the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century* of the United States (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2006). First, the culture strand introduces the student to the products, practices, and perspectives of Anglophone cultures. Each of the first nine trimesters concentrates on a particular English speaking country or region through the critical and aesthetic analysis of texts on history, geography, and society, simplified novels, poems, songs, and films. Next, the comparisons axis is based on a linguistic analysis between Spanish and English and a critical appreciation of both the maternal and Anglophone cultures. Then, in the connections strand, the student integrates English into his/her disciplinary major. The fifth strand, communities, promotes

1 *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* (CEFR) (2001) and *Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century* (2006).

the utilization of English outside the classroom. The closing three-trimester advanced level stage of the program presently includes selected topics in Anglophone cultures, as well as academic oral and writing skills.

Based on the innovative nature of our English Language and Culture Program already implemented with our public university students, in 2011 our institution was invited to participate in the *English Access Microscholarship Program* sponsored by the US Department of State through the US Embassy in Mexico City, aimed at having students acquire intermediate proficiency. This initial program was extended in 2014, due to its successful results, into the *Access More* program, an improved version with a target goal of making students reach an upper-intermediate level. In the rest of this article we will refer to the former as the *Access* program and to the latter as the *Access More* program.

Developed in 2004, the original *Access* program is a two-year English language program offered in 85 countries with currently more than 100 000 teenagers participating (Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs, n.d.). On its website, its purpose and scope are stated as follows:

The English Access Microscholarship Program (Access) provides a foundation of English language skills to talented 13-20 year-olds from economically disadvantaged sectors through after-school classes and intensive sessions. Access gives participants English skills that may lead to better jobs and educational prospects. Participants also gain the ability to compete for and participate in future exchanges and study in the United States (Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs, 2015).

Moreover, the us Ambassador to Mexico, Anthony Wayne (2012), in inaugurating the program at our campus, further specified:

First, Access provides English classes and basic computer skills for teenagers to raise their level of academic achievement and to motivate them to continue their studies, in order to qualify for scholarships and international exchange programs in the future. Also, these students learn to appreciate American culture and democratic values through cultural, sports, and recreational activities. Finally, by working in community service projects, the Access

scholarship students enhance their ability to successfully participate in the socioeconomic development of their own neighborhoods.²

Our university realized, upon accepting the challenge of educating high-risk secondary students in English, that we were facing the dismal statistics published by important agencies in Mexico, which expose the failure of English language education in the country at the primary and secondary levels, especially in public schools. Specifically, a recent study carried out by the non-governmental organization, *Mexicanos Primero* (2015), demonstrated that almost 80% of all students taking an English proficiency exam at the end of secondary school (after three years of compulsory education in that language) had no knowledge of English, while 3% reached the B1 intermediate level, officially established for secondary education graduates.

Consistent with these results, research commissioned by the National Association of Universities and Higher Education Institutions (ANUIES, by its Spanish acronym) (González, Vivaldo and Castillo, 2004) revealed that, even after three more years at high school level, 76% of a sample of entering freshmen in nine public and private universities in Mexico City failed the basic section of a standardized English language proficiency test. Furthermore, an additional research study, carried out in middle schools in the State of Mexico in 2013 (Estrada, 2013), yielded very similar results based on a thorough replication of the ANUIES original investigation. However, in spite of these discouraging conditions, and based on our vocation to promote the democratization of education, we regarded our task to extend a high quality English language curriculum to low-income teenagers as difficult, but not impossible. In the same vein, we felt obliged to investigate the true impact of our program, so as to ameliorate the shameful deficiencies in English language proficiency in Mexico.

Thus, the purpose of the present study was twofold: to measure the English language achievement of the *Access* students and to compare it with other areas of academic and personal development, including grade point average, cognitive style, and self-esteem.

² Authors' translation.

First, the relationship between academic achievement and foreign language proficiency has been widely reported, as shown in the annotated bibliography of the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (Valdés, 2015). One notable study in the above bibliography points out that foreign language learning in high school is related to higher scores in English and mathematics in the American College Testing entrance exam (Olsen and Brown, 1992).

Second, as for cognitive style, this is defined by Schwen, Bedner, and Hudson as: “a person’s typical or habit mode of problem-solving, thinking, perceiving, and remembering” (cited in Pitts and Thompson, 1984: 427). According to Witkin (cited in Pitts and Thompson, 1984), the field independent (FI) person has a greater ability to discover outstanding features in a complex field, as well as to react to ambiguous stimuli in an analytical way; while the field dependent (FD) person visualizes patterns more globally. FI has been associated with a greater articulation and competence in cognitive analysis and restructuring, whereas FD has been related to a more global approach and to a greater interpersonal competence. Regarding the relation between foreign and second language learning and cognitive style, Jameson (1992) reported that FI was moderately correlated to high TOEFL scores for all related language measures (listening, grammar, reading and total). Furthermore, a regression analysis in which cognitive style scores were regressed on language measures to determine relationships with language proficiency indicated that 21% of the variance in English proficiency was accounted for by FI/FD cognitive style. However, it should be noted that these studies cannot be considered conclusive, since further research has also demonstrated that learners in the central field tend to score high in areas related to foreign language learning (Contijoch and Popoca, 1999).

