



Individual Factors and Academic Success in an EFL Classroom: A Case Study of a Group of 2nd of ESO Learners From a State Public High School in a Valencian Middle-size City

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Abstract

We have examined the influence of individual factors in the learning of English as a foreign language depending on the marks students obtained in the English subject final term exams. The sample studied is formed by forty-one students in the second year of ESO, with ages between 12 and 15, from a state high-school in a medium-sized city in the north of the Valencian Country. We have measured the influence in their academic success of a total amount of seventeen individual variables, divided into two main groups: learners' internal characteristics, also classified according to cognitive ones and affective ones and external influences on learners. The results of the statistical analyses suggest that the most influential individual variables are related to cognition and to external learning conditions.

Keywords

Academic success; Motivation, Gender; Multilingualism; Out-of-school contact; EFL¹

Introduction

25 years ago, Peter Skehan [1] affirmed that, unlike in other disciplines like psychology, "a robust ID (individual differences) tradition" was somewhat lacking in the field of second language learning. Recent volumes such as the one edited in 2012 by Pawlak for Springer [2], however, show that this line of enquiry is in very good health.

The role played by learners' individual differences in language learning is paramount to understand academic success. This concern is especially present and even urgent in our country where it seems to be generally agreed that, despite the fact that English is a part of the curriculum since Infant to Secondary education, students do not achieve a proficiency level in this foreign language high enough to be able to communicate with sufficient correction and appropriateness. No wonder, then, that authors like Romero [3] have claimed that:

La situación actual es alarmante: según estudios recientes, de los 27 países de la Unión, España ocupa el lugar 23 en aprendizaje de idiomas, superado por países tales como Hungría, Bulgaria o Rumania. Incluso Portugal, nuestro eterno vecino, nos supera en el apartado del aprendizaje del inglés como principal lengua extranjera.

Something must be wrong in our approach to the teaching/learning of English as a foreign language in Spanish instructional settings and this failure is possibly related to methodological aspects.²

We fully agree with Portolés [4] when she states that "language is not a predictable process since there is not any magic potion with the clue for success. [...] All in all, we also believe that exploring individual factors might help to define the traits of the "Good Language Learner".

Theoretical framework

Skehan [1] states that aptitude is still "the most successful predictor of language learning success and failure. To include some attempt to measure aptitude will render the interpretation of any research study very difficult". What is more, authors such as Kiss & Nikolov [5] warn that although aptitude and motivation have been widely analysed in the field of second language acquisition, "few studies have been devoted to the role of cognitive variables in foreign language learning contexts in the case of young learners", pointing to a clear research gap.

1. Thanks to Otilia Martí and Marta Monraval for the help offered in this research.
2. Apart from social aspects not related to education such as the dubbing in Spanish television and cinemas.

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As far as motivation is concerned, nobody doubts of its relevance among the factors related to achievement in a second or a foreign language [6]. In fact, motivation is the most abstract variable we have measured and motivational factors have a special importance in our research. Among the seventeen independent variables considered in this study, eleven belong to motivational aspects (Interest in Foreign Languages, Parental Encouragement, Motivational Intensity, Anxiety, English Teacher Evaluation, Attitudes toward Learning English, Attitudes toward English-speaking people, Integrative Orientation, Desire to Learn English, English Course Evaluation and Instrumental Orientation). According to Madrid & Pérez Cañado [7], motivation is normally defined by psychologists as “the set of processes which involve the arousal, direction, and sustaining of behaviour (conduct). It is employed to indicate, for instance, a subject’s persistence and his/her pervasive work on certain tasks and not on other activities”.

Among those eleven aspects of motivation, we distinguish between integrative and instrumental motivation. Following Skehan [1], we consider that these two kinds of motivational factors are different in nature; integrative motivation is rooted in the personality and it is not susceptible to external changes of learning conditions such as a new textbook or a new teacher, although instrumental motivation could be affected by external changes.

Over the years, a major assumption has underlined research about motivation and it is based on Gardner & Lambert’s investigation [8,9] where it was hypothesised that an instrumental motive is less effective to guarantee language achievement because it is not rooted in the personality of the learner, but more dependent on fallible external pressures. Bearing this caveat in mind, in our study, we have included integrative motivation into the group of learners’ internal affective characteristics and instrumental motivation into the group of external influences on learners.

