

The Gap Between Theory and Practice: Examining the Curricular Reality of an Intercultural English Program in Mexico

La brecha entre la teoría y la práctica: examinando la realidad curricular de un programa intercultural de inglés en México

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze the actual coverage of courses, objectives and contents of the three basic levels of the Intercultural and Interdisciplinary English Program of the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana in the post-pandemic period. In the context of the application of an action research paradigm to the evaluation and monitoring of the instrumentation of this program over the last ten years, a quantitative study was carried out based on an *ad hoc* survey administered to a random sample of undergraduate students during 2024. The results reveal a significant gap in the coverage of the parameters originally established by the current curricular model, reflecting a marked heterogeneity in teaching practices after the COVID-19 pandemic. The main pedagogical implications derived from these results are discussed.

Keywords: Action Research; Curricular Evaluation; Higher Education; Intercultural English Teaching.

Resumen

El propósito de este estudio es analizar la cobertura real de cursos, objetivos y contenidos de los tres niveles básicos del Programa Intercultural e Interdisciplinario de Inglés de la Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana en el periodo postpandemia. En el contexto de la aplicación de un paradigma de investigación acción a la evaluación y seguimiento de la instrumentación de dicho programa a lo largo de los últimos diez años, se llevó a cabo un estudio cuantitativo basado en una encuesta *ad hoc* administrada a una muestra aleatoria de estudiantes de licenciatura durante 2024. Los resultados revelan una brecha importante en la cobertura de los parámetros originalmente establecidos por el modelo curricular vigente, reflejando una marcada heterogeneidad en la práctica docente posterior a la pandemia del COVID-19. Se discuten las principales implicaciones pedagógicas derivadas de estos resultados.

Palabras clave: investigación acción; evaluación curricular; educación superior; enseñanza intercultural de inglés.

Foreign language education has become one of the most important challenges for universities all over the world. In particular, the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana at Iztapalapa (UAMI) in Mexico City launched in 2007 its Intercultural and Interdisciplinary English Program (IIEP) (Lee, Vivaldo, Flores, Caballero & Calderón, 2009),¹ which was taken as a model to be developed by the Coordination of Foreign Language Education (CELEX) in all other languages.

A unique aspect of the IIEP is that it has been incorporated officially into the curricula of all undergraduate programs in our institution on the basis of three intermediate level courses at the B1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, 2018). After nearly two decades, it is obvious that the original program demands a thorough revision with the purpose of updating both contents and pedagogy.

It is considered relevant to point out that among the main decisions of the original methodological approach to the curricular analysis of the IIEP was the undertaking of action-research from the very inception of this program. Two outstanding scholars of Action Research, McNiff and Whitehead, defined its parameters as follows:

Action research can be a powerful and liberating form of professional enquiry because it means that practitioners themselves investigate their own practice as they find ways of living more fully in the direction of their educational values (...) This is what makes action research distinctive. It is done by practitioners themselves rather than a professional researcher, who does research on practitioners, as is often the case in traditional forms of social science research (2006, p. 8).

¹ All translations are the authors.

It is our conviction that action research provides an invaluable insider perspective into what is actually occurring in our English classrooms. In such regard, Hamdi and Asrobi, within the context of action research in the EFL classroom, propose an integrative definition of the concept based on a literature review of the topic: “Classroom Action Research is a systematic and reflective inquiry that helps educators identify classroom issues, implement teaching interventions, and track their effects through iterative cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection” (2025, p. 43).

In the next section, a concise description of our English program is presented which will be followed by an account of key action research studies on its implementation.

THE INTERCULTURAL AND INTERDISCIPLINARY ENGLISH PROGRAM (IIEP)

From the turn of the XXI century, foreign language education policies throughout the world have underscored the importance of promoting the formation of a critical intercultural citizenship in students, based on the premise that learning a language cannot be separated from the understanding of the cultures that speak that language.

From the beginning of our pedagogical endeavor in EFL, we have based every initiative in the seminal works of Michael Byram (Byram, 2013 and 2021) and Claire Kramsch (1993),² who have both remarked on the transcendental relevance of being intercultural in the current global context. Following their perspectives, Peskoller, in an influential paper on EFL in Austria, states:

(...) intercultural learning is understood as an educational approach that actively engages with cultural plurality as a resource, challenges processes of exclusion and discrimination, and fosters empathy, encourages perspective-taking, and cultivates reflexivity in relation to cultural encounters. It goes beyond the transmission of factual knowledge about national cultures ... and instead

² Both Byram and Kramsch have written innumerable books and articles since the 1990s on foreign language teaching and interculturality that cannot all be cited here. Nevertheless, we feel that our English Program reflects their educational philosophy.

promotes critical engagement with diversity and openness toward different ways of knowing, being, and doing. ... intercultural learning encompasses cognitive, affective, and action-oriented dimensions; is grounded in learners' *Lebenswelt*; and contributes to creating respectful, inclusive, and dialogically engaged classroom environments (Peskoller, 2025, p. 2).

