

PRIOR EDUCATION IN ENGLISH & THE TOEFL 500

By

HELEN KONSTANTOPOULOS

Submitted to

Professional Education Faculty

Northwest Missouri State University Missouri

Department of Professional Education

College of Education and Human Services

Maryville, MO 64468

Submitted in Fulfillment for the Requirements for
61-683 Research Paper

Summer 2014

7-19-14

ABSTRACT

The following study was conducted to find if there is a correlation between how long international English as a Second Language (ESL) students study English in their native countries and how fast they can get a 500 on the TOEFL proficiency exam once they have begun an Intensive English Program (IEP) in the U.S. Students from all over the world take the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) exam to prove their academic English proficiency so that they may be accepted into an undergraduate program in an English-speaking university. This makes this exam a high stakes assessment. Considering this and the many variables that come into play to influence second language acquisition, it would be difficult to make any kind of generalization. For this study, data from former and current students at Northwest Missouri State University's ESL IEP were collected and analyzed. After compiling and reviewing the findings, it was found that there is a significant relationship between prior English studies and how much time is needed to get a 500 TOEFL score once a student is in an IEP.

INTRODUCTION

Background, Issues and Concerns

Students from all over the world decide to study at universities in the U.S.A. for various reasons. They go through great lengths to meet requirements of admissions to these institutions at great monetary expense. However, some do not have the adequate level of English proficiency necessary to be accepted. In such cases, many choose to attend English courses in an Intensive English Program (IEP) at either the university they have chosen to attend (and might have tentative acceptance to) or in an IEP with a good reputation for success.

The question that many prospective English as Second Language (ESL) students ask is, “How long will it take me to exit this IEP and start my undergraduate coursework?” This question also determines the institution they choose to attend; i.e. - the one that promises the quickest way out. Thus, it is important to have the knowledge to help these students decide their course of action and give them realistic goals to follow. There is no denying that those students who have studied English for a number of years in their own countries prior to arriving in the U.S have an advantage over those who have had minimal to zero exposure. Many, however, wonder to what extent their background knowledge plays a role on their speediness of exiting an IEP. In other words, how long does it take a student who has had prior English coursework to reach the desired exiting score of 500 on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) proficiency test, a standardized test used as a high stakes decision making tool for university acceptance?

Practice under Investigation

The practice under investigation will be looking into English language background prior to the IEP. There will also be an investigation into TOEFL scores and how long students are in an IEP. The subjects will fill out questionnaires to gather their personal data. Then a comparison will be drawn investigating the number of years of prior English and the relative speed of attaining a score of 500 on the TOEFL exam.

School Policy to be Informed by Study

Every Intensive English Program advertises and promises success after completion of a certain number of sessions. Having this information will make it easier for an IEP to advertise its program as well as be able to explain why certain students need more time for success than others. This data could be invaluable to any IEP.

For example, students interested in applying to Northwest can go online and read through information about the ESL program at <http://www.nwmissouri.edu/iic/esl/index.htm> . They will find this comment: “The time you will need to score well on the TOEFL will depend on your ability when you arrive and how much you try in our program.” The site also says that starting at a 400 PBT (paper-based TOEFL) score, students will need about 4 sessions (1 session = 7-8 weeks) to reach 500, but if they start at 450, they will need approximately 2 sessions. The site also provides a chart to help students understand the approximate time span for exiting the IEP. However, none of this information considers their personal background and how it might affect the time line.

Conceptual Underpinning

Many in the field of second language education support Krashen’s Input Hypothesis (1977, 1982, 1983) which states that language is attained through

comprehensible input. Considering this theory, isn't it logical that the more background knowledge one has, the faster they learn the material on hand because it is more comprehensible as they can scaffold their learning? On the other hand, if this is the case, why then do students learn at different speeds in an IEP? Logic would dictate that if there is prior knowledge on any subject, then it is easier to build on that knowledge, develop and refine skills. Therefore, the more years an ESL student spends learning English in their native country, the faster they will become proficient when they attend an IEP in the U.S.

Statement of the Problem

If there are those who need more time and do not have this background to succeed faster, shouldn't ESL instructors find ways to help make this process more advantageous for them? Those provided the necessary tools and motivation can be limitless in their achievements.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to gain further insight as to how long it takes an ESL student to exit an IEP program by scoring a 500 on the paper-based TOEFL test (PBT). A further goal is to study how that speed is affected by a prior English language learning background. In light of the fact that English has become the most studied second language in the world, studies must be conducted to understand how second language acquisition works and how educators can provide better means to instruct English language learners (ELLs).

Research Question(s):

- 1) Is there a significant relationship between the number of years studying English in one's native country and how fast an ESL student obtains a score of 500 on the TOEFL exam?

Null Hypothesis(es)

There is no significant relationship between the number of years of prior English education in a native country and the length of time taken to obtain a score of 500 on the TOEFL exam and thus, exiting the Intensive English Program.

Anticipated Benefits of the Study

This analysis will help us build a more suitable IEP curriculum to serve the needs of our ESL students. The data collected may help us better place students in proper levels, as well as build timetables that will assist us in meeting our objectives. Finally, it will serve as a guide for advising our students and for avoiding misleading advertising of our program in any way.

