



# The ABA Efficacy Study

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## Executive Summary

This study<sup>1</sup> is the result of independent scientific research carried out from July 2015 to December 2015. It is based on the analysis of test scores and questionnaires given to a random representative sample of ABA users for the purpose of demonstrating the efficacy of ABA English, for users to learn English as a foreign language.

**This is the first study of its kind involving research in the efficacy of learning English online**, i.e. distance e-learning of English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

The efficacy of ABA was measured as the language proficiency improvement per hours of study and the proportion of ABA learners who could improve their level of language proficiency in terms of US college semesters after completing 24 ABA English Units.

The research involved a final sample population of 241 learners from three countries, Brazil, Italy and Spain, enrolled in the ABA Premium (paid) Course. Over a six-month period the informants for this study were given a **pre-test** to establish their knowledge of English before they started using ABA English, and also a **pre-questionnaire** to enquire about each learner's demographic information along with items designed to provide data regarding learner expectations and motivations. On finishing the ABA Course a **post-test** was administered to establish learning progress, and, finally, there was a **post-questionnaire**, designed to analyse learner satisfaction. The pre- and post-tests were drawn from WebCAPE computerised adaptive placement tests (Perpetual Technology Group<sup>2</sup>).

The maximum time given for each participant to complete 24 units of ABA English Course was 3 months.

## Main Results

### CONFIRMED EFFICACY

For every 24 units of ABA English (EFL) Course, the following results are confirmed:

- **71% of the learners (172) improved their proficiency by at least one College Semester.**
- **47% of the learners (113) improved by as much as two College Semesters.**
- **ABA English learners need—on average—40 hours' study time to complete and learn 24 Units** (a full ABA level) in a three-month period.
- **As a result of the above we can state that just 12 ABA Units (completed in 20 hours) were needed for an improvement of a full US College Semester in half of the cases (47%).**
- **100% of the surveyed learners stated that they will recommend ABA English Course to their friends, as a measure of learner satisfaction.**

## Supplementary Results

- ABA English **efficacy is not affected by sociodemographic factors** such as age or native language (L1).
- The **average student using ABA English achieves 0.79 improvement points** in WebCAPE per every hour of study.

### USER SATISFACTION

- **98%** thought the ABA English course **content is useful and relevant**
- **97%** were satisfied with the use of **short films as pivotal learning material**
- **87.5%** thought the ABA English course is **easy to use**
- **97%** were **satisfied** at being able to **monitor their own progress**

<sup>1</sup> The study was designed and conducted by Professor Ana Gimeno-Sanz.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.perpetualworks.com>

# Introduction

There is an ever-increasing offer of language-learning apps and online courses to choose from. The present study is focused on the one claim that all of such products insist on the most: efficacy of the combined effect of the materials and methodology, in colloquial terms, "how fast can I learn the target language?".

The study sets out to achieve an independent, objective, scientifically valid evaluation of the efficacy of an exceedingly popular EFL online (e-learning) course, ABA English<sup>3</sup>.

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## ABA English: online and mobile distance EFL learning

ABA English 1.0 was founded in 2007 by Severo Figarola. It was the result of 4 years of development by a multinational team of philologists, linguists and IT experts who were given a dual goal: to develop a course with an excellent teaching methodology and to ensure that studying would be fun. ABA English 4.0 was launched in 2013, adopting a free trial business model. In June 2015 ABA English launched its new app for iOS, and in September the Android version.

**In December 2015, ABA English won the Best Educational App Award granted by Reimagine Education**, an initiative co-managed by The Wharton School and QS Quacquarelli Symonds.

At the end of May 2016 the number of students crossed the 10 million mark. An agreement with Cambridge English was signed in May 2016 whereby ABA English has become the first entirely digital school to provide Cambridge exams and certificates.

Students learn vocabulary and grammar by Units. The Units cover grammar items and pragmatic issues. The pattern and structure of the Units is always the same, divided into 8 parts or activities. The full ABA English Course covers 6 levels stretched over 144 Units: Beginners (A1), Lower Intermediate (A2), Intermediate (B1), Upper Intermediate (B2), Advanced (B2-C1) and Business (C1).