Very much in the line of Peskoller perspective, a major objective of the IIEP is to develop in our students a sound and critical understanding of the vast diversity of anglophone cultures, in parallel to the discerning appreciation of their own cultural heritages. Thus, the IIEP endorsed from its creation the integration of a critical intercultural competence into the English curriculum, anticipating the inclusion of the critical intercultural stance shown in the visionary document *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture* (Council of Europe, 2018).

Another important characteristic of the IIEP (see Appendix) is the fusion of international and national standards as a curricular strategy. The program is structured along an educational *continuum* based on the following linguistic policy documents: (1) the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages of the Council of Europe (CEFR) (Common European Framework..., 2018); (2) the US Standards for Foreign Language Learning (SFL) (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2006) and the recommendations on foreign language education of the Mexican Secretary of Education (Subsecretaría de Planeación y Coordinación, 2006).

In terms of its curricular structure, the IIEP covers 12 trimesters that center around five strands: Communication, Culture, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities.

First, the COMMUNICATION focuses on the development of language skills according to the levels of the CEFR. The remaining four strands are evaluated and defined based on the SFL document. Second, CULTURE introduces the practices, products and perspectives of the anglophone countries (trimesters 1 to 9). Each course focuses on the thematic study of a country or social group through the critical and aesthetic analysis of literary and informative texts (unabridged or simplified), poems, music, and films. Third, in these nine trimesters, the COMPARISONS strand makes a contrastive linguistic and cultural analysis between the mother tongue and culture and the English language and

anglophone cultures. Fourth, the CONNECTIONS strand links the learning of English to the student's disciplinary area. Fifth, the COMMUNITIES promotes the use of English in contexts beyond the classroom (UAMI, 2007, p. 22).

Of the twelve trimesters of the program, three (corresponding to level B1 of the CEFR and Intermediate of the SFL) are compulsory subjects in all undergraduate programs. With regard to advanced courses (Level C1), the UAMI offers a set of courses on Selected Topics in Anglophone Cultures as well as on academic writing and speaking.

It is highly pertinent to our present study to note that the UAM establishes in its legislation the following guidelines. First, the students should follow their courses in accordance with officially approved plans and programs. Second, they should receive all sessions scheduled per term. Third, evaluation must be circumscribed to the approved plans and programs. (Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Reglamento de Alumnos 2021: 241).

ANTECEDENTS OF ACTION RESEARCH ABOUT THE IIEP

The English program at UAMI has been the center of a systematic series of action-research studies. First, and prior to university approval, a preliminary theoretical analysis of its cultural foundations was undertaken and published (Lee & Vivaldo, 2010). Second, in order to have an initial assessment of the feasibility of integrating the program into all undergraduate programs, a two-year pilot study was conducted with groups of voluntary undergraduate students. That study supported the appropriateness of course objectives, programming sequences, relevance of materials and activities, and evaluation criteria (Vivaldo, Calderón & Lee, 2010). Third, the linguistic competence in English of freshmen students was evaluated based on an interinstitutional diagnostic test. Such study indicated that only 20% of the students entering UAMI could be expected to be placed above the A2 level of English (Vivaldo, Lee, Calderón & Flores, 2013). Fourth, the intercultural attitudes of students and teachers participating in the English program were assessed (Vivaldo & Lee, 2014). Fifth, a longitudinal study from 2017 to 2021 compared students' achievement among three different teaching-learning modalities. The results showed that under the virtual mode, the IIEP had the highest performance levels (Vivaldo, 2023). Lastly, Vivaldo, Lee and Bergamaschi (2024) examined

the perceptions of interculturality among teachers of English and French following formative seminars on the use of film in the teaching of culture in foreign language education. Results gave evidence of the relevance of film as a powerful means to immerse teachers and students in the target cultures. In the following section we describe the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the IIEP as well as how our university faced the situation.

CURRICULAR DECISION-MAKING AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In 2020, in the face of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the UAM set as a major institutional objective to develop an unprecedented pedagogical and technological strategy that was materialized in the Emerging Remote Teaching Program (PEER by its acronym in Spanish) (UAM Educational Innovation Committee, 2020, p. 3).

The PEER was envisioned as a contingent, multi-technological, flexible, and inclusive institutional response scheme. Planned for a limited period of time, the project was based on the articulation of the following elements: (1) diversity of technological resources available in the institution, (2) flexibility in academic-administrative processes, and (3) formulation of an institutional inclusion strategy that could assure access to connectivity and technology for low-income students.