Current research focused on EFL instructional settings [10,11], however, proposes that, although integrativeness is still very influential, “more attention should be directed towards what goes on in the language classroom and in changes over time” [12]. This opens the possibility of identifying ways for teachers to enhance their students’ motivation. In fact, when paying attention to those studies focusing on younger learners’ motivation, we can see how instrumental motivation gains importance over integrative one. Nikolov [13] carried out a longitudinal study about the motivational patterns of three groups of children (aged 6-14) in Pécs, Hungary, between 1977 and 1995. The results showed that the participants in her sample were mostly motivated by factors related to the class situation such as positive attitudes towards the teacher, the materials used or the activities and tasks done in the English class. Thus, no traces of integrative motivation were detected. In contrast, Clément et al.’s [4] pioneer research with secondary school students (aged 14-18), which was also conducted in Hungary, found, more in line with Gardner’s Canadian studies [15-17], that integrativeness was still predominant being the elements with a strong impact on achievement those of attitudes towards the British/the Americans, identification orientation or motivational intensity. The comparison of the findings in these two studies suggest that age in the case of young learners might also play a role in the kind of motivational orientation with a higher impact on language achievement. The fact that the participants in our study are from 12 to 15 years old makes our sample a very suitable one to explore this hypothesis.

In spite of having defined aptitude and motivation as the most influential individual variables, language learning strategies have also received lots of attention. In 1990, Oxford proposed a test (The Strategies Inventory for Language Learning, also known as SILL) consisting of 80 questions for English-speaking students learning a new language, and 50 for speakers of other languages in which respondents are requested to rate how frequently they make use of each technique. Both versions provide information about six different behaviours, coined as memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social strategies. According to Gardner [12], as resorting to such strategies is “a conscious process”, this

individual factor cannot be separated from other variables such as (i) motivation, attitudes or beliefs, (ii) personality; or (iii) gender.

Precisely, in both Sunderland’s [18,19] and Ehrlich’s [20] views, three of the areas clearly connected with individual variables in which gender is relevant in the ESL/EFL classroom are those of (i) learning styles and strategies, (ii) attitudes toward the target language and culture; and (iii) perceived career opportunities created by the acquisition of the target language. This link raises the following two questions: are there two ways of learning a second or foreign language according to the learner’s gender? Is there a higher motivation among girls to study foreign languages? Are girls more strategically oriented than boys when learning a foreign language?

This stronger motivation has been documented in contexts so different as high-school and university students learning Spanish as a foreign language in the United States of America [21,22], EFL Spanish secondary students [23] non-immersion Canadian girls learning French [24], or high-school students learning French as a foreign language in the United Kingdom [25].

Among the reasons put forward to explain female students’ higher motivation and better grades as far as foreign language learning is concerned, we find firstly, girls and women’s propensity for strategic use when learning a foreign language [22,23]; secondly, the higher social-orientation in the case of non-immersion Canadian female students of French in terms of travel, knowledge and personal-achievement goals [24]; and, finally, stronger peer, teacher, guidance counsellor, and parental support, especially on the part of middle-class families, who favour girls studying languages and boys pursuing science subjects [26,27].

Since research conducted by Oxford and her associates [28-35] established that gender does have a significant impact on students’ strategies aimed at learning a language, a number of studies have explored the effect of this variable on second or foreign language learning strategies, but without achieving conclusive results. For example, the advantage of EFL female students over male ones is suggested, with respect to EFL vocabulary learning, by Jiménez Catalán’s [23] on Spanish-speaking students learning Basque and English. Female students in Jiménez Catalán’s survey [36] show a preference for formal rule, input elicitation, rehearsal and planning strategies; while males mostly opt for image vocabulary learning strategies. The superiority of female students in the use of all strategy categories is also confirmed in the case Korean junior high school students by Ok [37].

However, a non-significant difference regarding the role of gender, is reported by (i) Kaylani [38], who do not find differences between successful female and male learners in Jordanian high schools, (ii) Phakiti [39], according to whom, if we take into account learners’ proficiency level, no gender differences in reading performance and use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies are detected; and, (iii) by Aliakbari and Hayatzadeh’s [40] analysis of Iranian English students’ performance, who also deny statistically-significant disparities between men and women, even when the former have reported higher frequency of strategic use.