Definition of Terms

CLT = Communicative Language Teaching – an approach to teaching which is collaborative and student-centered

EFL = English as a Foreign Language - English taught in public schools in non-English speaking countries

ELL = English Language Learner – the student who is studying English as a non-native speaker

ESL = English as a Second Language – studying the English language as a non-native speaker

ETS = English Testing Service – the official testing center that provides many of the proficiency tests as well as assesses them

IEP = Intensive English Program – an intensive language program that enables students to quickly attain fluency and proficiency in a short amount of time

L1 = one's first or native language - the language you grow up learning

L2 = one's second language - the language you learn in school or that you learn later in life after you have learned your first language

Lingua franca = a language used as a common language between speakers whose native languages are different. (Oxford Dictionary)

PBT = paper-based TOEFL exam – a variation on the English proficiency exam which is taken within the institution and tests reading comprehension, listening, structure & written expression

SLA = Second Language Acquisition – the study of how a second language is learned/acquired

TL = target language - the language you are trying to learn

TOEFL = Test of English as a Foreign Language - a standardized high stakes academic English proficiency exam

Summary

A study was conducted to see whether English background knowledge plays a significant role on how fast an ESL student can pass the paper-based TOEFL exam in order to be admitted into university as an undergraduate student. Given the fact that motivation and learning styles are vital for progress in any educational setting, results

may not produce clear cut data. Nonetheless, having this knowledge can help build better curricula, but it can also simply provide invaluable insight.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Menezes (2013) in her article entitled *Second Language Acquisition-Reconciling Theories* states that none of the “40 some theories” of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), that Larsen-Freeman and Long proposed present a thorough explanation for the phenomenon of acquiring a second language. Menezes says that “language learning is not a linear process, and therefore cannot be deemed as predictable as many models of SLA have hypothesized it to be. Countless theories have been developed to explain SLA, but most such theories focus merely on the acquisition of syntactic structures and ignore other important aspects” (p.404).

Most researchers agree that first language (L1) and second language (L2) acquisition (SLA) differ greatly. They also agree that the younger a person is, the faster they can learn. Selinker defined interlanguage as a unique linguistic system that draws, in part, on L1 but is also different from the target language (TL) (Ellis, 1997). In other words, interlanguage is the language between the learner’s L1 and TL. It is unique because the grammar is permeable in that it draws from one’s personal experiences, knowledge, environment and motivation. It is the connections we make to bridge between the two languages and build on the new language. Therefore, it is difficult to study as everyone’s interlanguage is completely different. Nonetheless, many theories have been developed and studies have been conducted to try to shed some light on this complex phenomenon.

One of the most renowned linguists whose theory challenged many and caused great debate was Stephen Krashen. According to the article written by Schultz (2014), Krashen stated,

Acquisition requires meaningful interaction in the target language - natural communication - in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding. The best methods are therefore those that supply 'comprehensible input' in low anxiety situations, containing messages that students really want to hear. These methods do not force early production in the second language, but allow students to produce when they are 'ready', recognizing that improvement comes from supplying communicative and comprehensible input, and not from forcing and correcting production (p.1).

Although many other linguists saw the logic to this hypothesis, others challenged the absoluteness of it (Gass 1997, Larsen-Freeman&Long 1991, Ellis 1997). Yet others, such as Long, added to Krashen's comprehensible input theory. Long's Interactionist Theory (1996) emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input but claims the input is most effective when it is modified through negotiation of meaning. Long (1996) defines negotiation of meaning as involving "denser than usual frequencies of semantically contingent speech of various kinds (i.e., utterances by a competent speaker, such as repetition, extensions, reformulations, re-phrasings, expansions and recasts), which immediately follow learner utterances and maintain reference to their meaning" (p.452).

When conducting any research regarding second language acquisition, one must consider how students learn and what affects their learning. One thing that greatly influences their learning is the student's native language. One's mother tongue greatly affects the rate of SLA. Some languages have similar features making it easier for learners to make connections. For example, English & Arabic use relative clauses

whereas Chinese & Japanese do not (Ellis, 1997). Another effect is environment. Where are they being exposed to the language? In or out of a classroom? In a social or academic setting? English Language Learners (ELLs) learn differently in social settings than in academic ones. What kind of educational atmosphere are they being provided with? Are they “safe” to make mistakes? Are they accepted for who they are? All of these play a great role on how fast and how well an ELL acquires their L2.

Schumann’s Acculturation Theory - adapting to the new culture - is another aspect to consider. For successful SLA, it is believed that successful acculturation plays a significant role. Schumann (1978) implies that students will learn faster if they become a part of the new culture and are surrounded by the language - something directly relevant to IEPs. Besides acculturation and age (mentioned earlier), two very influential aspects to SLA are education and motivation. It is undeniable that motivation is the key to learning, and Ellis (2008) points out that prior education influences the speed of SLA because of how a student scaffolds their learning and what strategies they develop for L2 learning - something which we will look into in this study.

When studying to become an ESL teacher, you will no doubt encounter the works of Brown (2001, 2010) and Ellis (1997, 2008). Both of these linguists/educators provide great insight into second language acquisition and the best practices and approaches to teaching available for English as a second language. Brown (2001) says that a good approach to teaching a second language is an informed approach. The emphasis of language teaching today is on the “nature of social, cultural and pragmatic features of language,” on ‘real-life’ communication, on facilitating lifelong learning and cooperation to reach full potential (p.42). Brown further explains that the currently recognized

approach (as opposed to ‘methodology’ - a term used more in the past) is CLT, communicative language teaching.