Nevertheless, the development of academic programs was affected with some of them not being implemented as required. This was the case of the IIEP, which was subject to a series of *ad hoc* decisions which directly altered or even erased the original scope and essence of the program with a definitive negative impact in the achievement of skills and competences. This gap became evident in the performance of students entering the intermediate level of the IIEP in the post pandemic period.

In view of the above, the purpose of this study was to diagnose the current functioning of basic courses of the IIEP, in light of the original objectives, curricular strands, contents and learning activities. The methodological approach is based on an action research paradigm that, according to Burns, implies:

(...) a self-reflective, systematic and critical research approach by participants who are also members of the research context. The purpose of action research is to identify problematic situations or issues that participants themselves consider worthy of investigation, and to intervene in these situations to bring about informed changes in practice (Burns, 2004, p. 5).

In this sense, one major criterion of the curricular evaluation approach here presented is to accurately assess the conditions of implementation of the IIEP on the basis of accountability in education. In Nedkova's words: "The purpose of accountability has to do with prescribed areas of performance and with the assessment of the degree in which minimum levels of competence are achieved" (Nedkova, 2004, p. 209).

Among the unilateral decisions taken at the onset of the pandemic were *impromptu* substitutions of the Communication strand, namely the approved textbook, paving the way to a myriad of initiatives by the faculty. In such regard, the original series –*Touchstone* published by Cambridge University Press (McCarthy, McCarten & Sandiford, 2014)–, had as one of its most important teaching resources a solid technological platform that made it possible to migrate the IIEP to an online teaching modality. On the other hand, a superficial revision of textbooks in the market was launched, which ended in 2021 with the decision mandating the *Life* series (Stephenson, Dummett & Hughes, 2024) as the Communication strand textbook.

In summary, the period of the COVID-19 pandemic at CELEX was characterized by abrupt curricular decision-making that led in turn to unprecedented changes of the official program in the absence of a critical analysis of their pedagogical implications.

Statement of the Problem

One of the most important side effects of the pandemic period in education in EFL at UAMI was the increasing heterogeneity in competence profiles in English of students entering the compulsory segment of the IIEP (B1 intermediate courses). Specifically, it became common to find cases of students who did not meet the objectives, contents and activities of the Basic I, II and III levels of the program. Among possible reasons for such a gap we can mention two. First, students being placed incorrectly through not validated placement

tests or, second, by the students' inaccurate promotion throughout courses that do not meet the standards, objectives and contents established in the IIEP. That is, despite covering specific basic courses at UAMI, their performance is shown to be well below the required A2 level. This, in turn, may be associated to the lack of consensus among teachers in terms of methodological approaches, leading to poor articulation in the pedagogical sequencing of the program. Therefore, it is considered that if a realistic and thorough revision of the IIEP is to take place, it is essential to assess the extent in which the learning and certification standards approved by the Academic Council of the UAMI are being met.

Justification

Since its creation, the IIEP has been conceived as an institutional response in the democratization of foreign language education. Our ultimate aim is to guarantee the attainment of standards of excellence that could place our graduates on a par with the graduates from private universities.

Presently, the IIEP has been integrated into the curricula of all undergraduate programs taught in the institution in the form of three compulsory curricular subjects with credits. Hence, it is imperative to ensure the appropriate implementation of the stages of the IIEP (Basic, Intermediate, Upper Intermediate and Advanced) based on articulated fulfillment of objectives, contents, and curricular standards.

In short, it is our conviction that a *sine qua non* criterion for the achievement of certification parameters established in the IIEP is the articulation of courses, contents, and activities on which the program is based. According to the Interinstitutional Advisory Council on Foreign Languages of the Mexican Ministry of Education (SEP by its acronym in Spanish):

The learning of foreign languages and cultures is one of the most complex, enriching, and formative learning experiences that a student can have access to... the Council considers a priority to enforce sound policies in order to guarantee the articulation among the programs of foreign language education at all different levels in terms of the following:

- skills and achievement criteria;
- curricula;
- teaching methodologies;

- infrastructure for teaching-learning;
- material design;
- teacher development;
- institutional regulatory frameworks. (Interinstitutional Advisory Council on Foreign Language Education, 2009: 5-7)

In accordance with the above, and after almost two decades, it is necessary to gain a reliable empirical perspective of the extent in which the IIEP stages are being covered and of the degree of articulation being accomplished in its implementation. Thus, the purpose of this study is to carry out a thorough evaluation of the current coverage and articulation among the courses that comprise the basic level of the IIEP (Basic I, Basic II and Basic III Courses) as a first step in advancing possible modification in its scope or structure in the future.

METHOD

The study is based on a quantitative descriptive analysis of a series of variables assessing the current implementation of basic courses of the IIEP. It centered on the development and administration of a questionnaire to a sample of voluntary undergraduate students entering the Intermediate I level at UAMI.