### SOME OF ABA'S KEY FEATURES:

- Video clip materials produced exclusively for ABA and provided with subtitle options.
- Interactive vocabulary and grammar activities based on the video stories, specifically written and directed to facilitate and pragmatically contextualise new vocabulary and grammatical explanations.
- Listening activities: for recognising the sounds, for oral comprehension, and as a model for oral production.
- Speech production activities and pronunciation, based on repeated viewing of the video clips and the possibility to listen to excerpts. The methodological pattern is Listen-record-compare.
- Assessment: continuous testing activity at the end of every Unit, plus personalised feedback and answers from teachers online.
- Motivation and monitoring, provided by teachers online. This is the only EFL e-learning course and app that provides teacher guidance, even while you are on the move.
- Full learning continuity is guaranteed by the online course<sup>4</sup>, regardless of the device used.

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## Research objectives

The aim of this research is to discover the efficacy of ABA for learning English as a Foreign Language. Efficacy refers to the amount of time needed to make significant progress, which involves improvement in English Language Level Test scores.

The goal of language learning is largely agreed to be to improve in overall language skills and communicative competences; and improvement is usually measured in terms of progressing from one level to the next.

The specific goals of this study were to find the answers to three main questions, presented here:

1. How effective is ABA English e-learning course in terms of language improvement over a period of three months for completing 24<sup>5</sup> Units (a whole level) for a random selection of students from all levels?
2. Which students improved most when compared to their pre-test level after using ABA English e-learning course for the stipulated period of three months and having completed 24 Units?
3. What variables (e.g. motivation, bias or demographic) may have an influence on language improvement, at least according to the conditions of this study?

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.abaenglish.com/es/>

<sup>4</sup> ABA English also has an app with all of the same features of accessibility from different devices and all of the same contents.

<sup>5</sup> On average students invested 40 hours, some less, some more; but 40 hours is a result of the research, not a condition imposed on the participants. What they were told to do was to complete 24 Units because 24 Units covers a whole level.

Improvement in general<sup>6</sup> English language skills and overall competence is measured here by comparing each participant's score in their pre-test to their post-test score. In both cases, the tests used were WebCAPE placement tests. Such tests are the basic methodological tool to help in the analysis required for answering research questions 1 and 2. Research question 3 has to be analysed by means of data produced by the pre- and post-questionnaires, which specifically ask each individual learner about their age, sex, motivation and so on. One very likely variable is initial language level but this one has to be established, not through the questionnaire but by the WebCAPE pre-test score.

### LANGUAGE LEVELS USED

The Council of Europe's **Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)** is a series of descriptions of abilities which can be **applied to any language**. Its basic structure is of 6 levels distributed into three large categories (A-C), thus

having a high (A2, B2, C2) and a low level (A1, B1, C1) within each category. The categories are: A, for Basic User; B, for Independent user; C, for Proficient User.

In US universities, Foreign Language courses are designated as **FL1** (first-semester college-level course), **FL2** (second-semester college-level course), or **FL3** (third-semester college-level course), and so on.

College Semesters are a common reference within the USA, but are more loosely defined as levels than the other test-based standards. Understandably, College Semesters are as much about dedication (study hours) and course duration (calendar weeks or months) as levels strictly speaking. This means that when we use College Semester as a measure it refers both to improvement of level and investment of effort and time, more precisely six months' of university level work, all included.

## Research methodology

The methodology used was to take a representative random sample of ABA students who had previously volunteered to participate in the study. The total amount of volunteers for this study is 241, coming from Brazil, Italy and Spain. They were given a pre-test and a pre-questionnaire before they started using ABA English. They were given a post-test and a post-questionnaire upon finishing the required amount of work with ABA English. The analysis is based on the data provided by results of the two tests and the two questionnaires<sup>7</sup>.

The study was independently conducted over a period of six months, in order to achieve the desired number of volunteers, although each volunteer only participated for a three-month period, the time they were given to do the 24 Units. The system used makes it possible to know the exact amount of time each volunteer devoted to the course and exactly when they started studying.

### WebCAPE as a tool for testing levels

The main instrument for gauging the informants' level of English was the Web Based Computer Adaptive Placement Exam, also known as the WebCAPE test. It is offered for testing levels of EFL, Spanish, French, German, Russian and Chinese, and administered completely online. Over 650 institutions worldwide use WebCAPE today, making it the worldwide standard for ESL placement testing. WebCAPE's assessment is strictly of language performance ability.

#### HIGH ACCURACY FOR PROPER ESL PLACEMENT

Accuracy of WebCAPE's English placement exam is about 80%. It is among the most efficient methods available for predicting English foreign language proficiency. Error is uncommon, but when found is mostly conservative, meaning by this that error would always involve students being placed just one level below where they could have been. The WebCAPE test gives a score in points, and the score determines the FL level.