Finally, our study also included the analysis of students’ self-esteem. According to Rubio (2014: 42), in the literature two notions are always intertwined, that of self-concept and the concomitant self-esteem. The first, self-concept, is conceived as “a complex construct consisting of different dimensions or selves, namely physical, social, familiar, personal academic, and many other situational ones. Someone’s self-concept defines his/her individuality and predicts his/her behaviours” (Rubio, 2014: 43). The second, self-esteem, is defined as the “process and resulting evaluation of the self-concept” (Rubio, 2014: 43). In short, the relation between these two phenomena can be seen

as a one between cognition (self-concept) and its resulting affective evaluation (self-esteem). Specifically pertinent to the present research, the same author also acknowledges, based on other studies, that there is a separate self-concept for each foreign language studied and that acquiring a language involves more than linguistic proficiency to include personal development (Rubio, 2014: 49, 54). The above is reiterated by Pavlenko and Norton when they remark: “the learning of another language, perhaps more than any other educational activity, reflects the desire of learners to expand their range of identities and to reach out to wider worlds” (cited in Ryan and Irie, 2014: 109).

In the remaining sections of this article we describe the methodology used in evaluating the *Access* and *Access More* programs, the results obtained, and their educational policy and pedagogical implications.

METHOD

Participants

STUDENTS (*Access* Program)

In 2012 the two-year *Access* program enrolled fifty secondary school students (aged between 13 and 14). Selection criteria included the following: (1) a grade point average (GPA) ranging from 90 to 100, during the first year of secondary school; (2) low social economic status; (3) enrollment in a public secondary school in the Iztapalapa sector of Mexico City, second year, and (4) written commitment by parents to support and collaborate in all program activities. The screening procedure involved interviews with 150 students and their parents, which fifty students being selected.

STUDENTS (*Access More* program)

In 2014, with the approval and support of the US Embassy and our university, it was decided to offer the original *Access* students —by then enrolled in the first year of high school— the opportunity to perfect their English skills at a higher level in *Access More*.³ Thirty-six out of the forty-nine students who completed *Access* continued into *Access More*, which lasted one more year,

3 As far as we know, the continuation of the *Access* program into *Access More* has been unique in the world.

with five students dropping out and the rest of them fulfilling the program satisfactorily.

TEACHERS AND STAFF

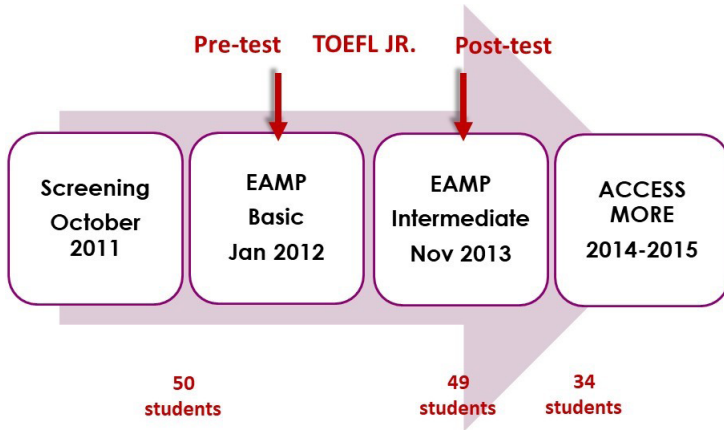
The *Access* stage of the program involved two groups of students (25 per group), each with a head teacher and a teacher's assistant. Head teachers were required to have a Bachelor's degree in Foreign Language Education (English), and assistants to be in the final stage of their undergraduate program. Head teachers were part-time associate English professors at UAM-I and had a C1 level (Advanced) or above (Advanced+) in English, according to the CEFR. The average age of the academic group was 35. A general coordinator supervised and reported systematically to the US Embassy. Technological support was provided by three technicians, with clerical support by two members of the administrative staff at the Coordination of Foreign Language Education (CELEX, by its Spanish acronym). During the *Access More* stage, two groups were involved (18 students each: 10 male and 26 female). No assistant teachers or technicians participated in this part of the program. Nevertheless, an additional component was included focusing on the development of students' leadership abilities. This last part of the program was coached and directed by our Fulbright English Language Teaching Assistant for the academic year 2014-2015.

Program funding

For the *Access* stage, the US Department of State provided: (1) salaries for two teachers per group (a head teacher and his/her assistant), as well as for a part-time coordinator; (2) Kindle devices for all students and teachers; (3) all academic materials (students' and teachers' textbooks and graded readers); and (4) other expenses (field trips and special academic events). As for the *Access More* phase, it became a combined initiative in which all parties involved —parents, the US Embassy, and the University— contributed proportionately to pay teachers' salaries. Moreover, the US Embassy provided additional funding for readers and materials for both groups of students, while parents paid for required textbooks.