Subjects

The sample for the study was integrated by a group of 182 voluntary students registered during winter and fall trimesters of 2024 in the IIEP Intermediate I course at the Coordination of Foreign Language Education (CELEX). They came from undergraduate programs from the three academic divisions taught at UAMI, namely, Basic Sciences and Engineering, Biological and Health Sciences, and Social Sciences and Humanities.

Instrument

The survey instrument was designed specifically for the study. It evaluated five categories of analysis (see Table 1) and was administered before or after scheduled English classes. Student and teacher anonymity was kept at all times.

TABLE 1. STRUCTURE OF THE SURVEY INSTRUMENT

| Category | Description | Number of Items | Type of Item |
|----------|--|-----------------|------------------------|
| 1 | Number of basic courses taken at UAMI vs. number of courses exempted through placement exams | 1 | Multiple choice |
| 2 | Textbook used for each basic course | 1 | Multiple choice |
| 3 | Language used in each of the basic levels in conducting the class | 1 | Multiple choice |
| 4 | Students' perception of the quality of the basic courses attended | 1 | Multiple choice |
| 5 | Components of the IIEP covered in basic courses attended (Communication/ Culture) | 18 | Binary option (Yes/No) |

The survey was initially validated through a process where the researchers reviewed the accuracy, relevance, and credibility of each item. A first draft was piloted with a group of students which led to the correction of some items for clarity and pertinence. A quantitative, descriptive statistical analysis of data was carried out using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). No qualitative measures were taken at this stage given the specific scope of this study. However, it is important to note that this paper is part of a continuum of action research which has incorporated qualitative methods of analysis (e.g., Vivaldo, Lee & Bergamaschi, 2024).

Procedure

The survey was administered to nine groups of Intermediate I and II levels of the IIEP at the beginning of the 24-P and 24-O trimesters. The administration of the printed version of the survey took an average of 20 minutes and was coordinated by the teacher of the group. In total, 182 instruments were applied. Once processed in Excel, the database was migrated to SPSS for analysis.

Type of Accreditation

The first variable under analysis was the procedure followed by students to cover the basic level of the IIEP (i.e., exemption via placement examinations or attending courses at the UAMI). As seen in Table 2, a high percentage of basic courses exemption was evident. Most of the sample (57.1%) reported having exempted at least one of the three basic courses of the program and 20% having exempted all courses of that level. On the other hand, only 42.9% reported having attended all three courses at CELEX.

TABLE 2. TYPE OF ACCREDITATION OF THE BASIC LEVEL OF THE IIEP

| | Frequency | Valid percentage | Cummulative percentage |
|-------------------------------------|------------|------------------|------------------------|
| Exempted all three courses | 38 | 20.9 | 20.9 |
| Exempted two courses | 46 | 25.3 | 46.2 |
| Exempted one course | 20 | 11.0 | 57.1 |
| Attended all three courses at CELEX | 78 | 42.9 | 100.0 |
| Total | 182 | 100.0 | |

Language Used in the Classroom

A second interest of the study was to analyze the predominant language used in the classroom within a continuum that went from exclusively in Spanish to exclusively in English. As can be seen in Tables 3, 4 and 5, an inverse association was found between the predominant language of the class and the level of the course. That is, the use of English as the language of instruction consistently increased as progress was made in the IIEP: from 40% in Basic 1 courses, to 54% in Basic 2, and 75.3% in Basic 3.

TABLE 3. LANGUAGE USED IN CLASS BASIC 1

| | Frequency | Valid percentage | Cummulative percentage |
|----------------|-----------|------------------|------------------------|
| English | 34 | 40.0 | 40.0 |
| Spanish | 42 | 49.4 | 89.4 |
| Both languages | 9 | 10.6 | 100.0 |
| Total | 85 | 100.0 | |

TABLE 4 . LANGUAGE USED IN CLASS BASIC 2

| | Frequency | Valid percentage | Cummulative percentage |
|----------------|------------|------------------|------------------------|
| English | 55 | 54.5 | 54.5 |
| Spanish | 28 | 27.7 | 82.2 |
| Both languages | 18 | 17.8 | 100.0 |
| Total | 100 | 100.0 | |

TABLE 5. LANGUAGE USED IN CLASS BASIC 3

| | Frequency | Valid percentage | Cummulative percentage |
|----------------|------------|------------------|------------------------|
| English | 110 | 75.3 | 75.3 |
| Spanish | 20 | 13.7 | 89.0 |
| Both languages | 15 | 10.3 | 100.0 |
| Total | 146 | 100.0 | |

Students' Perceptions of the Basic Courses Quality

The third variable is particularly noteworthy because it represents the perception that students have about the English program (see Table 6). Although 89.0%

rated the quality of the basic courses taught at CELEX between “Very Good” and “Good”, it is worrisome that 11% perceived them as “Deficient”.