Be that as it may, whenever it is female students the ones who are reported as showing higher strategic learning competence, what both Western and Eastern pieces of research shares is the factors which explain this advantage. Drawing on psychological and socialization research, along with findings on the conversational behaviour of learners in the ESL/EFL classroom, Oxford and her colleagues tend to highlight the fact that women present a higher use of general, social and affective/emotional learning strategies because they are more empathic, more polite-oriented and display more cooperative speech styles in the classroom. These psychological features, besides, are supposed to be due to female students’ stronger motivation and greater conformity to academic and linguistic norms.

Furthermore, Oxford [32] has noted that as field dependent subjects, women tend to be more sensitive to the social context. In

order to support this idea, she [33] states that females, due to their higher interpersonal and global orientation, might be superior “in less analytic aspects of overall L2 communicative competence, such as sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence”. Additionally, in the same article, Oxford [33] also held that women have a feeling style which favours greater concern for their interlocutors’ feelings and values (that is, other people’s faces), and more reflective and analytic learners’ features which result in both a higher grammatical accuracy and a higher tendency “to carefully analyze sociolinguistic factors in order to produce the appropriate response”.

Therefore, the likely interplay existing between gendered strategic use and affective factors such as degree of motivation [32,36] has led authors like López Rúa [41] to advocate for an integrative approach to the effect of gender in foreign language learning, which is the one we adopt in this paper.

If there is an individual factor that has been neglected in the language acquisition area is that of learners’ linguistic background, an individual factor that, according to Aronin & Bawardi [2] cannot be overlooked any more in light of what Aronin & Singleton [42] coined as “the new linguistic dispensation”. Research about the so-called multilingual factor, from Cummins 1976 Threshold Hypothesis to Herdina & Jessner [43] and their 2002 Dynamic Model of Multilingualism, has shown that bilingual and multilingual users when learning additional languages have access to some cognitive and linguistic benefits and possess a number of abilities which facilitate this language learning process in terms of attitudes, learning strategies, metalinguistic awareness [44] or communicative sensitivity [45].

In this sense, it is a fact that, in the Valencian Country, English is taught from a monolingual perspective instead of from a multilingual one, ignoring that it might be introduced as a third language considering that the vast majority of students are receptive or productive bilinguals or even trilinguals. This monolingual view in the EFL classroom implies the loss of methodological opportunities to make the most of bi- or multilingual students’ skills.

All in all, we also agree with Portolés [4] when she warns that there are also other studies which suggest that bilingualism per se is not a determinant condition for additional language success and claims that many other variables may influence the process of language acquisition, as our analysis will show.

Last but not least, another element that we have analysed is that of the students’ Out-of-School Contact with English. Failure to achieve a good command of English is an issue that worries most parents to the extent of enrolling their children in extracurricular English lessons or paying for private tuition in commercial language schools. It is our contention, however, that the perceived need of extracurricular English lessons and the im(possibility) of affording them might increase social differences and it works against the universal right of citizens to receive quality education for free.

The Study

Research questions

The first aim of this research is to explore the correlation between learners’ individual factors and school grades as a quantitative index of academic success in learning EFL. This aim leads us to formulate the following research question: Which are the most important individual variables in terms of academic achievement in the EFL classroom? In other words, which individual factors are the most successful predictors of language learning success? Internal and/or psychological dimensions versus social factors and/or conditions of learning? Besides, concerning the former and following Robinson [46], are cognitive variables more influential than affective ones?

The second aim of the present research is to explore the correlation among learners’ individual factors. This aim implies

the following research question: Which correlations exist among individual variables that condition academic success in the EFL classroom?

All in all, by analysing the relation between each individual variable and the target variables and also by analysing the correlation among individual variables, we will try to define the profile of a prototypically good learner. In light of the literature review presented in this section, however, we might hypothesize that our good language learner would be a productive bilingual or multilingual [43-45] female student with some aptitude to language learning [1], a strong motivation [18,19,23] with a special emphasis on integrativeness [14] and positive attitudes towards the target language and culture [20], who resorts to a wide range of learning strategies, especially social ones, who shows simultaneously a feeling learning style along with reflective and analytic learners’ features which are very extremely useful in grammar-oriented and teacher-led classrooms [33], who actively searches for teacher guidance and finds parental support, especially on the part of middle-class families, who still favour girls studying languages over sciences [27,47].