CLT is a difficult concept to define linearly because it entails all the aspects mentioned above. It is a departure from many of the methods used in the past, especially regarding structurally sequenced curricula (something non-native English teachers or seasoned instructors might have difficulties with). Brown (2001) offers six interconnected characteristics to describe communicative language teaching:

- 1) The goals of a classroom emphasize all the competency components - grammar, function, sociolinguistics, strategy - in an organized pragmatic way.
- 2) Engaging students with techniques that are pragmatic, authentic and functional for a meaningful purpose.
- 3) Fluency and accuracy complement the underlying techniques and in fact, fluency might take priority.
- 4) ELLs are put in positions where they have to use the language to produce unrehearsed contexts. (According to Brown (2001), this might make it difficult for non-native teachers of English to teach effectively because they might lack the proficiency to guide unrehearsed contexts.)
- 5) Autonomous learning is developed where learners have to consider their own styles of learning.
- 6) The teacher is a facilitator and guide as opposed to an “all-knowing bestower of knowledge” (p.43).

Brown (2001) also mentions that certain concepts have become overused and overemphasized today amongst scholars and textbooks. *Learner-centered instruction*,

cooperative & collaborative learning, interactive learning, whole language education, content-based instruction and task-based instruction have become the fundamental approaches of contemporary SLA. However, even though these fads of expression build the framework of CLT, they overlap and are confusing sometimes. As Ellis (1997) states, “There is no single theory or model or even framework that can adequately incorporate the range of hypotheses which SLA has addressed” (p.89).

In her article, Menezes (2013) describes SLA as chaotic and complex. She states that “there is evidence to support the claim that second language acquisition (SLA) is a complex adaptive system due to its inherent ability to adapt to different conditions present in both internal and external environments” (p.404). She claims that, like Brown and Ellis, we should not disregard any SLA theories because they are all reasonable and that language learning cannot be predicted because it is not a linear process. It is a combination of many factors that are influenced by innate and environmental forces. Menezes (2013) asserts that “language is not a static object, but a system in constant movement” (p.408).

No matter the theory behind the practice and that “chaotic” system at play in learning a second language, there is still a great need and desire to learn English by people from all over the world. English is the *lingua franca* of international trade. That is, English is the language used to overcome the language barrier. According to Celik & Karaca (2014), over 100 countries worldwide mandate EFL instruction in public education because English is seen as the primary “global contact language” (p.1). In fact, there has been a movement to teach English even earlier (in preschool & primary school)

in the global community because English is regarded as the primary language for international and intercultural communication.

A research study conducted by Ku & Zussman (2010) gives an in-depth analysis as to how English proficiency can enhance international trade. Ku & Zussman (2010) conclude that “our results thus demonstrate that improvements in English proficiency, while typically not very large, can nevertheless significantly raise trade. Moreover, given conventional estimates of the effect of trade on income, such as those reported by Frankel and Romer (1999) and Irwin and Tervio (2002), our estimates also suggest that improvements in English proficiency have the potential to substantially improve economic welfare” (p.255).

Similarly, the NY Times (2007) reported that the top business schools around the world were pushing to make English the language used to teach in these institutions. The report gives two primary reasons. First, schools striving to instruct business academia in the lingua franca of English are trying to attract international students to raise revenue. Secondly, the push towards international accreditation standards requires English components in the curriculum. In the same article written by Carvajal (2007), the author states “in the shifting universe of global academia, English is becoming as commonplace as creeping ivy and mortarboards” (np).

It is no wonder then that proficiency tests have become big business. Tests like the TOEFL, TOEIC, Cambridge, PTE and Michigan proficiency exams have become well-known and have become a mandate for employment. In other words, ELLs all over the world take these exams in order to further their skills and prove to prospective employers and universities that they have the language skills necessary to be an asset

and/or a functioning student. English has become such a powerful force that students leave their countries to study in an English-speaking country because having the language as well as a degree from an English institution is viewed as prestigious and necessary in today's competitive capitalistic globalized society.

For this reason, IEPs -Intensive English Programs- have become commonplace at many universities across the U.S.A. These programs provide a transition for international students between education in their countries and university coursework in the U.S. IEPs provide intensive courses in English to prepare students for the academics of university. The last years have witnessed a huge increase in enrollment numbers in both IEPs, undergraduate and graduate programs. Students who have taken and passed proficiency exams in their countries can register for undergraduate/graduate programs abroad. However, there are many who have not passed the proficiency requirements for registration and therefore, must enroll in IEPs before they can begin to study at university. For many of these prospective university students, a 500 score on the TOEFL exam becomes their primary goal. They, therefore, look for IEPs that can provide them the best quality program – i.e. the quickest exit (getting a 500 as quick as possible). However, the fastest exit is not possible unless students have had prior English education in their own countries before entering an IEP. But how many years of English education prior to an IEP can guarantee a quick exit from the program and acceptance into the university?

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

A quantitative study was conducted to see if the number of years studying English prior to an IEP affected the speed of exiting the program by attaining a 500 on the TOEFL. The independent variable was the number of years of prior English lessons before attending an IEP. The dependent variable was the TOEFL score and the amount of time to get the score of 500. If the study proved that having a certain number of years background affects speed of exit, then there is definitely a relationship.