TABLE 6 PERCEPTION OF QUALITY OF BASIC COURSES

| | Frequency | Valid percentage | Cummulative percentage |
|--------------|------------|------------------|------------------------|
| Very good | 43 | 29.7 | 29.7 |
| Good | 86 | 59.3 | 89.0 |
| Poor | 16 | 11.0 | 100.0 |
| Total | 145 | 100.0 | |

Textbook Used for the Communication Strand

The fourth variable under study was the textbook employed by teachers in the linguistic strand (communication strand) (see Tables 7, 8 and 9). According to the IIEP, a common textbook series was expected to be used in all groups and courses in order to guarantee a homogeneous accreditation of CEFR standards.

Nevertheless, an important percentage of students reported not having used any textbook at all during their basic courses, fluctuating from 22% in Basic 1, 18.4% in Basic 2, and 12.3% in Basic 3. On the other hand, 54.9% reported having used the *Life series* (not in the official program). In the case of the *Touchstone* series (Communication strand of the IIEP), a low percentage of use in class was reported, fluctuating between 6.6% (Basic 1), 7.8% (Basic 2), and 6.8 (Basic 3).

TABLE 7. TEXTBOOK USED IN BASIC 1

| | Frequency | Valid percentage | Cummulative percentage |
|------------------|-----------|------------------|------------------------|
| Life 1 | 50 | 54.9 | 54.9 |
| Touchstone I | 6 | 6.6 | 61.5 |
| Other | 15 | 16.5 | 78.0 |
| No textbook used | 20 | 22.0 | 100.0 |
| Total | 91 | 100.0 | |

TABLE 8. TEXTBOOK USED IN BASIC 2

| | Frequency | Valid percentage | Cummulative percentage |
|------------------|------------|------------------|------------------------|
| Life 1 | 55 | 53.4 | 53.4 |
| Touchstone I | 8 | 7.8 | 61.2 |
| Other | 21 | 20.4 | 81.6 |
| No textbook used | 19 | 18.4 | 100.0 |
| Total | 103 | 100.0 | |

TABLE 9. TEXTBOOK USED IN BASIC 3

| | Frequency | Valid percentage | Cummulative percentage |
|------------------|------------|------------------|------------------------|
| Life 1 | 82 | 56.2 | 56.2 |
| Touchstone I | 10 | 6.8 | 63.0 |
| Other | 36 | 24.7 | 87.7 |
| No textbook used | 18 | 12.3 | 100.0 |
| Total | 146 | 100.0 | |

Culture Strand: Content Coverage

The last group of variables analyzing program coverage was related to the Culture strand. According to the IIEP, this strand must be directly interwoven into the Communication strand in order to guarantee the achievement of competence standards for Level A2 in the program (CEFR and SFL).

The Culture strand is structured on the basis of a thematically related set of instructional materials including the following: (1) a reader that introduces students to the target country or region for the trimester, which follows the corresponding CEFR level; (2) an iconic simplified/graded novel of the target culture according to the CEFR; (3) the analysis of a film version of the novel analyzed during the trimester; (4) the analysis and practice of a

song representative of the foreign culture under study, and (5) the study and reflection about a poem also representative of the country and appropriate both in its structure and complexity to the students' competence level.

Figures 1, 2 and 3 present coverage data of the five previous variables for each of the three Basic courses. A close look at the three charts reveals a number of troubling patterns. First, the full coverage of cultural contents in basic courses occurred in only 34.19% of the cases, that is, only a third of the enrolled students had actually been exposed to these contents. Secondly, two components of the Culture strand had the highest coverage rates: the expository readers and the simplified novel. In both cases, the coverage percentages fluctuate between 41% (Basic I) and 63% (Basic III) with an increasing trend in coverage as the program progresses.

A third pattern observed relates to the lowest coverage: the poem and the song. Here, coverage moved between 14.5% (Basic III) and 19.5% (Basic II). Notice that for both variables, the lowest coverage percentages are found in the most advanced level (Basic III).