The *Access* and *Access More* programs

FIGURE 1. CHRONOGRAM OF THE *ACCESS* AND *ACCESS MORE* PROGRAMS*



FIRST STAGE

The *Access* program was based on the official Intercultural and Interdisciplinary English Program of UAM-I and conducted in four-hour Saturday sessions for six trimesters (264 hours). The program aimed at providing students with a solid command of both linguistic and intercultural competences in five curricular strands: (1) Communication; (2) Culture; (3) Comparisons; (4) Connections, and (5) Communities. Every trimester, students were exposed to cultural contents related to a specific Anglophone country or region: US (three courses), Great Britain, Ireland, and Australia and New Zealand. This first stage covered language standards from A1 (Basic) to low B1 (Low Intermediate) levels of the CEFR and from basic to lower intermediate levels of the United States Standards for Foreign Language Learning. Systematic evaluations were conducted throughout each one of the six trimesters of the program in linguistic and intercultural competence, as well as interpretive and expository skills (oral and written).

**The tables are self made.

SECOND STAGE

The extension course, *Access More*, followed the same criteria, but it aimed at meeting standards from low B1 to low B2 levels. It was conducted in weekly 4-hour Saturday sessions during three trimesters (132 hours). In this case, the cultural strand covered contents and materials focused on Great Britain, the USA, and Canada. Evaluations, as in the previous stage, included linguistic and intercultural competence, as well as interpretive and expository skills (oral and written).

Additional evaluations

In order to measure the impact of both phases of the program, pre-test and post-test evaluations of linguistic competence were conducted using the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL Jr. version) (see table 1). The first TOEFL Jr. was administered at the end of the third trimester of *Access*, and the second one upon completion of the sixth trimester of the program. In addition, before the beginning of *Access More*, the 36 students enrolled were administered the following set of instruments in order to collect demographic information as well as to evaluate the *Access* program impact on students' cognitive style and self-esteem.

TABLE 1. INSTRUMENTS ADMINISTERED

TEST ADMINISTERED	ADMINISTRATION TIME	PRE-TEST (AFTER 3 RD TRIMESTER OF <i>ACCESS</i>)	POST-TEST (BEFORE <i>ACCESS MORE</i>)
Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL Jr.)	120 min	*	*
Demographic questionnaire	15 min		*
The Group Embedded Figures Test (Witkin, Ottman, Raskin and Karp, 1971)	60 min		*
Multidimensional Self-Esteem Scales (Revised Janis and Field Scale) (Heatheron and Wyland, 2015)	45 min		*

RESULTS

Fifty low-income, high achievement students, all from the Iztapalapa sector of Mexico City, were originally accepted in the *Access* program, having a mean age of 14.28 years old. Forty-nine of them (98%) successfully concluded the *Access* stage of the program. The second stage, *Access More*, included 34 students from the original *Access* program, 73% of which were female and 27% male. All of them (100%) passed entrance exams into high school and, additionally, reported planning to pursue university education. Their secondary school mean grade point average (GPA) was 93/100, and their first year of high school GPA was 86/100. Data from the demographic questionnaire revealed that mothers tended to have a higher education level than fathers.

TOEFL JR. SCORES AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Table 2 presents the main descriptive statistics for the six-trimester *Access* program GPA, followed by the TOEFL Jr. pre-test and post-test scores, and the GPA for secondary and for the first year of high school. It should be noted that the TOEFL Jr. pre-test was administered at the end of *Access*' third trimester, and it does not constitute a true baseline. The post-test mean score corresponded to the A2 level of the CEFR (just before beginning *Access More*). The GPA scores for secondary and the first year of high school revealed high academic achievement in secondary school, in accord with our screening criteria. On the other hand, we can observe a decrease in high school mean GPA, possibly associated with the major changes required to adapt to a more demanding academic environment.

TABLE 2. LINGUISTIC AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT VARIABLES

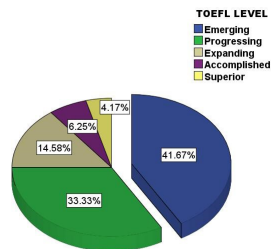
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	St. Dev.
<i>Access</i> Final average	48	6.80	9.70	8.3708	.69465
TOEFL Jr. Pre-Test	30	610	690	642.67	22.040
TOEFL Jr. Post-Test	48	610	870	688.85	63.675
Secondary School GPA	45	80.00	99.00	93.0444	4.24776
First Year High School GPA	42	70.00	98.50	86.0310	6.81109

Graph 1 shows the distribution of the students' scores in TOEFL Jr. at post-test. In the upper-right corner, the levels evaluated by TOEFL Jr. are shown with their CEFR equivalents. 42% of the *Access* students reached the A1 level, a third of the total sample fulfilled the A2 level, whereas only 25% placed at the B1 level or above. In comparing our results with those of the *Sorry* research study by *Mexicanos Primero* (2015), none of our students fell in the A0 category, as opposed to almost 80% of the *Sorry* study. Second, 42% achieved the A1 level, as opposed to 13% of *Mexicanos Primero* (2015). Third, 33% of the *Access* students scored at the A2 level, contrasting with only 5% in the national study. Finally, whereas *Sorry* reported only 3% of their sample at the B1 level, 25% of our students fulfilled competencies at the B1 level or above. An important fact here is that all of our students came from low-income families and public schools, and that TOEFL Jr. focuses exclusively on grammar, reading, and listening skills, without considering expository skills (oral or written), intercultural competence or technological literacy, all of them distinctive elements of the English university curriculum at Iztapalapa.