ABA learners took one of the 6 ABA language levels available for their pre- and post testing with a time lapse of 3 months between one test and the other, or however long it took them to complete 24 ABA Units. Table 1 shows the correspondences between WebCAPE scores and ABA levels.

**Table 1. WebCAPE English language test cut-off scores and their equivalents**

| SCORES (POINTS)  | WEBCAPE LEVEL | PLACEMENT                                  | ABA LEVEL          |
|------------------|---------------|--|--------------------|
| <b>Below 100</b> | 0             | ACTFL Novice Low / Mid                     |                    |
| <b>100-392</b>   | 1             | ACTFL Novice High / College Semester FL 1  | beginners          |
| <b>393-492</b>   | 2             | College Semester FL 2                      | lower intermediate |
| <b>493-542</b>   | 3             | College Semester FL 3                      | intermediate       |
| <b>543-642</b>   | 4             | College Semester FL 4                      | upper intermediate |
| <b>643-782</b>   | 5             | ACTFL ADVANCED Low / College Semester FL 5 | advanced           |
| <b>Above 783</b> | 6             | WebCAPE CUT OFF / College Semester FL 6    | business           |

<sup>6</sup> We use the term "general English" here in opposition to "English for specific purposes" (ESP). When this is not specified the default implication should be "general" rather than "for specific purposes".

<sup>7</sup> The pre- and post-course questionnaires were designed by two of the members of the CAMILLE Research Group, Ana Sevilla-Pavón and Antonio Martínez-Sáez for their respective PhD dissertations, supervised by the researcher, Prof. Ana Gimeno-Sanz.

## Level as a variable of efficacy: time, too

Making progress through the various levels is clearly the main goal of language learning. However, the amount of time required to make noticeable progress is also very important as well as an essential component of efficacy. WebCAPE does not take into account the time/effort factor. ABA learners, therefore, had to be monitored for the amount of time they spent studying English, to enable the study to correlate time and level change in each student.

### COLLEGE SEMESTERS

It is also interesting and important to point out that College Semesters are determined by level but also, more objectively, by time (six months), hence the name "semester". However, there is no uniformity in how long a semester lasts, generally, 16 to 18 weeks long, for 45-48 contact hours in class plus an additional 3 hours' homework for every contact hour.

This kind of nomenclature presupposes a connection between levels and the normally expected time to jump from one level to another, and this does have an impact on this study, because the results of our research show that the normally expected time of six months can be cut down quite considerably if one uses ABA English given that its students average 40 hours using the e-learning course to jump from one level to the next.

### SEMESTER

1 📖 course = 3 📅 class hours per week + 6 🕒 hours homework per week = 9 🕒 hours total per week

Total hours per semester = 144 – 162 🕒 hours

## Questionnaires: pre- and post-

While improvement in English language is measured by comparing each student's score in the WebCAPE placement tests (pre- and post-), a number of variables that could bear an impact on the efficacy of ABA English are analysed by collecting student responses according to a pre-course questionnaire (pre-questionnaire<sup>8</sup>).

For the purpose of finding possible correlations, the same informants were asked to answer a post-course questionnaire (post-questionnaire<sup>8</sup>) in addition to the WebCAPE tests.

Each variable was composed of a number of defining items and analysed qualitatively and quantitatively. Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS predictive analytic software<sup>9</sup>. Each of the items were correlated to the results obtained in the WebCAPE test to analyse whether there was evidence of a significant relationship.

### PRE-QUESTIONNAIRE

The **initial questionnaire** included 34 items based on a 5-point Likert scale<sup>10</sup>, divided into four parts, enquiring about the following:

1. Personal data and the students' perceptions on how good they are at learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and how important they perceive EFL to be for their studies as well as their professional careers. (12 items)
2. The various uses and frequency in using ICT both as study tools and as leisure items. Their attitude toward technology as an educational tool. (7 items)
3. Their preferred learning styles, approaches to language learning and methodologies. (3 items)

### POST-QUESTIONNAIRE

The **post-questionnaire** included 50 items and was divided into three sections. It also used a 5-point Likert scale, plus five open-ended questions, to ask about the following:

1. General courseware features seeking data on student satisfaction regarding the graphical user interface. (16 items)
2. Course contents. (14 items)
3. Student self-assessment and personal commitments. (20 items)

<sup>8</sup> The pre- and post-course questionnaires were designed by two of the members of the CAMILLE Research Group, Ana Sevilla-Pavón and Antonio Martínez-Sáez for their respective PhD dissertations, supervised by the researcher, Prof. Ana Gimeno-Sanz.

