

*Learning Growth and Attitude Of Students Exposed to
Prolonged Non-Contractual English
Intervention Program*

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Abstract

This study is quasi-experimental in nature which utilized an intervention program sponsored by the US Embassy through the English Access Microscholarship Program to help develop the language skills of the students. Fifty (50) students ranging from 13-20 years old who have economically disadvantaged backgrounds and show low performance in English skills (speaking, reading and writing) were encouraged to learn English and develop their linguistic skills through after-school instruction and enhancement activities.

This study aimed to measure the effect and its magnitude on the English language skills of students after being exposed to a prolonged non-contractual English intervention program. This study also assessed whether or not, the program has significantly changed their attitude and perception toward other cultures.

Using the pretest and posttest, the results show that there was a significant change in the linguistic performance of the students exposed to the prolonged non-contractual English intervention program.

As far as English language learning is concerned, it is concluded that the students may improve significantly their linguistic skills if they are exposed to an intensive intervention program without any pressure to pass the course. It is further concluded that the Access Program has opened the minds of the students to other cultures.

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Introduction

One of the identified causes of learning barrier of Filipino students is poor level of proficiency in English. This problem is usually more felt in the rural areas where there are less exposure to mass media and contact to English speaking individuals. This scenario is true in Tawi-Tawi, an island province in the southernmost tip of the Philippines, and is considered as the gateway to the Borneo-Indonesia Malaysia Philippines – East Asia Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA) region. To address this problem, the Mindanao State University -Tawi-Tawi was established with a mandate to provide quality education to the Muslim community along fisheries, oceanography and other related disciplines (Republic Act No. 6060, Congress of the Philippines, 4 August 1969). MSU-TCTO has witnessed some students entering their freshmen year who could hardly complete a sentence in English without committing errors either in grammar, pronunciation or in sentence construction. Their difficulty in English oftentimes, if not always, lead to their struggle in understanding and learning new concepts and theories in other fields of study – not because of the complexity of the concepts and theories, but due to their limited understanding of the English terms used in texts and in teaching.

Many factors have been pointed out by researches as reasons of poor English Language skills. Among the many factors that can be thought of, poor teaching during the early years of schooling tops the list. To remedy the situation, many universities and colleges offered English remedial programs for students who have low English language skills with the hope of improving their chances of finishing college. In many cases, intervention programs are implemented using the usual “pass-fail” criterion where learners are assessed of their performance in conformity to the prescribed “learning skills” to pass the course. In such situation, students are often forced to comply of what they are required to attain that contribute to the high anxiety level of the students, which may hinder learning.

According to Krashen (1982), one obstacle that manifests itself during language acquisition is the affective filter, i.e., a “screen” that is influenced by emotional variables that can prevent learning. This study is anchored on Krashen’s Affective Filter Hypothesis in language learning which states that when the anxiety level is low, learning is high. This anxiety, fear or frustration may prevent a student from learning or accomplishing a learning task. In the study of McIntyre and Gardner (1989), it was found out that learner’s anxiety could be associated with language learning and that Communicative Anxiety is a factor in both the acquisition and production of vocabulary. Analyses of the correlations between the anxiety scales and the measures of achievement show that scales of foreign-language anxiety and state anxiety are associated with performance.

One of the innovations in the learning environment of the students in MSU-TCTO is manifested in an intervention program sponsored by the US Embassy through the English Access Microscholarship Program which aims to develop the language skills of the students through after-school instruction, enhancement activities and intensive sessions. The students enrolled in this program are not “contractually obliged” to pass the course through standard sets of achievement levels of English language skills, i.e. pass-fail. Instead, they are encouraged to use English and develop their linguistic skills during class hours, after-school instruction, and even during enhancement

activities, thereby creating an environment with low anxiety level and assures success in language learning. The students are given unit tests only to determine progress of learning as far as language skills and culture appreciation are concerned.

The following are the objectives of the study:

1. To measure the degree of effect on the English language skills of students after being exposed to a prolonged non-contractual English intervention program;
2. To compare the magnitude of change in the class performance of those students exposed to the program compared to their peers who are not participants of the program; and
3. To assess whether or not, the program has significantly changed their attitude and perception toward other cultures.

Methods

The research is quasi-experimental in nature. Fifty (50) students ranging from 13-20 years old who have economically disadvantaged backgrounds and show low performance in English skills (speaking, reading and writing) were exposed to an English intervention program through after-school instruction and enhancement activities sponsored by the US Embassy, Manila. The program, among others, include developing their English language skills, exposure and training in the use of computers and participation in activities that are usually practiced in Western cultures. Their performances in class, skills in English language, attitudes and perception towards other cultures were assessed and monitored during the whole program. The change (if any) on their attitude and performance was compared to their peers who are non-participants of the program.

Following a quasi-experimental research design, two groups were utilized in this study, i.e., the **experimental** group and the **controlled** group. The controlled group consists of students who are enrolled either in high school or college but are not enrolled in the Access Program, while the experimental group are those students who are enrolled in the Access Program with MSU. Both groups have similar language profiles and level of English proficiency at the start of the study.