GRAPH 1. SAMPLE DISTRIBUTION IN TOEFL JR. AT POST-TEST VS. SORRY STUDY RESULTS

THE SORRY STUDY OF ENGLISH IN MEXICAN
SECONDARY SCHOOLS 2015

A0	79%
A1	13%
A2	5%
B1	3%



One of the most important research questions of our study was if there existed a significant statistical difference between the students' linguistic competence at the beginning and at the end of *Access* (the pre-test did not represent a true base line since it was given at the end of the basic level, course 3). As illustrated in table 3, a *Student's t-test* of differences between the TOEFL Jr. mean scores at pre-test and post-test showed that the 50 point

increase at post-test was highly significant ($t = -5.342$, $p > .001$). Furthermore, if we consider that the original entrance level to the program must have corresponded to a TOEFL Jr. of 600,⁴ then the true increase of our *Access* students may very well be 90 points.

TABLE 3. TEST OF DIFFERENCES IN TOEFL JR. (PRE-TEST/POST-TEST)

DESCRIPTIVES FOR RELATED SAMPLES		MEAN		
Pair 1	Listening pre-test	213.00		
	Listening post-test	230.25		
Pair 2	Language form pre-test	212.50		
	Language form post-test	223.10		
Pair 3	Reading pre-test	216.75		
	Reading post-test	237.25		
Pair 4	TOEFL Jr. pre-test	643.75		
	TOEFL Jr. post-test	690.75		
TEST OF RELATED SAMPLES		t	df	p (Sig.)
Pair 1	Listening pre-test - post-test	-3.984	19	.001
Pair 2	Language form pre-test - post-test	-3.092	19	.006
Pair 3	Reading pre-test - post-test	-4.570	19	.000
Pair 4	TOEFL Jr. pre-test - post-test	-5.342	19	.000

A second research question was if there existed a correlation between our students' achievement in *Access* and their performance on an international standardized measure of linguistic competence (TOEFL Jr.). As seen below,

4 600 in TOEFL Jr. is the lowest grade, meaning no English competence. The *Access* students at pre-test had already achieved the basic level at UAM-I.

Pearson’s correlation analysis between both variables reveals a more than moderate and highly significant correlation between what our program measures and what TOEFL evaluates.

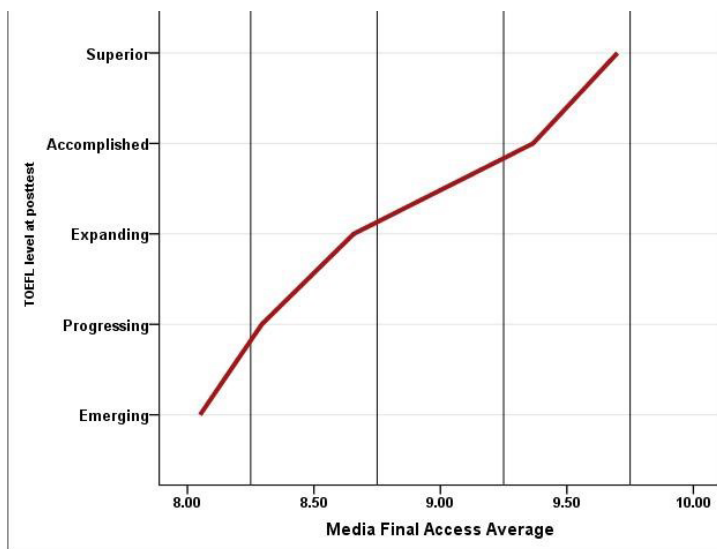
TABLE 4. PEARSON’S CORRELATIONS BETWEEN TOEFL JR. AT POST-TEST AND ACCESS GRADES

	TOEFL Jr. post-test	<i>Access</i> Basic GPA	<i>Access</i> Intermediate GPA	<i>Access</i> Total GPA
TOEFL Jr. post-test	Pearson’s correlation	1	.531**	.529**
	Sig. (bilateral)		.000	.000
	N	48	46	48