Study Group Description

Twelve international current and former IEP students between the ages of 18 and 41 from a variety of countries including Brazil, China, Mexico, Saudi Arabia and South Korea that studied English in the U.S.A. between the Spring 2013 session and the Summer 2014 session were given the opportunity to take part in the research anonymously by providing their scores and personal backgrounds.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

Archived data was used of official TOEFL scores from the students' file. Moreover, a questionnaire was given to the students about their personal backgrounds. Both the students who were no longer in the IEP program and the current students were given the opportunity to take part in the study voluntarily and anonymously.

Statistical Analysis Methods

A correlation analysis was conducted to determine how and if prior English background plays a role on speediness of exit (getting a 500 TOEFL score). The Alpha Level was set at 0.25 to test the null hypothesis.

FINDINGS

Twelve international students responded to the questionnaire used to collect data. The answers to the questions were collected and presented in the table in Figure 1. The following graphs and charts represent the information that was gathered and comparisons that were made. Information was also taken from the last institutional TOEFL exam administered at Northwest Missouri State University in June 2014. This was done in order to compare the data gathered.

Figure 1: Data collected from questionnaire

Student (age)	Yrs in Middle Sch	Yrs in High School	Yrs in college /univ.	Yrs in Lang Sch.	Total-prior educatn	1 st TOEFL Score	Time in IEP	TOEFL Score
S.A 1 (32)	3	3	2	-	8	450	1mo	450
S.A 2 (19)	3	2	-	-	5	498	3mo/6mo	498/500
S.A 3 (18)	3	3	-	-	6	360	1.5mo/3mo	423/417
Br 1 (19)	3	2	-	8 mo.	5.8	450	3mo	500
Br 2 (21)	3	2	6mo	6mo.	6	507	3mo	537
Ch 1 (36)	3	3	4	-	10	443	1 yr	510
Ch 2 (21)	3	3	3	-	9	423	3mo	423
Mex1 (20)	10	3	-	3	16	450	2mo.	492
Mex2 (22)	3	3	-	-	6	457	2mo.	523
S.Kor (22)	3	3	1	8mo.	7.8	467	9 mo.	517
S.Kor (20)	3	3	-	-	6	447	2 mo.	523
S.Kor (41)	3	3	4	1	11	443	9 mo.	517
Mean	3.6	2.75	1.2	5.8	8	450	4.6	492

Figure 1 shows all the information collected from the questionnaire. It includes country of origin, age of student, and how many years they spent studying English in middle school, high school, college and/or any language institute. It also shows the total number of years these students had of prior English education before entering an IEP. In addition to that, the table shows how long they attended the IEP and their first and last TOEFL scores. This information was used to create graphical comparisons and a

correlation analysis to study the relationship between prior English education and how fast they exited the IEP.

Figure 2: Time spent in an IEP and corresponding TOEFL scores

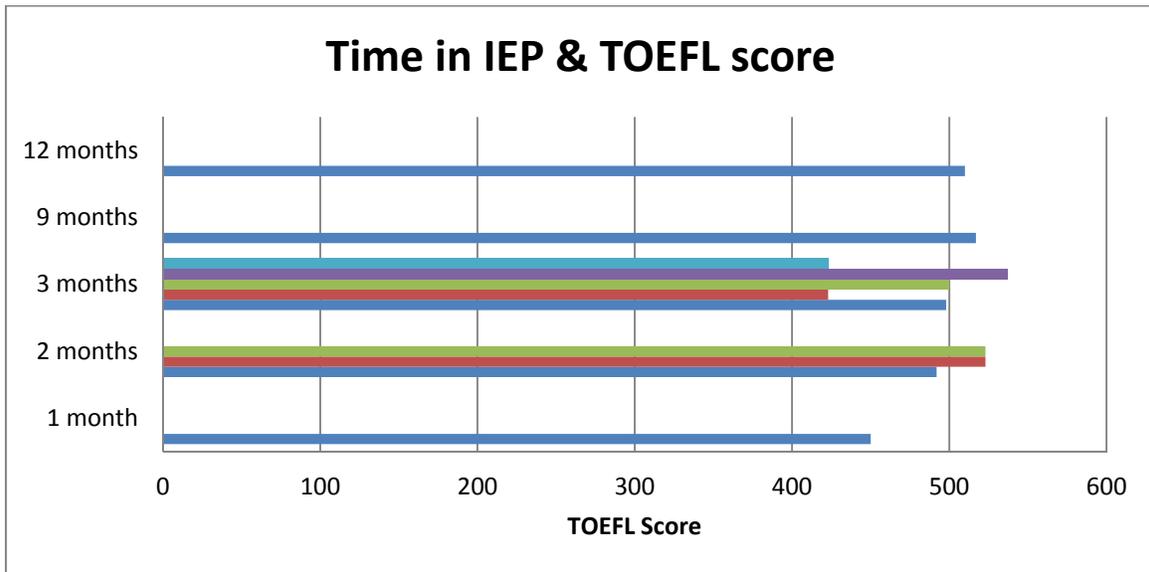


Figure 2 shows a bar graph representation of the 12 students and how much time they each spent studying in the IEP. The horizontal axis depicts their scores on the TOEFL exam after their time in the IEP. The mean amount of time spent in an IEP before students achieved a score of 500 was found to be 5.75 months.