To compare the magnitude of change in the linguistic performance of both groups, pretest and posttest were conducted before and after the exposure of the students to a prolonged non-contractual English intervention program.

Venue and Duration

The English language intervention program was conducted in the Mindanao State University – Tawi-Tawi College of Technology and Oceanography (MSU-TCTO) located in Sanga-Sanga, Bongao, Tawi-Tawi, Philippines. For assessment and comparison of effect of the program, students from the neighboring schools, where some students participating the program come from, were also included in the assessment and monitoring as the control. This study was conducted from January 2016 to February 2017.

Results and Discussion

I. Assessment of Access Students' Learning Growth

The data on Table 1 displays how the attitude and performance of learners engaged in the Access program change over time. The scores are transformed into percentages from the maximum (perfect) score for better appreciation on how their attitude, knowledge and skills progresses while undergoing the program.

Table 1
Pre-test and Midterm Assessment of English Language Skills, Knowledge on Western Culture, and Attitude Towards Western Culture and Ideas

Area of Assessment	Period of Assessment		Change
	Pre-test (Start of the Program)	Midterm Assessment	
English Language Skills	47.2%	53.0%	5.7%
Knowledge on Western Culture	38.5%	64.3%	25.8%
Attitude Toward Western Culture	54.3%	86.4%	32.1%

At the start of the program, despite that those learners have undertaken the Philippine basic formal education, their scores on English language skills and knowledge of Western Cultures are still low. Their appreciation on Western Culture and ideas is already fair. During the midterm assessment their skills in the use of English Language improved a little from 47.2% in the pre-test to 53.0% in the midterm assessment gaining an increase of 5.7. However, a large advance can be observed on their knowledge in culture as well as their perception towards the same culture gaining an increase of 28.8 and 32.1 percentage points, respectively.

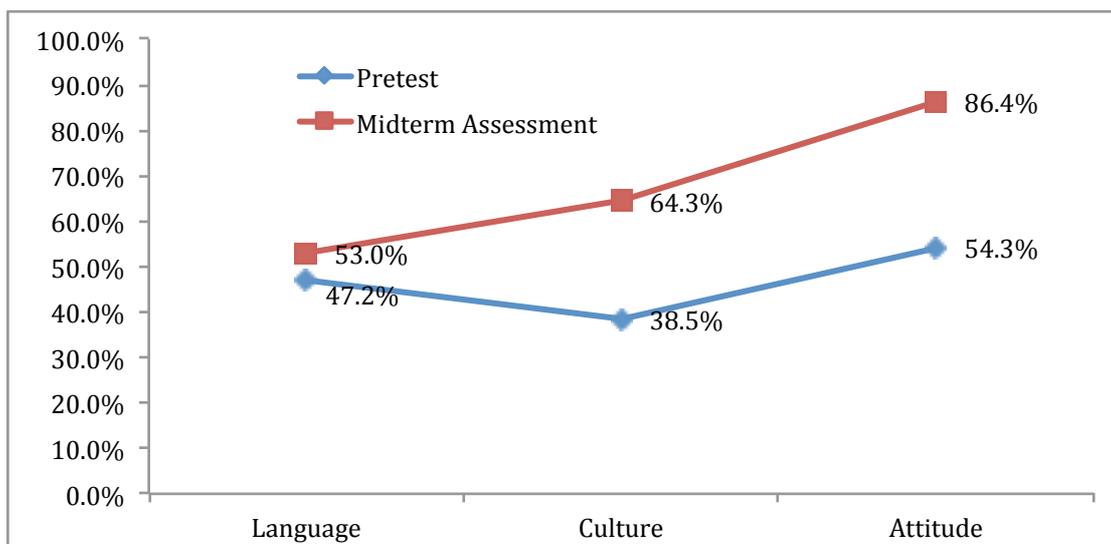


Figure 1: Plot of the pre-test and midterm assessment scores of access students

The graph in Figure 1 depicts the progression of the access learners' attitudes and performance during the first half of the program implementation. As already mentioned earlier, huge improvement was expressed on their knowledge in culture and positive perception– i.e. acceptance and tolerance to the culture of Western nations.

The next table presents the statistical test results using t-test which explore whether or not the magnitude of change on the access learners' skills and attitudes is immense enough to conclude that indeed there was a significant learning growth among access learners during the period.

Table 2
Summary of t-test comparing **pre-test and midterm** assessment scores of access students

Assessment Area Compared	Paired Differences			t	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean		
English Language Skills	.05741	.16265	.02711	2.118	.041
Knowledge on Western Culture	.25833	.20195	.03366	7.675	.000
Attitude Toward Western Culture	.96296	.35544	.05924	16.255	.000

At 5% level of significance, the results show that the midterm assessment scores among access students are significantly higher than their pre-test scores. It could be claimed that the access program has significantly improved the learners' knowledge and skills as well as meaningfully changed their views towards western people and culture.