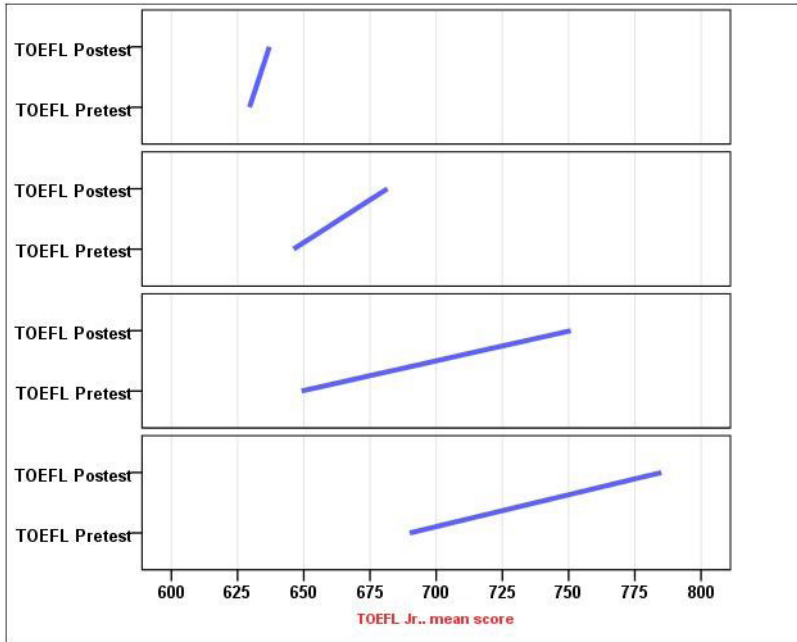
**Correlation is significant at level 0,01 (bilateral).

The results (see graph 2) are consistent with the correlation presented previously. As shown below, the higher the score in *Access*, the higher the students’ achievement in TOEFL Jr.

GRAPH 2. ACCESS GPA VS. TOEFL JR. LEVELS AT POST-TEST



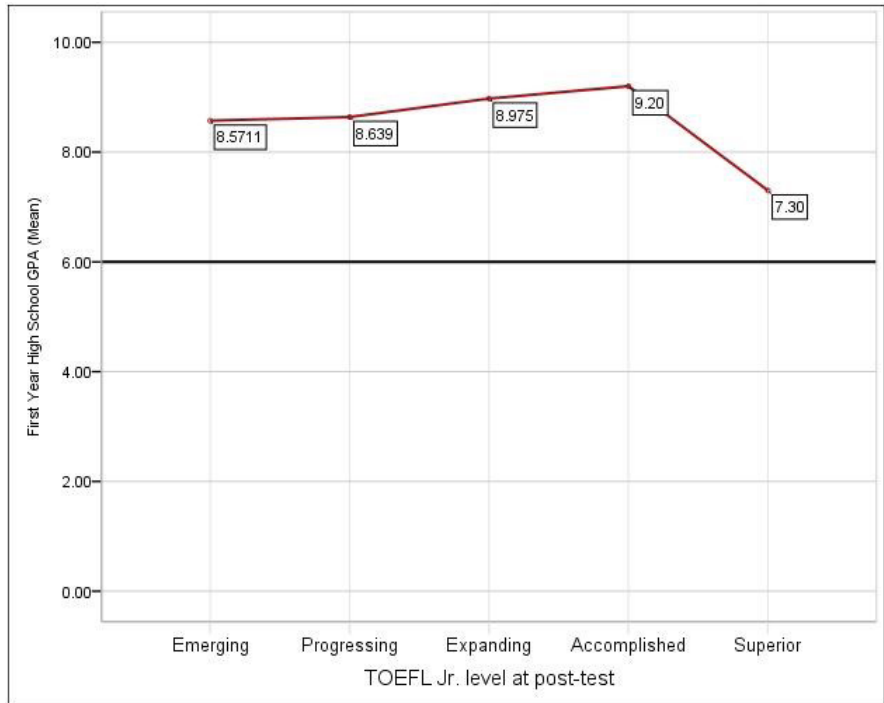
GRAPH 3. DIFFERENTIAL IMPROVEMENT RATES IN TOEFL JR. FROM PRE-TEST TO POST-TEST



Graph 3 below presents the differential improvement rates for the *Access* students, according to each one of the levels of TOEFL Jr. (Emerging, Progressing, Expanding, and Accomplished). Improvement data for the Superior level are not included, given the fact that the four students in that group did not present the pre-test.

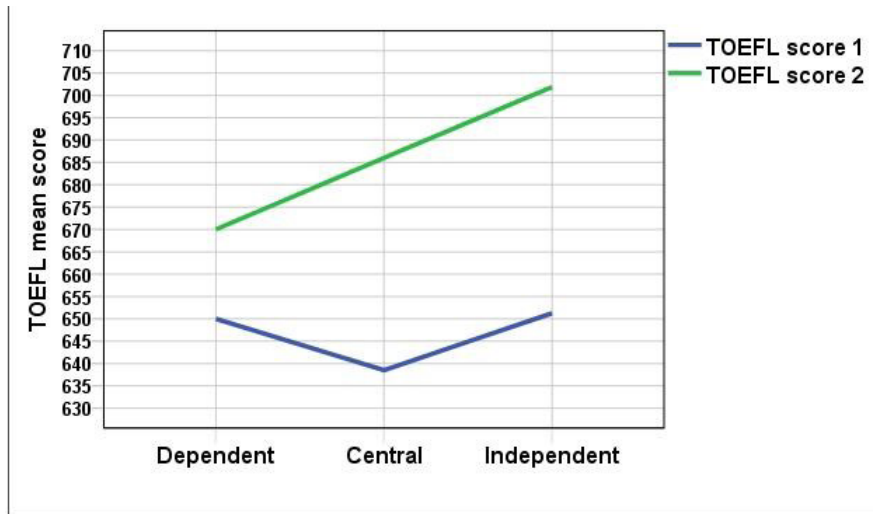
Students in the Emerging group showed the lowest improvement and remained in the same category at the end of the study. The second group (Progressing) moved from a high A1 to an A2 level, whereas the third group (Expanding) moved across three levels from a borderline A1 to a middle B1 level of linguistic competence in English. The fourth group (Accomplished), together with the third one, showed the most important increase in academic achievement, moving from middle A2 to a low B1+. We should point out that if the pre-test had been applied at the time of the students' admission into *Access*, this graph would have started at 600, and the improvement leaps would have been commensurately greater.