Figure 3: First and last TOEFL scores

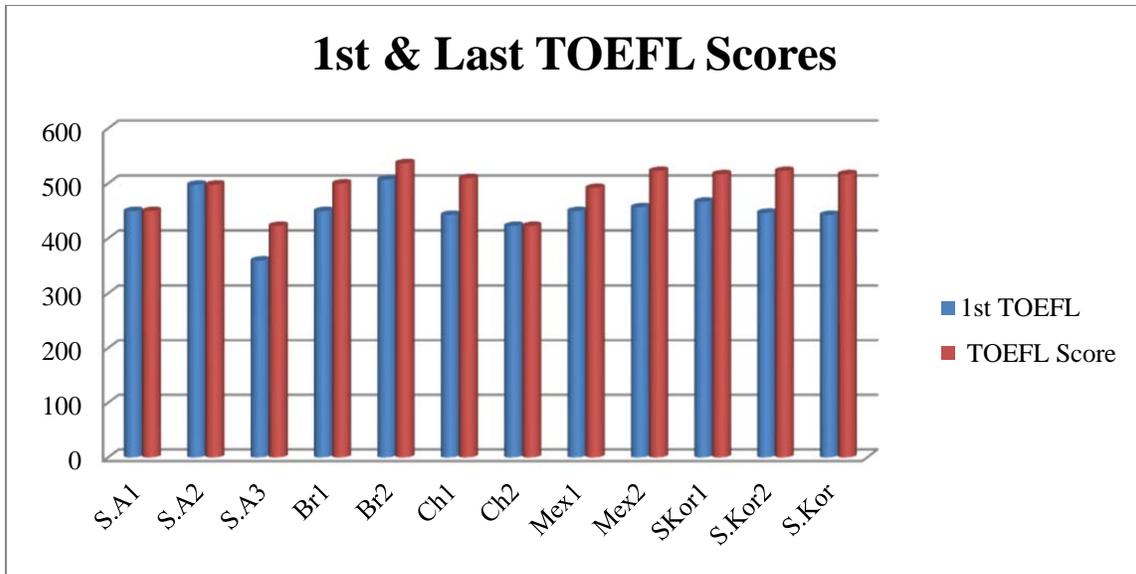


Figure 3 is a visual representational comparison of the students’ first and last TOEFL scores. The blue bars depict the first score and the red bars depict their last TOEFL scores. The majority of the students, 9 out of 12 or 75%, showed significant growth. The average points gained between their first and last test was found to be about 47 points.

Figure 4: How many years spent studying English prior to the IEP

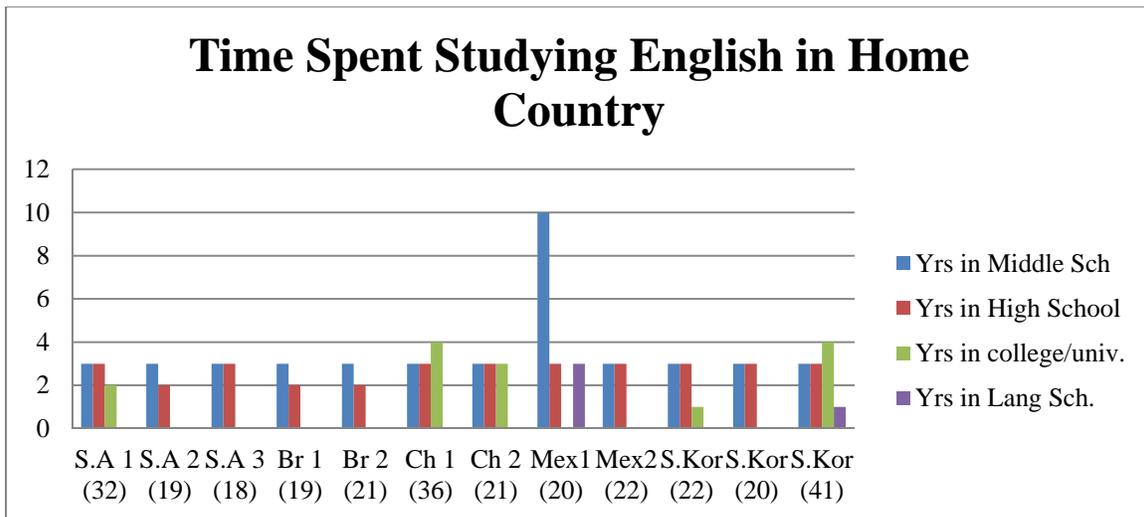


Figure 4 is a bar graph representing how much time the twelve subjects spent studying English in their home countries before attending an IEP in the U.S. The colored bars show where they studied English: in middle school, high school, college or a language institute. The average time spent in middle school was found to be 3 years and all the subjects participated in some type of EFL – English as a Foreign Language – class in middle school. Similarly, all students took EFL courses in high school. We can conclude that the countries represented in our study have mandatory English courses as part of their curriculum. We begin to see a shift in post-secondary education. This can be explained by the fact that 50% of the subjects were transfer students, and therefore, took some type of English class while in college. The other 50% attended the IEP straight out of high school and were looking to enroll in university in the U.S. as first-time undergraduate students. Only 5 out of the 12 students, 42%, attended language institutes to further their English skills – something more common in Europe.

Figure 5: How long subjects were in an IEP

How long in IEP to get a 500 on the TOEFL

	1 month	2 months	3 months	6 months	9 months	1 year
450-500	1	1	2			
500+		2	2	1	2	1

This information was used to create the pie chart in figure 6.