Participants

We have studied a number of individual factors conditioning the academic success in the case of forty-one 12 to 15-year-old students in a state high-school based on a bilingual territory where there is also a great amount of trilingual students coming from migrant families. In our sample, there are students with the following mother tongues: Catalan, Spanish, Romanian, Arabic and Portuguese. All the students had the same English teacher and belong to groups with Catalan as the main language of teaching and learning (Programa Plurilingüe d’Ensenyament en Valencià). The research was implemented at the IES Jaume I in Borriana (province of Castelló, Valencian Community, Spain) during the second and third trimesters of the academic year 2014-2015. This is a high-school with around 670 students located in a neighbourhood with both working and middle-class families. The percentage of immigration in this high-school is about 12%. Borriana has almost 35.000 inhabitants. This middle-size city is situated in the northern part of the Valencian Country, which is a Spanish region with two coofficial languages: Catalan (Valencian) and Spanish.

The Sample consists on 41 Students from three 2nd of ESO groups. All of them have ages between 12 and 15 years old. We have measured academic success in EFL, in terms of score achievement, and we have tried to measure and analyse the relationship with academic success and seventeen individual variables and also the correlations among individual variables. Our sample is balanced in terms of sex. We have 22 girls and 19 boys.

Instruments of data collection

According to Gardner [12], we cannot only focus on the variables individually. We also need to analyse the interdependency among the individual variables that condition the target variables:

We often speak of the individual different variables as independent variables and interpret the correlation as indicating that the variable is responsible for that achievement [marks, academic success], but because individuals are not randomly assigned to the independent variable, it is only an interpretation. [...] Correlation [between IDs and academic success] does not mean causation. As a consequence any ‘casual statement’ is arbitrary, and arguments about what causes what are meaningless.

According to this, we have also taken into consideration the correlations among independent variables, because what matters is that such correlations indicate that there is an association between the two variables in the population, and such connection has a meaning.

According to the statistical analysis conducted by means of the SPSS program version 22.0, our variables are normally distributed, according to the Kolmogorov Smirnov tests. After having checked

that all the variables were normally distributed, we studied the correlations among independent variables and also in relation to the target variable. To study these correlations and their significance, we have used different statistical elements: box and whisker plot, scatter plot, ANOVA test and t-test.³

Now we are going to measure the instruments used to compile the information about all the variables. We have used six questionnaires to collect the information about the individual variables.

To be sure about the validity of the tests implemented, we have used tests already employed in similar statistical investigations in foreign language learning. Some of them are well-known and are accessible through the Internet.

Test 1: Attitude/Motivation Test [48].⁴ This is a validated test that has been used in many EFL studies. It consists on 104 questions and measures twelve variables in a rating scale with six options. The variables measured are: Interest in Foreign Languages, Parental Encouragement, Motivational Intensity, English Class Anxiety, English Teacher Evaluation, Attitudes toward Learning English, Attitudes toward English-speaking people, Integrative Orientation, Desire to Learn English, English Course Evaluation, English Use Anxiety and Instrumental Orientation. Although there are many data that we have omitted.

Test 2: Test of bilingualism. From this test, we have only considered the question about the student's mother tongue.

Test 3: My history as English learner. From this test, the question in which we have focused our analysis has been the one about whether the student has any Out-of-school contact with the English language.

We decided not to implement the aforementioned questionnaires in English in order to facilitate our respondents' comprehension. Moreover, we have considered important to alternate between tests written and administered in Spanish and tests written and administered in Catalan because we did not want to show any implicit preference for one of the two co-official languages.

Test 4: Aptitude. This test is an adaptation from the one included in the doctoral thesis Language Aptitude in Young Learners: The Elementary Modern Language Aptitude Test in Spanish and Catalan elaborated by Suárez et al. [49] in 2010. The test is divided into four parts. Each part counts 25 points up to 100. In the first part, called "Hidden Words", the students have to answer five questions. They have some letters that altogether form a word. Next, they have four options of possible words and they have to choose the correct one. In the second part, called "Correspondent Words", the students have five groups of two sentences each. In the first sentence, they have one word in capital letters. In the second sentence, they have to circle the word that they intuitively consider that has an equivalent grammatical function.