GRAPH 4. DISTRIBUTION OF FIRST YEAR OF HIGH SCHOOL GPA BY TOEFL JR. LEVEL AT POST-TEST



With regard to the relationship between general academic achievement and language proficiency in English (see graph 4), a consistent trend was evident, indicating that the higher the score in linguistic competence in English (as measured by TOEFL Jr.), the higher the GPA in high school of the *Access* students. However, such a trend was not shown in the case of the two students in the Superior group who showed a strong drop in GPA in the first year of high school when compared with the Emerging, Progressing, Expanding, and Accomplished groups. No further information was available to assess the reasons for such a drop in those two students, although we could speculate that the academic, social, and emotional challenges and stress of entering a new school may be related. We should note that qualitative complementary data could have provided answers for the lowering of their GPA.

GRAPH 5. COGNITIVE STYLE DISTRIBUTIONS BY TOEFL JR. MEAN SCORES AT PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST

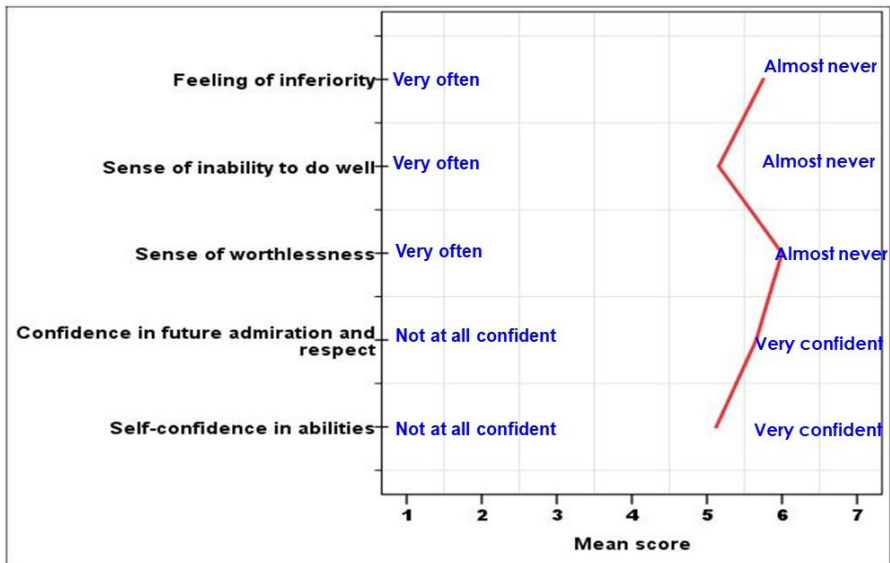


At this point, we start the discussion of additional findings, beginning with cognitive style (cs). Evaluation of cs was based on the administration of Witkins' Group Embedded Figures Test. First of all, graph 5 below shows differences between the pre-test and post-test among groups categorized by cs. Only four students were placed in the FD group, and the greatest achievement leaps in TOEFL Jr. were obtained by central and FI students (48 and 50 point increase, respectively). We must point out here that the TOEFL Jr. does not test speaking and interactive abilities nor team work, which are usually benefited by a FD style. Therefore, the conclusion that we can make is that, as for what the TOEFL Jr. does test, a FI style tends to be associated with higher scores on that exam.

The last sequence of graphs is related to the analysis of the impact of *Access* on our students' self-esteem. It was measured using Janis-Field "Multi-dimensional Self-Esteem Scales." As can be seen in graphs 6-10, at the conclusion of *Access*, students showed a positive self-esteem profile, which can be considered relevant to academic and professional success and reiterates the positions of Rubio (2014) and Pavlenko and Norton (cited in Ryan and

Irie, 2014) concerning the enhancement of self-esteem during successful foreign language learning.