Figure 6: Average time to exit an IEP

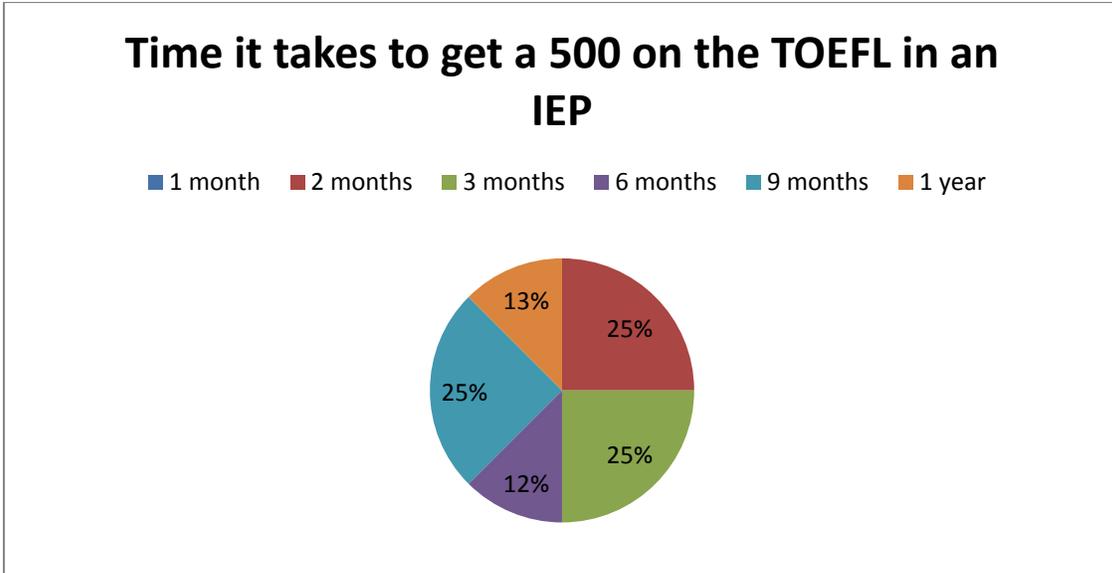
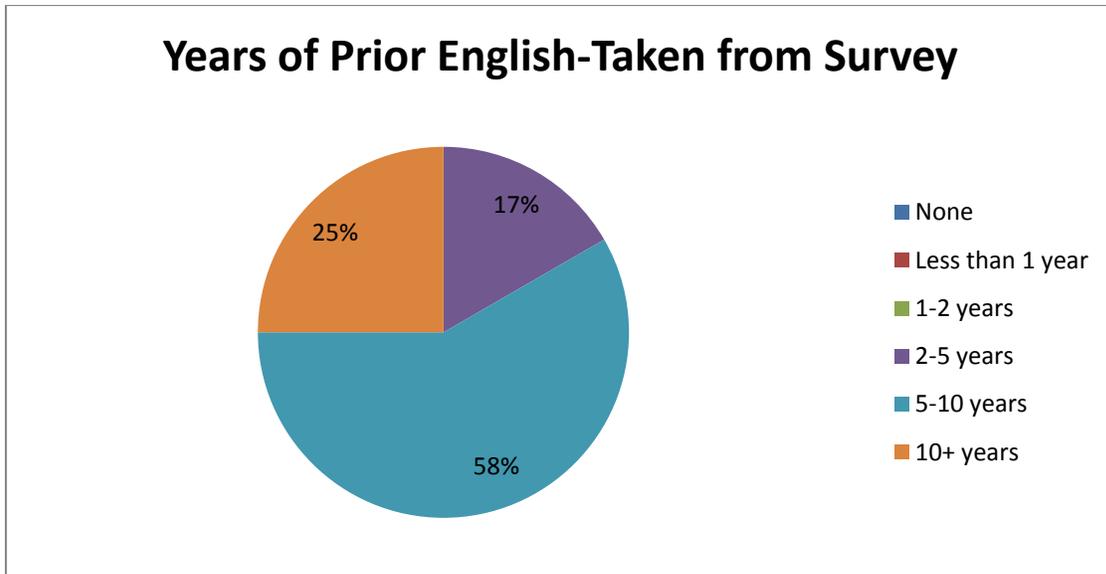


Figure 6 shows a visual representation of the amount of time it takes to exit an IEP by attaining a score of 500 on the TOEFL exam and thus, transferring or starting an undergraduate program. The data collected from the 12 subjects who participated by answering the questionnaire shows that 25% of the students who got a 500 were able to do this within 2 months, 3 months or 9 months. Four of the subjects who participated in the study have not reached 500 on the TOEFL yet and are still in the IEP. Therefore, these four students are not represented in this pie chart.

Figure 7: Time spent studying English before the IEP

Time spent on English prior to IEP (500)

	None	Less than 1 year	1-2 years	2-5 years	5-10 years	10+ years
Number of Students				2	7	3



As seen from this pie chart, all of the participants in this study were enrolled in some type of English course prior to attending the IEP. The majority of them, 58%, spent anywhere between 5 and 10 years of English study prior to their IEP.