II. Access and Non-Access Learners' Comparison

During the midterm assessment a group of non-access students were given the same assessment questionnaires. The latter was chosen from among the peers of access students whose ethnic, social, economic and educational background are similar to the access learners. The purpose is mainly to evaluate if the level of skills as well as the perception of the non-access varies from those in the program.

Table 3
Access and Non-Access Learners' Midterm Assessment Scores

Area Assessed	Learners Grouping		Difference
	Access	Non-Access	
English Language Skills	64.3%	44.0%	20.3%
Knowledge on Western Culture	53.0%	45.6%	7.4%
Attitude Toward Western Culture	86.4%	59.6%	26.7%

The results of the assessment given to the two groups indicated that learners engaged in the Access program have higher percentage scores in all areas being assessed. Among the three subjects of interest, students who participated in the Access program achieved much larger percentage scores in the English Language performance and higher acceptance (positive) ratings on Western cultures compared to the non-access counterparts.

The plot in Figure 2 depicts the disparity on the average mean responses (in percentage) between the two groups.

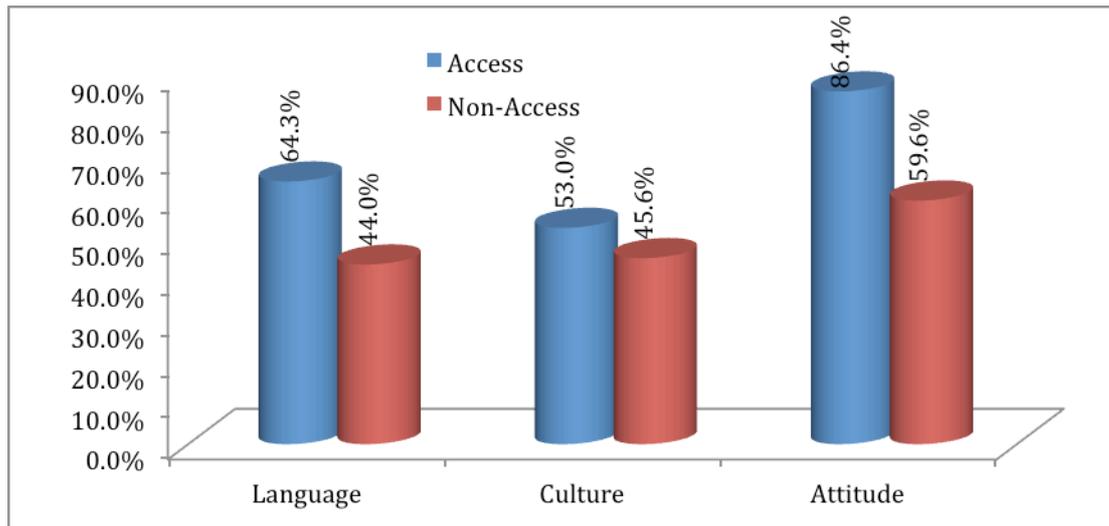


Figure 1: Plot comparing the midterm assessment scores of access and non-access students

To answer the notion whether or not the differences of the mean responses are persistently higher which is sufficient to conclude that access students performed better than the non-access, a series of independent t-tests comparing the two groups' scores were made. The results are summarized in Table 4.

Assessment Area Compared	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
English Language Skills	.20306	.04126	4.922	.000
Knowledge on Western Culture	.07408	.03711	1.996	.050
Attitude Toward Western Culture	.80141	.09089	8.818	.000

The above results indicated that except on the area of knowledge in western culture, access participants possess better English Language skills and give much favorable attitude towards acceptance and tolerance to western cultures. This further suggests that the program has significantly influenced ones knack in English language. It also opens up to understanding and tolerance to a culture which is different from theirs.

Findings

1. Students enrolled in the Access program have significant learning growth in the three areas being assessed, i.e., English language skills, knowledge on western culture, and attitude toward western culture. The Access language program has moderately improved the English language skills of the students.
2. Compared to Non-Access students, the students enrolled in the Access program showed large improvement in their knowledge of western culture.
3. Access students have manifested significant positive change in their attitude towards acceptance and tolerance to western culture. This suggests that the Access program has significantly influenced ones knack not only in the English language but also opens up to understanding and tolerance to a culture which is different from theirs.

Conclusion

As far as English language learning is concerned, it is concluded that the students may improve their linguistic skills if they are exposed to an intensive intervention program without any pressure to pass the course. It is further concluded that the Access Program has opened the minds of the students to other cultures.

Recommendations

1. Since English language learning is significantly higher in a non-contractual learning environment, i.e., the anxiety level of the students in learning the target language is low, this intervention program may also be implemented in other Asian countries that consider English as a target language.
2. The Access Program must be continued as it has an impact on the economically disadvantaged but intelligent students enrolled in the program. It empowers not only the underprivileged students but also their families and the communities that they belong to by giving them a new perspective of the world through appreciation of other culture.
3. Further in-depth study on the impact of the Access Program to the community be conducted.

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