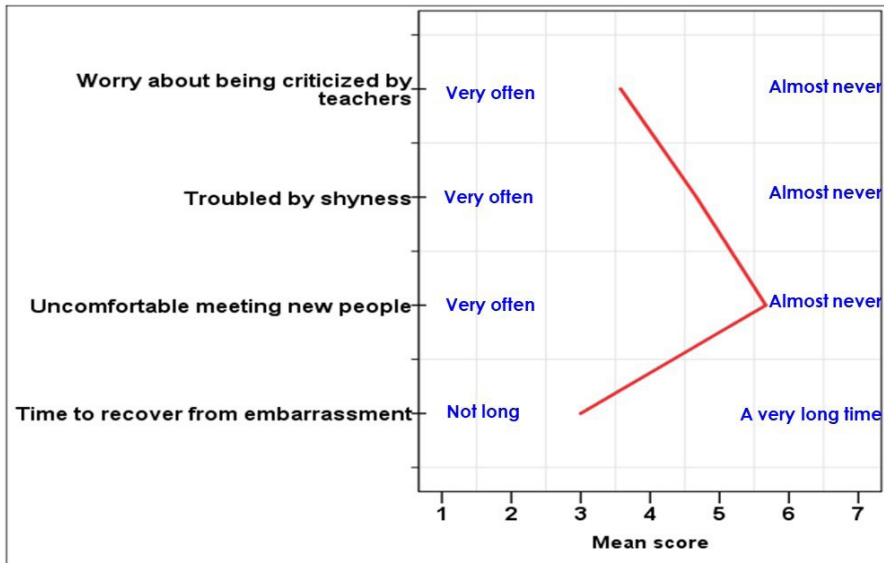
GRAPH 6. DISTRIBUTION PROFILES IN SELF-ESTEEM SCALES: SELF-REGARD



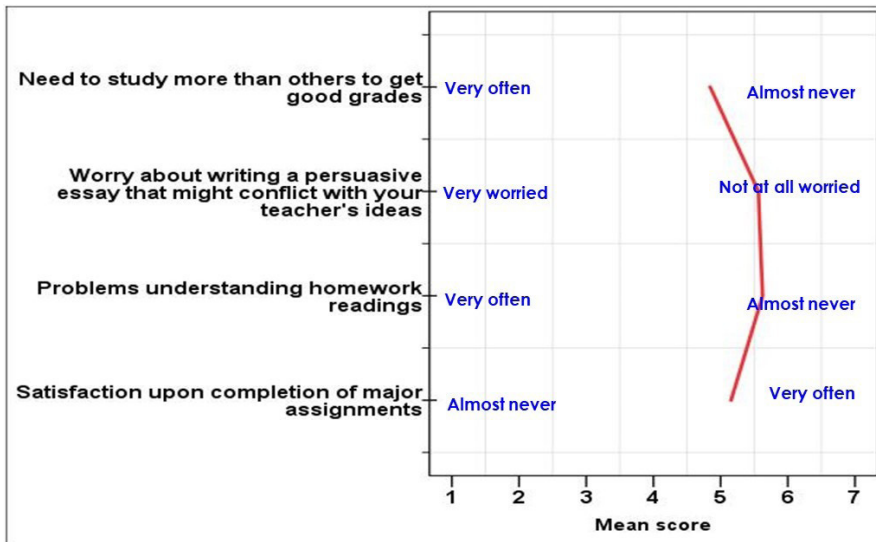
Specifically, the first area, self-regard (see graph 6), reflects individuals with a positive perspective about their personal worthiness, which is evident from the marked tendency of mean scores to cluster towards the right extreme of the graph. That is, at the end of the *Access* program, students reported almost never having feelings of inferiority, inability, or worthlessness. On the contrary, they perceived themselves as confident in their abilities and certain of being admired and respected by others in the future.

As for the social confidence dimension (see graph 7), two elements stand out. On the one hand, there was an interesting form of academic “self-consciousness” in *Access* students who, on average, manifested some feeling of concern over the criticism of their professors. On the other hand, the students revealed to be socially confident, expressed no problem with shyness, a capacity to meet new people and a rapid recovery from embarrassing situations.

GRAPH 7. DISTRIBUTION PROFILES IN SELF-ESTEEM: SOCIAL CONFIDENCE

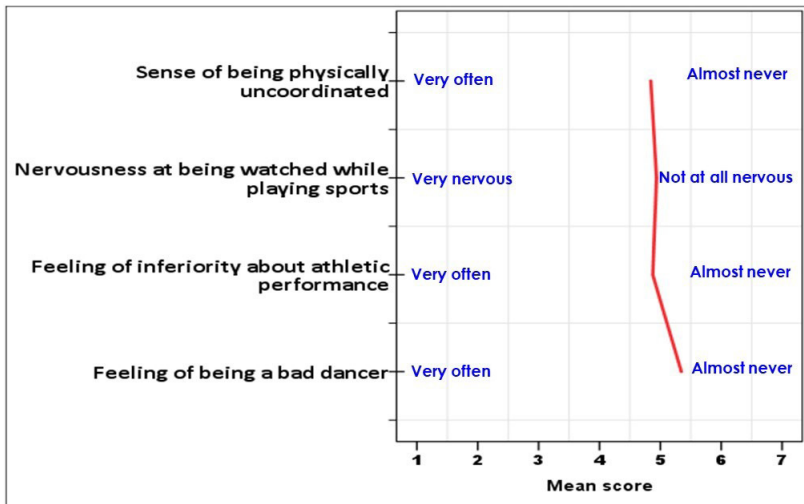


GRAPH 8. DISTRIBUTION PROFILES IN SELF-ESTEEM: SCHOOL ABILITIES



The third area, School abilities (see graph 8) shows an interesting tendency for *Access* students to be somewhat concerned about the effort needed for academic success. They don't feel overwhelmed about the time devoted to study nor feel uncomfortable expressing views contrary to their professors. They understand assignments and show an above average satisfaction in completing them.