Figures 8: Data collected from the Institutional TOEFL on June 27th, 2014

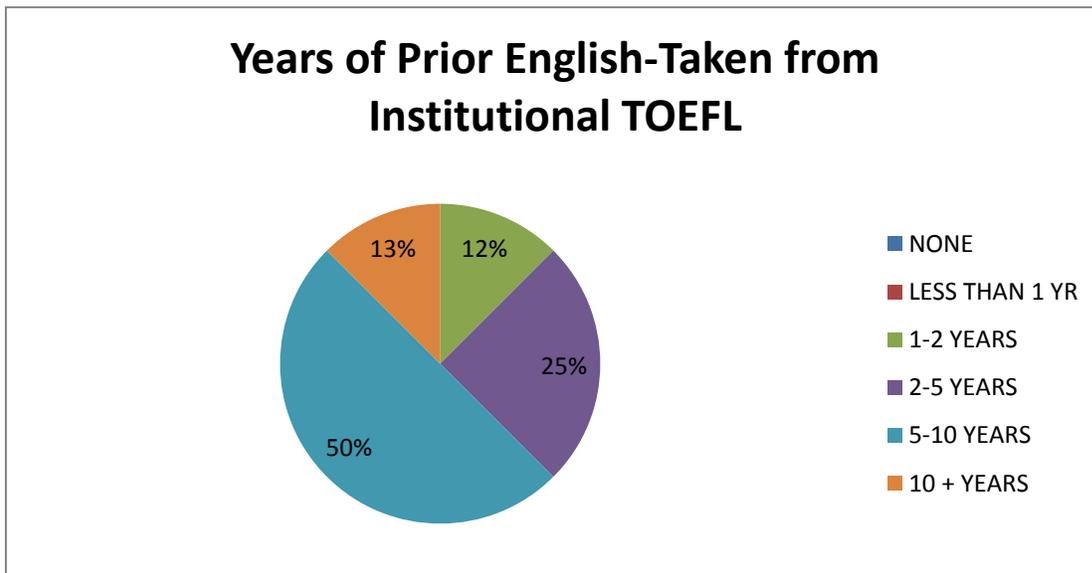


Figure 8 depicts information taken from the Institutional TOEFL exam given to Northwest students in June 2014. All TOEFL exams are preceded with surveys asking

test takers to answer questions which are used to gather data for ETS. This data is then published and used for research and comparisons. If you compare the two pie charts, you will notice that they are quite similar showing that at least 50% of the test takers have had 5-10 years of English prior to sitting the exam. Moreover, it is noteworthy to point out that having less than 2 years of English prior to taking the TOEFL is very rare.

Figure 9: Correlation analysis comparing prior education and TOEFL scores

YEARS in prior education	TOEFL SCORE
5	500
5.8	500
6	537
10	510
6	523
7.8	517
6	523
11	517
Mean: 7.2	Mean: 516

Table 1: Correlation Study Years in Prior Education and TOEFL

	N	Mean	r	R ²	p-value
Years in Prior Education	8	7.2			
TOEFL Score	8	516	0.26	7%	0.53

Note significance = or < .25

Using the ASP Statistical Analysis Package, the years spent studying English in one’s own country and the TOEFL score were the variables correlated. After collecting the data from the eight subjects who had achieved a score of 500 on the TOEFL, the correlation coefficient *r* was found to be 0.26 which means it is a chance relationship that is weak or negligible. Moreover, having a positive *r* means that the relationship is direct. In short, the TOEFL scores will increase the longer one studies English. The practicality,

R², was found to be about 7% which is below 10% needed for the relationship to be practical. The null hypothesis states that there is no significant relationship between the amount of time studying English prior to the IEP and how fast a student gets a 500 on the TOEFL score. Based on this correlation study, we can reject the null hypothesis. Even though the relationship is weak, there is still an existence present. The p-value (0.53) was greater than 0.25 showing a high chance of a Type 1 Error as well. Therefore, there is no significant relationship between the amount of time spent studying English prior to the IEP and the TOEFL score of at least 500.

Figure 10: Correlation comparing Time in the IEP and Prior Education (hypothesis)

Time in IEP (months)	Prior Education (months)
6	60
3	72
3	72
12	120
2	72
9	92
2	72
9	132
Mean = 5.75	Mean = 96

Table 2: Correlation Study Months in Prior Education and Months in IEP

	N	Mean	r	R ²	p-value
Months in IEP	8	5.75			
Months of Prior Education	8	96	0.79	63%	0.02

Note significance = or < .25

The last table depicts the final and most relevant statistical analysis related to this specific study. After collecting the information from the 12 students who