In the third part, called "Words that rhyme", the students have five options of one isolated word followed by four options of words. They have to circle the word that they consider that rhymes with the first one. The last part is called "Numbers in another language". Here, the students are expected to recognise the numbers in an invented language. Firstly, they listen to some examples of this system of numbers in an unknown language. Then, they have to write down the numbers in this new language that they are able to identify by listening them.

Test 5: Personality. The test of personality used in this research is an adaptation into Catalan from the MBTI test (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator), about the way people make decisions and perceive the world. This test codifies its results into sixteen possible combinations of the next four features: Extraverted/Introverted, Thinking/Feeling, Sensing/Intuitive and Judging/Perceiving.⁵

Test 6: Learning Strategies. The test about learning strategies used in our research has been an adaptation into Catalan from Oxford's "Strategy Inventory for Language Learning" (SILL).⁶ This test has a total amount of 50 questions. Each question has to be measured in a scale from 1 to 5 depending on the degree of identification to the student with each statement (1 is "never or almost never true in my case" and 5 corresponds to "always or almost always true in my case").

From all the learning strategies including in the SILL test, we have measured the following ones: remembering more effectively, using all mental processes, compensating for missing knowledge, organising and evaluating the learning, managing emotions and learning with others. We have marked each learning strategies' test according to the next orientations⁷.

The final average is between 1 and 5. For the statistical analysis, we have codified these results in three levels:

- High level of use of learning strategies when learning English (codified as 3): 4.4 - 5.0.
- Medium level of use of learning strategies when learning English (codified as 2): 2.5 - 4.4.
- Low level of use of learning strategies when learning English (codified as 1): 1.0 - 2.4.

Next, we shortly describe the two parts of the statistical analysis, each of one respectively focused on the answer of one of the two questions.

To answer the question 1, we carry out a thorough analysis of each individual variable with the target variable. Each analysis will depend on the characteristics of the independent variable because we have a wide range of individual variables with different features and the descriptive analysis must take these differences into consideration.

The target variable is the mean of the score obtained for each student in the last 5 trimesters. The independent variables are the next ones:

Group A. Learners' internal characteristics

A.1. Cognitive ones

Gender

Kind of multilingualism

Aptitude

Personality

Learning Strategies

A.2. Affective ones

Anxiety when Learning English

3. Because of a lack of space, we have decided not to show here the detailed results of the statistical analysis carried out in order to answer questions 1 and 2. All the statistical results can be checked at <<http://ainamonferrer.com/?p=764>> [26-6-2017].
4. All six tests that have been used can be checked at: <http://ainamonferrer.com/?p=764>.
5. It has 64 questions. We have calculated the results of each of the 41 students' tests from the next webpage: <<http://www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/jtypes2.asp>> [25-6-2017].
6. This questionnaire was firstly used in Oxford, 1990.
7. Extracted from <<http://goldstonepencil.tripod.com/l2studystrategies/id6.html>> [25-6-2017].

Integrative motivation
 Motivational intensity
 Interest in Foreign Languages
 Attitudes toward Learning English
 Attitudes toward English Speakers
 Desire to Learn English

Group B: External influences on learners

Instrumental motivation
 Parental Encouragement
 English Teacher Evaluation
 English Course Evaluation
 Out-of-school Contact

In the descriptive analysis of each variable, we checked that all the variables in this study could be considered as normally distributed, which means that parametrical analysis could be carried out with all of them (for instance the t test for the comparison of the means of groups when the independent variables are nominals or ordinals).

At this point we will only comment on the statistical analysis of the variables that are significant (p-value lower than 0,05) or that are close to this significance threshold and are also interesting in our study. We have considered this closeness in some cases where the variable has a p-value of 0,100 or less.

After the correlation analysis between the target variable and the independent variable, we have carried out the analysis needed to try to answer question 2. As previously stated, the second aim of the present research is to explore the correlation among learners' individual factors. Thus, it has been tried to answer the following research question: Which correlations exist among individual variables that condition our respondents' academic success?

The correlation is a measure of the degree of linear association between two variables. It is strongly associated linked with the concept of dependency, although dependency is more a subjective interpretation than a statistical result.