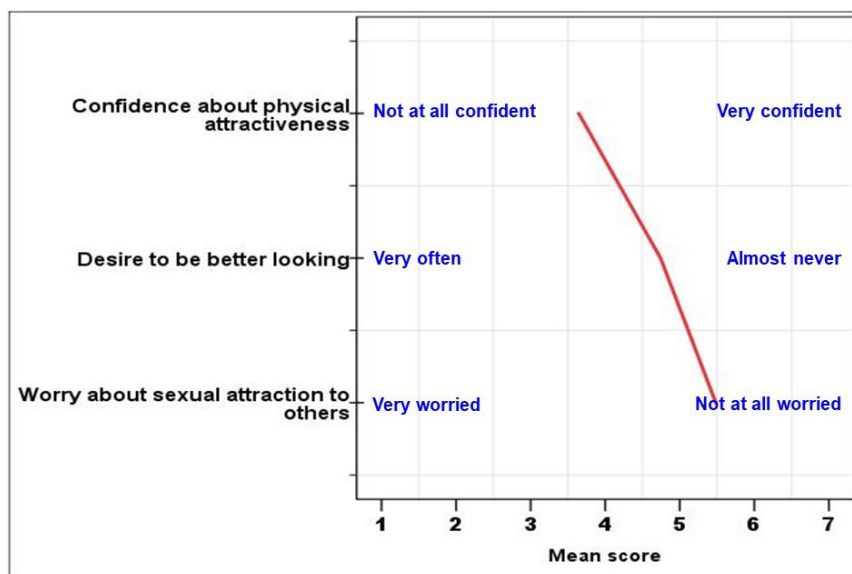
GRAPH 9. DISTRIBUTION PROFILES IN SELF-ESTEEM: PHYSICAL ABILITIES



Concerning physical abilities (see graph 9), the *Access* graduates reported an essential confidence in themselves, with no feelings of physical inability or inferiority in sports. Notice their score when evaluating their self-confidence in their dancing abilities.

Finally, the physical appearance scale (see graph 10) reflects a slight contradiction: whereas the first two categories (confidence about physical attractiveness and desire to be better looking) seem to express a below average sense of physical attractiveness, they still perceive themselves as being rather sexually attractive.

GRAPH 10. DISTRIBUTION PROFILES IN SELF-ESTEEM: PHYSICAL APPEARANCE



CONCLUSION

We believe it is only through empirical research that we can know the impact our curricular initiatives actually have on the students' development. Returning to the original objectives of this study, namely, to evaluate the effect of our university English program on the language proficiency of low-income Mexican secondary school students through an international English language standardized test, as well as to correlate such linguistic competence to their academic achievement, cognitive style, and self-esteem, our results give evidence for some reassuring considerations.

First, the *English Access Microscholarship Program* at UAM-I proved to make a difference in the development of a sound platform of linguistic competence in English in Mexican secondary school students, with more than 25% of them achieving the B1 competency level, which the Public Education Secretariat

in Mexico aims to be reached in the future at the end of lower secondary education. Moreover, all students demonstrated a systematic improvement in language competence in pre-test/post-test evaluations with TOEFL Jr., thus suggesting the pedagogical potential of the intercultural and interdisciplinary English program at UAM-I to promote the abilities and competences in the foreign language, required by the current policies for students' international mobility.

In addition, the linguistic competence in English profiles attained by the students at the end of the *Access* program contrast markedly with those reported by recent educational research initiatives in Mexico that evaluate foreign language competence at the end of secondary school (*i.e.*, ANUIES and *Mexicanos Primero*). As a whole, the results of this study give support to the view that it is certainly not the students, but the traditional educational system which is to be held responsible for the current gap in foreign language education in the country. That is, given a solid English curriculum, a qualified group of teachers, institutional support, and committed parents, high-risk, low-income students have just as much chance, or even more, to achieve high language proficiency as their peers in private institutions.

Second, as with all good or poor educational endeavors, we observed a relationship between competence and personal development. From our data, we can perceive an optimistic trend at the end of *Access* suggesting that our program not only aided in bettering English competence, but also permeated positively such areas as general academic achievement in secondary school and the first year of high school; it also influenced the development of critical intercultural knowledge, expository skills, technological literacy, and self-esteem.

Third, the *Access* and the *Access More* programs give testimony to the overwhelming potential of sound educational initiatives based on the unwavering team work from all concerned (curriculum, educational institutions, international agencies, teachers, technological and administrative staff, and parents). Such synergy can provide for the democratization of Mexican public education and our ultimate hope for our students: to lead rich and fulfilling lives. In short, we are convinced by the *Access* and *Access More* experience that we should not hold students responsible for their current limited English proficiency, but should promote both a thorough understanding of factors

affecting the development of complex academic and professional competences and an undivided commitment to assure access to an education of excellence for all our students.

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