Fig. 1. CULTURAL STRAND: COVERAGE OF CONTENTS IN BASIC 1

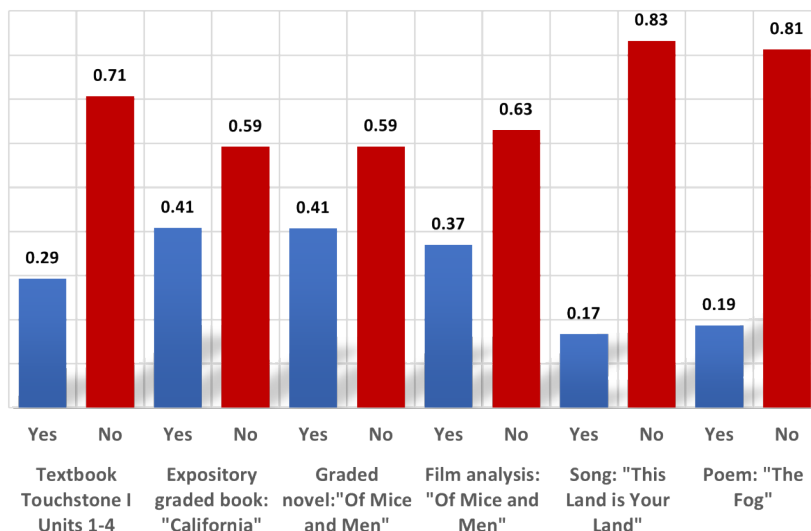


Fig. 2. CULTURAL STRAND: COVERAGE OF CONTENTS IN BASIC 2

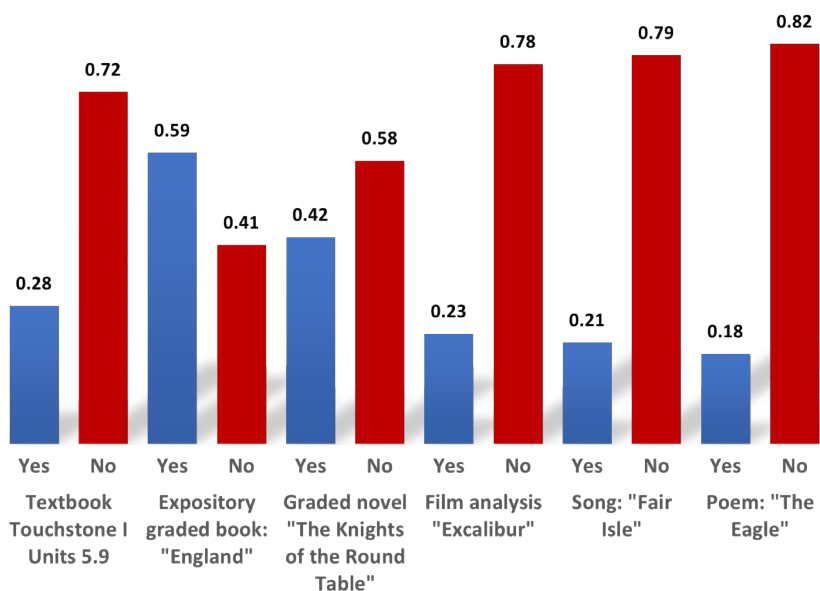
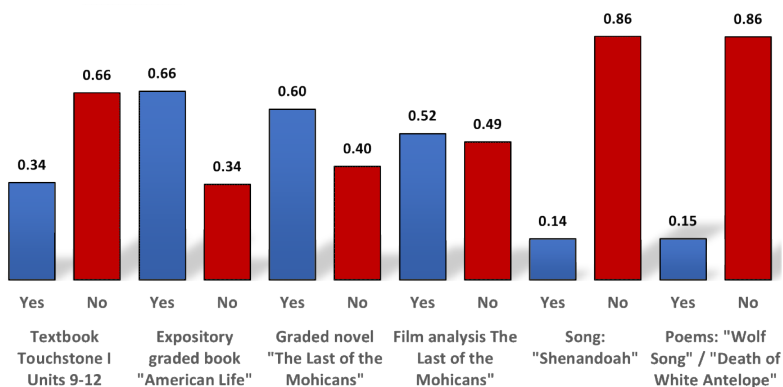


Fig. 3. CULTURAL STRAND: COVERAGE OF CONTENTS IN BASIC 3



The following section presents a discussion of the main implications derived from the data obtained in the light of the IIEP curricular model.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The discussion of results is presented according to the main categories of analysis established for this research. First, according to the data on the number of basic courses taken by the students in the sample, it was found that more than half of the students (57.1%) exempted from at least one to three basic courses through placement examinations, while 20.9% indicated that they had exempted all three basic courses.

These high rates of exemption of basic courses, seemingly indicating above average English skills in students entering the university, are in marked contrast with the low performance levels of students entering intermediate level after the pandemic. That is, a recurrent concern reported by teachers in CELEX meetings is the low levels of linguistic competence of students admitted to intermediate level courses of the IIEP.

The above paradox constitutes one of the main findings of this study and could be, in our opinion, the result of two main factors. First, the elimination of the original internationally standardized English exam administered before the pandemic to all freshmen students by the Entrance Exam Commission of the UAM. During the pandemic that exam was replaced with random assessment procedures lacking validation and reliability. Second, the deficiencies found in students admitted to intermediate courses are a result of the minimal or no coverage of objectives, standards, contents and activities established in the IIEP. In short, this study, part of systematic action research on the IIEP conducted at UAMI, highlighted the fact that the English program was and has been disregarded since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, in the absence of a research grounded revision of its structure, objectives and contents as mandated by the university legislation in the case of the modification of officially approved academic programs.