Discussion

Regarding the correlations among independent variables, we have observed the following links:

1. Men use less learning strategies than women. This result is in line with the studies carried out by Sunderland [18,-22] and/or Jiménez Catalán [23], among others.
2. Aptitude is positively related to the use of learning strategies. Indeed, those aspects are quite similar. Then, there is highly improbable that a student that does not implement Learning Strategies had a good Aptitude for the learning of the English language. Learning strategies are also related to different internal elements, such as motivation, personality and gender [12].
3. Aptitude is also positively related to three personality features: Extraversion, Thinking and Judging. Language is communication. Consequently, being extraverted, which also implies being communicative, is important when learning languages. At the same, however, our study points to the importance of the features Thinking and Judging, a finding which could be expected given the fact that EFL teaching in this high-school is mostly teacher-centred and mostly focused on grammar and vocabulary, two

aspects of linguistic competence in which being Thinking and Judging can be rather useful.

4. Introversion and Anxiety. Precisely, being thoughtful and wise is important because learning languages in an artificial context such as the English class means a higher degree of reflection upon grammar, morphological and textual elements as far as responsibility to pay attention, practice and review. On the contrary, it was predictable the fact that Introverted students manifested higher degrees of Anxiety in different classroom situations, despite the fact that opportunities for practice are fewer than in more task-oriented and communicatively focused approaches to English Language Teaching.
5. Out-of-school contact and positive evaluation of the teacher and the subject. Students with Out-of-school contact with the English language have better considerations on the teacher and the subject than students without it. This is a positive indicator of the quality of the English teaching in this high-school because despite the fact that these students have other English teachers and have attended out-of-school English courses, such external references do not diminish the good consideration they have towards their teacher and the English subject as it is taught in this state-run educational centre. Further research needs to ascertain whether this is an exceptional case or just the norm with respect to other high-school English teachers. As we will see, this positive evaluation is even more remarkable because the English Teacher Evaluation is one of the few independent variables significantly related to academic success. This coincides with Nikolov's [13] view about the important effect of external individual factors for academic success in young learners.
6. Correlations among motivational variables. As it could be expected, we have observed that many of the motivational variables show correlations among them. On the one hand, the Attitude Toward Learning English is related to the Desire to Learn English. On the other hand, good English Teacher Evaluation is related to Motivational Intensity, which means that the consideration over the teacher has a big influence over the student's motivation. As a consequence, if the student does not like the way the teacher develops the class, his or her motivation towards the English learning will get damaged.
7. Instrumental Orientation is related to Interest in Foreign Languages. Obviously, whenever a student wants to learn English for practical purposes, this element increases his or her interest in the learning of the target language. Moreover, learning English in a Spanish or more specifically in a Valencian context has many possibilities of instrumental applications for leisure (listening to music, watching series, travelling abroad...) and also for future professional options (get access into the university,^a working abroad...). Both can be very attractive for the high-school students. In fact, Valencian society shows positive prejudices towards the English language that foster these favourable thoughts in students. These data contradicts Gardner and Lambert [8,9] when they affirmed that instrumental motive is less effective than integrative motivation.
8. Parental Encouragement is related to a positive Attitude toward Learning English. As we will see later on, parental encouragement is one of the significant independent variables that clearly condition the English academic success. We will also see that women get better results. This is in line with Kissau [47] and Jones [27] in that parental support on the learning of languages is higher over women than over men, since the latter are more pushed by their parents to study technical degrees.

8. In the university legislation defined by the EEES, the student is requested to possess a B2 English level to get graduated.

Next, there are the main correlations among individual variables and the target variable:

1. There is a significant difference between the scores in men and women. Women tend to get better scores. It coincides with the results in other studies where women get better marks in the learning of foreign languages [24].
2. Aptitude and English learning success. The level of Aptitude for the learning of languages is also significantly linked with the results obtained in the target variable. It coincides with Skehan's statements about Aptitude as a very important predictor of the learning success [1].
3. Thinking and Judging students get better results. Thinking is a personality feature that takes special importance in a traditional language methodology which is grammar-focused and where memorisation, grammar rules and lists of vocabulary are the main activities. In this kind of teaching contexts, thoughtful students would get better scores. In this sense, Oxford [32] points out that women reflect more upon linguistic elements and tend to analyse structures and words more than men. Then women would get better results in the traditional way of teaching EFL, which is the kind of methodology used in our research.