completed an IEP at Northwest Missouri State University, a correlation matrix was conducted to test this null hypothesis between time spent studying English before the Intensive English Program and the time they spent in the IEP before attaining a 500 on the TOEFL. Subjects who had not attained a 500 were not included; therefore, the analysis was conducted on the 8 subjects who had passed. The analysis showed that the correlation coefficient r was 0.79, the R^2 was 63% and the p-value was 0.02. The correlation coefficient gives us a marked to high degree of strength in the relationship. Since the r is a positive number, this shows a direct relationship between the variables. In other words, the more years one spends studying English prior to an IEP, the more time they will spend in the IEP. The R^2 was much greater than 10%, indicating that the relationship is very practical. The null hypothesis states that there is no significant relationship between the number of years of prior English education in a native country and the length of time taken to obtain a score of 500 on the TOEFL exam and thus, exiting the program. Thus, the null hypothesis can be rejected because the correlation analysis shows a distinct relationship between the variables. Finally, the p-value of 0.02, which is less than the 0.25 set Alpha level, indicates a relatively low chance of Type 1 Error, which means the relationship is quite significant. Based on all of these findings, we can reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is a significant relationship between the amount of time a student studies English prior to an IEP in their home country and the time spent in an IEP.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study were both surprising and puzzling. The null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between time spent studying English prior to attending an IEP and the time spent in an IEP to reach the goal of proficiency marked by scoring a 500 on the TOEFL exam can be rejected. The ASP correlation analysis proved that there is a strong, direct, practical and significant relationship. One astonishing result of the study was the fact that the relationship between the time spent in an IEP and prior education was a direct one. This seems highly unlikely. The longer you take English courses, the faster you should attain a 500 (which means *less* time in the IEP). The relationship should be negative. What was even more surprising was the fact that there is no significant relationship between time in the IEP and getting a 500 on the TOEFL which we know to be false (see figure 10).

However, many explanations can be given for the results of the analysis. Regarding any study in education, many variables can affect and skew the data. First of all, the data base was quite small making it difficult to make any generalizations. Secondly, the participants in the study each had to fill in a questionnaire regarding their prior education. How much can we rely on this information? Although most said they had had English classes in middle school and high school, there is no way of knowing what kind of quality education it was or if one year meant 3 times a week for one hour for a nine-month school year or for 5 hours a day for 12 months. Furthermore, when studying EFL in a school system, assimilation does not occur, and many of the teachers may not be native speakers. This in of itself skews the data.

What about CLT? Are the Communicative Language Teaching approaches used by teachers in other countries who teach EFL? Many EFL classrooms do not provide the students with the opportunity to produce unrehearsed contexts. Moreover, autonomous learning is not developed and most of the lessons are form-focused as opposed to communicative. It is very difficult to draw conclusions when each of the subjects in the study has had a different English background. For example, can we compare the education of a Saudi Arabian student to a Mexican student? Each student has had a particular experience studying English in their own country before coming to the U.S., and they all have a different starting point when they begin an IEP, as well as a unique interlanguage. Some students may start with a TOEFL score of 350 and need a year to get 500 and others come into the program at a higher level and need only a few months. All of these variables can play into the 'prior education' portion of the study.

Besides the type of education provided and the starting points of each student or interlanguage, we must also consider the different learning styles of our students, age and their motivation. All of these play a significant role as to how fast and how well students learn. Younger students may have an easier time assimilating into the new culture and seem to progress in the productive skill of speaking, whereas an older student may progress in the receptive skills of reading & listening. Learning styles play a role because international IEP students not only have their individual learning style, but they are also forced to learn new styles and classroom etiquette that perhaps they have not experienced in their own countries. As Ellis (2008) points out, motivation is the key. Most students who attend IEPs are extremely motivated. They chose to be there and work hard to achieve their primary 500 goal.

In order to be able to truly draw a conclusion as to how prior English study affects the speediness of exit from an IEP, further studies need to be conducted. First and foremost, there need to be ample studies from different IEPs throughout the U.S. Secondly, these studies must take data from multiple candidates from a variety of countries. Perhaps it would be more advantageous to collect data categorically by nation. That way, there would be data available to IEPs and students alike that could be used to inform them. The data might not be as skewed if the correlation analysis was nation-categorized because all of the subjects would have similar backgrounds that could be more easily and accurately compared.

REFERENCES

- Brown, H.D. (2010). *Language Assessment: Principles and Classroom Practices*. White Plains, NY: Pearson/Longman.
- Brown, H.D. (2001). *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Proficiency-2nd Edition*. White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Carvajal, D. (2007). English as Language of Global Education. *New York Times*. Retrieved from online source: http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/11/education/11english.html?_r=0
- Celik, S. & Karaca, B. (2014). Improving learner outcomes in EFL: Does early instruction lead to greater achievement? *Novitas-ROYAL (Research on Youth and Language)*. 8(1), 1-10.
- Ellis, R. (1997). *Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R. (2008). *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- ETS (2014). Online website: <http://www.ets.org/>
- Ku, H. & Zussman, A. (2010). Lingua franca: The role of English in international trade. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*. 75, 250–260. Available as a PDF and retrieved from online source: www.elsevier.com/locate/jebo
- Lakshmanan, U. & Selinker, L. (2001). Analysing `Interlanguage: How do we know what learners know? *Second Language Research*. 17.4, 393-420.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. & Long, M. H. (1991). *An Introduction to Second Language Acquisition Research*. New York: Longman.

Menezes, V. (2013). Second Language Acquisition: Reconciling Theories. *Open Journal of Applied Sciences*. 3, 404-412. Published Online

(<http://www.scirp.org/journal/ojapps>).

<http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/ojapps.2013.37050>

Northwest Missouri State University Intercultural and International Center. (2014).

Retrieved from online source: <http://www.nwmissouri.edu/iic/esl/index.htm>

Schultz, R. (2014). Stephen Krashen's Theory of Second Language Acquisition

Assimilação Natural -- o Construtivismo Comunicativo no Ensino de Línguas.

Retrieved from an online source: <http://www.sk.com.br/sk-krash.html>

TOEFL. (2014). Retrieved from online source: <http://www.ets.org/toefl>