On the other hand, a positive finding of the study is associated with the analysis of the language used in the classroom. Our data indicate that, as the IIEP courses advance, the use of English increases, gradually fading out the use of the mother tongue. In other words, the native language (Spanish) is reduced as the program progresses to give way to English in the class, as would be expected in a teaching-learning program of a foreign language. Hence, it was reassuring to confirm the scaffolding impact of our teachers' language competence in creating consistent environments for the use of English by the students in the classroom.

The third category of analysis centered on the evaluation of the students' perceived quality of the basic courses offered at UAMI. The focus was on the segment of the sample that reported having covered all three courses at CELEX. Notice that all students' evaluations moved along the upper levels of perceived quality (from "Very Good" to "Good"), which in itself constitutes a positive assessment of Basic courses and, thus, of the academic quality of our teaching staff. Regardless of the above, it is considered necessary to take into account the fact that a percentage of students, although smaller, perceives the courses as deficient which opens a window of opportunity for the conjoint serious reflection on possible pedagogical improvements in the IIEP structure and scope, very much within the philosophy of action research.

As to the fourth category of analysis –textbook used in the classroom–, the results of this study show a systematic trend towards disregarding the use of the approved textbook series. Independently of other matters, the original decision to have a textbook series as a common core in the Communication strand, was based on the following considerations: (1) the need to reliably certify achievement of national and international standards in a large population of undergraduate and graduate students; (2) the institutional demand to guarantee the articulation among a complex curricular seriation of courses and levels, and (3) the fact that most of our teaching staff in foreign languages is integrated by part-time adjunct professors whose teaching loads do not allow for curricular and pedagogical design and thus need the support of a textbook.

Finally, the results of the fifth category under study –culture– provided strong evidence indicating that most of the original contents of the IIEP Culture strand have been put aside or totally eliminated, being replaced in the best of cases, with superficial cultural capsules.

At this point, it becomes unavoidable to question the implications of such a dismal panorama. We have emphasized previously that the essence of our curricular philosophy in EFL is the belief that language and culture are inseparable for the meaningful learning of a foreign language. In other words, mastering of a linguistic code is and should be anchored in the development of crucial competencies that have to do with the understanding of others. For the IIEP, such understanding comes from the gradual immersion of our students into the history, institutions, behaviors, literature, and art of the peoples who speak the target languages. In doing so, students develop strong receptive and productive skills, which are central to the development

of a global intercultural citizenship. Furthermore, our pedagogical approach to culture at UAMI represents the humanistic contribution of the IIEP and accounts for a large segment of each language course.

Taken as a whole, the results of this action research study underscore the gap between the original vision, scope and theoretical foundations underlying the IIEP, and the current *ad hoc* pedagogical practices originated during the pandemic and still prevalent. Therefore, at this point we are in a position to delineate three major challenges. First, the need to revise current admission criteria to courses, assuring the reliable placement of students through validated exams. Second, the importance of promoting academic initiatives leading to a critical reflection on the utmost importance of covering the two main pillars of the IIEP: the Communication and Culture strands, through professional development seminars and courses. Third, to reorient any further curricular decision-making concerning the actualization of the IIEP on the basis of a collective and collaborative process of analysis and revision.

To conclude, and notwithstanding their negative impact, the results of this study point to the importance of having relied on action research as a cornerstone in the evaluation and assessment of the IIEP throughout the years. That decision, in turn, has made it possible to gain a much-needed research grounded insight into the strengths and limitations of the IIEP at key stages of its implementation which in turn paves the way for its reformulation.

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APPENDIX. INTERCULTURAL AND INTERDISCIPLINARY PROGRAM OF ENGLISH AT UAMI