Moreover, students with the internal cognitive characteristics Thinking and Judging also get significantly better results in the mean of the 5 last trimesters. Again, Thinking is a determinant individual variable. The students with a higher use of Learning Strategies also get significantly better results in the mean of the 5 trimesters and this agrees with Ok [37] findings that women use more learning strategies.

4. Active bilinguals get better results in learning English. We also wanted to underline the importance of the kind of multilingualism in relation to academic success. Despite the fact that in none of the two target variables the independent variable Kind of multilingualism has been significative, in both cases the p-value has been quite close to the 0,005 threshold of significance.⁹ The box-whisker representation in both cases showed a clear higher academic success in active/productive bilingual students in comparison with trilinguals¹⁰ and passive/receptive bilingual students. In fact, the results obtained related to the kind of multilingualism are consistent with the statements of the Dynamic Model of Multilingualism [43].

This partial influence of the multilingual factor in success supports Portolés' [4] caveat when she suggested that bilingualism per se is not a determinant condition for success, but many other variables.

5. Internal cognitive variables are the most influential ones in terms of success in the EFL classroom. In light of these findings, we can affirm that internal cognitive variables are influential in the long-term grades understood as an index of academic success on the English subject. There are two variables that are especially significant: Aptitude and Learning Strategies. The internal affective variable Desire to learn English is also significant in relation to the target variable. In fact, it is the only significant variable from the group A.2. Out-of-school contact with the English language is an external variable that also affects significantly the mean of the 5 last trimesters as well as the English Teacher Evaluation.

Conclusion

At this point, we are going to try to answer the main research question: Which group of variables conditions the most the learning of English measured as academic success on the English subject? There are two external variables that are clearly linked with positive scores: English Teacher Evaluation and Out-of-school Contact. For this reason, we can affirm that the most influential variables in the continuous academic success when learning English are the external ones, followed by the cognitive internal ones.

We observe a problem in the fact that the most influential variables to the academic success on the English subject seem to be the most difficult ones to change or to improve by the teacher's influence either because they are cognitive characteristics that are not easy to modify because they are deeply rooted in the student's character or because they depend mostly on economic resources or familiar characteristics (Out-of-school Contact and Parental Encouragement). On the other hand, there is an external feature that is easy to modify because it depends over all on the teacher's attitude and methodologies: this is the English Teacher Evaluation.

We have found a strong link between academic success and having access to extracurricular English courses. All the students but one with Out-of-school contact attended at extracurricular English classes.¹¹ In our opinion, the popularity and resort to private tuition perpetuates a social injustice because only affluent families can provide their children with private tuition and/or enrol them in commercial language schools. Two possible ways to solve this problem could be: a) to offer free remedial English lessons for students with fewer economic resources or b) to rethink the methodology of teaching English in Valencian high-schools in order to get a more effective learning and also to higher motivate the students.

All in all, after having reviewed all, we can sketch a profile of the hypothetical student model. She might be a woman, with the personality features of Sensing and Thinking, having Out-of-school Contact such as extra English classes or some contact with natives. She might have a high level of aptitude for the learning of languages. She must use a wide range of learning strategies for the language learning. She might be highly motivated at least in the aspects of Interest in foreign languages, Desire to learn English and she might positively evaluate her English teacher.

Limitations and Further Research

In this research we have tried to collect a wide range of individual variables that could have determined the student's academic success when learning English. However, we cannot ensure that all influential factors with a potential effect on the participants' grades have been taken into consideration. That is why the results must be taken with caution and cannot be generalized. The results of our quantitative research will only be able to be extrapolated to populations typologically similar to the individuals who participated in this experiment and to the educational context of our sample.

Regarding further research, it could be interesting to enlarge the sample, to measure the same individual variables in academic success with younger and older students, with different teachers or in high-schools with different social and economical contexts.

9. Sig.=0,100 in correlation with Pre-post score U5 and Sig.=0,098 in correlation with Mean of the 5 trimesters.

10. We have considered trilinguals the students from immigrant families that have a mother tongue different from the two Valencian co-official languages. They are not normally productive bilinguals, but receptive ones because they frequently communicate in Spanish but they barely speak Catalan, whilst they only resort to their mother tongues in very informal situations an through colloquial registers. However, in both target variables, trilinguals get better grades than receptive or passive bilinguals.

11. The exception was one student that used to play online video-games with a friend from Germany and they communicate each other in English.

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