| CURRICULAR STRAND | EXTRACURRICULAR PHASE BASIC LEVEL Common European Framework of Reference A2 Standards of Foreign Language Learning Basic | | | COMPULSORY CURRICULAR PHASE INTERMEDIATE LEVEL Common European Framework of Reference B1 Standards of Foreign Language Learning Intermediate | | | CURRICULAR ELECTIVE PHASE UPPER INTERMEDIATE LEVEL Common European Framework of Reference B2 Standards of Foreign Language Learning: Upper Intermediate | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|---|--|--|---|
| | COURSE 1 | COURSE 2 | COURSE 3 | COURSE 4 | COURSE 5 | COURSE 6 | COURSE 7 | COURSE 8 | COURSE 9 |
| COMMUNICATION Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) | TOUCHSTONE 1 Units 1-4 | TOUCHSTONE 1 Units 5- 8 | TOUCHSTONE 1 Units 9-12 Level A1 / A2 (CEFR) SFL: Basic | TOUCHSTONE 2 Units 1-4 | TOUCHSTONE 2 Units 5- | TOUCHSTONE 2 Units 9-12 Level A2 / B1 (CEFR) SFL: Intermediate | TOUCHSTONE 3 Units 1-4 | TOUCHSTONE 3 Units 5-8 | TOUCHSTONE 3 Units 9-12 Level B1 / B2 (CEFR) SFL: Upper Intermediate |
| CULTURES Standards of Foreign Language Learning (SFL) | UNITED STATES | GREAT BRITAIN | UNITED STATES | IRELAND | AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND | UNITED STATES | GREAT BRITAIN | UNITED STATES | CANADA |
| | Novel: Of Mice and Men (Steinbeck) Poem: Fog (Sandburg) Song: This Land Is My Land (Guthrie) Film: Of Mice and Men (Sinise) Introductory texts to the USA | Novel: King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table Poem: The Eagle (Tennyson) Song: Fairest Isle (Purcell) Film: Excalibur (Boorman) Introductory texts to Great Britain | Novel: Last of the Mohicans (Cooper) Poems: Wolf Song (Teton Sioux); The Death Song of White Antelope (Cheyenne) Song: Shenandoah Film: Last of the Mohicans (Mann) Introductory texts to the USA | Novel: The Picture of Dorian Gray (Wilde) Poems: The Lake Isle of Innisfree; The Second Coming (Yeats) Song: Both Sides the Tweed (Gaughan) Film: Michael Collins (Jordan) Complementary films: The Secret of Roan Inish; The Boxer Introductory texts to Ireland | Novel: Walkabout (Marshall) Poem: Old Botany Bay (Gilmore) Song: Waltzing Matilda Film: Walkabout (Roeg) Complementary films: An Angel at my Table; The Piano Introductory texts to Australia & New Zealand | Novel: Ethan Frome (Warthon) Poem: Harlem (L. Hughes) Song: Amazing Grace; Strange Fruit (B. Holiday) Film: Ethan Frome (Madden) Complementary films: Jungle Fever Introductory texts to the USA | Novel: 1984 (Orwell) Poem: If (Kipling); Seven Ages of Man (Shakespeare) Song: The Wall (Pink Floyd) Film: 1984 (Radford) Complementary films: Brazil (Gilliam) Introductory texts to Great Britain | Novel: The Mosquito Coast (Theroux) Poem: America (Whitman); News Item (Parker); La Migra (Mora) Song: Blowin' in the Wind (Dylan) Film: The Mosquito Coast (Weir) Complementary films: Real Women Have Curves; Matewan Introductory texts to the USA | Short story: The Age of Lead (Atwood) Essay: From Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature (Atwood) Poem: From Brébeuf and His Brethren (Pratt) Song: Both Sides Now (Mitchell) Film: Black Robe (Beresford) Introductory texts to Canada |
| COMPARISONS Standards of Foreign Language Learning (SFL) | Contrastive study of the contents of communication strand (Spanish / English) and the culture strand (mother culture and foreign cultures). | | | | | | | | |
| CONNECTIONS (SFL) | Project: Reading of simple academic texts and brief oral presentations. | | | Project: Initial bibliographic search of academic texts related to the disciplinary area; Reading and simple, written and oral presentation of selected topics. | | | Project: Review of literature in the disciplinary area and writing of a brief critical review. | | |
| COMMUNITIES Standards of Foreign Language Learning (SFL) | Project: Group interview and participation in an exchange network on the Internet. | | | Project: Participation in Internet exchange networks. Structured interviews with bilingual specialists and preparation of reports on them. | | | Project: Participation in Internet exchange networks. Structured interviews with bilingual specialists and preparation of reports on them | | |

CURRICULAR ELECTIVE PHASE FOR UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE STUDENTS
(Continuation)

ADVANCED
Common European Framework of Reference
C1
Standards of Foreign Language Learning
Advanced

| ADVANCED WRITING IN ENGLISH | | SELECTED TOPICS IN ANGLOPHONE CULTURES | THEMATIC COURSES IN CO-TEACHING |
|---|---|--|---------------------------------|
| I Analysis of Written Academic Discourse | II Written/Oral Academic Text Production | Selected Topics I Selected Topics II Selected Topics III Selected Topics IV | (In process) |

SOURCE: Lee, M., Vivaldo J., Flores M., Caballero T., Calderón M. (2009). *Lengua Inglesa y Culturas Anglófonas: Un Enfoque Intercultural al Currículo Universitario* (pp. 47-49). Mexico: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Unidad Iztapalapa, Department of Philosophy.

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