<sup>9</sup> Statistical Analysis Software Package

<sup>10</sup> The Likert scale is a method of ascribing quantitative value to qualitative data, to make it amenable to statistical analysis.

## The learner sample population

The call for participation in the study was open for a period of two months, from 23rd July to 20th September 2015, to all ABA English Premium subscribers enrolling for the first time in the online course. The sample population was not selected externally or biased in any way and would be totally random except for the fact that volunteers did so knowingly and after giving their consent. Volunteers were offered an additional free subscription for themselves and a course gift voucher for a friend, as compensation for their participation.

The target informant populations were approached in Brazil, Italy and Spain since they have the largest number of ABA enrolments. The **initial sample population** was comprised of **868 learners** having set 900 as an overall target for attracting volunteers from all three countries, with 314 from Brazil, 270 from Italy, and 281 from Spain.

However, learners of the initial population were excluded from the survey for one or both of the following reasons:

- They did not complete 24 Units of ABA English.
- They did not complete each and every part of the 4-part survey.

After this exclusion process, the final **sample population for analysis is comprised of 241 learners** (N=241). This total amount of volunteers who fulfilled all the necessary requirements to be counted as valid informants breaks down as follows: 74 from Brazil, 83 from Italy, and 84 from Spain.

**Table 2. DISTRIBUTION PER COUNTRY**

| COUNTRY       | NUMBER | %     | CUMULATIVE % |
|---------------|--------|-------|--------------|
| <b>Brazil</b> | 74     | 30.7% | 30.7%        |
| <b>Italy</b>  | 83     | 34.4% | 65.1%        |
| <b>Spain</b>  | 84     | 34.9% | 100.0%       |
| <b>Total</b>  | 241    | 100%  |              |

**Table 4. STUDENT OCCUPATIONS**

| OCCUPATION                          | %     |
|-------------------------------------|-------|
| <b>employed</b>                     | 56.5% |
| <b>seeking employment</b>           | 17.5% |
| <b>retired</b>                      | 14.1% |
| <b>enrolled in formal education</b> | 3.1%  |
| <b>unspecified</b>                  | 8.8%  |

A balanced distribution per country as well as per age was sought and achieved, as can be seen in Tables 2 and 3. Respondents' ages ranged from 10, the youngest, to 82, the eldest.

In terms of occupation, and according to their answers, the pool of eligible participants is shown in Table 4.

## The sample population is 214, with 74 from Brazil, 83 from Italy and 84 from Spain

Only 32 of the participants (13.4%) report having an official English language certificate. Commonly mentioned ones are Cambridge FCE, TOEFL and IELTS.

**Table 3. RESPONDENTS' AGE GROUPS**

| AGE*                  | NUMBER | %     | VALID % |
|-----------------------|--------|-------|---------|
| <b>Under 18</b>       | 4      | 1.7%  | 1.7%    |
| <b>18-24</b>          | 11     | 4.6%  | 4.7%    |
| <b>25-34</b>          | 49     | 20.3% | 20.9%   |
| <b>35-44</b>          | 53     | 22.0% | 22.6%   |
| <b>45-54</b>          | 57     | 23.7% | 24.4%   |
| <b>55-59</b>          | 31     | 12.9% | 13.2%   |
| <b>60 and over</b>    | 29     | 12.0% | 12.4%   |
| <b>Total</b>          | 234    | 97.1% | 100%    |
| <b>Missing values</b> | 7      | 2.9%  |         |
| <b>Total</b>          | 241    | 100%  |         |

# Main results and analysis

## Effectiveness of the ABA English Course

Out of the total number of students (241) who took the placement test, **71% (172) of them raised their proficiency in English by at least one College Semester level**, and **47% (113) of the learners improved by as much as two College Semesters**, having completed 24 ABA units (Table 5).

Table 6 shows the starting level in WebCAPE achieved in the pre-test by the group of 71% of students who improved at least one semester. The vast majority of these learners (82%) started at the lower WebCAPE levels (0 and 1).

Table 5. TOTAL LEARNER IMPROVEMENT

|                                 | NUMBER     | %             |
|---------------------------------|------------|---------------|
| <b>Improved at least 1 sem.</b> | <b>172</b> | <b>71.4%</b>  |
| Improved 2 Semesters            | 113        | 46.9%         |
| Improved 1 Semester             | 59         | 24.5%         |
| <b>Stayed at the same level</b> | <b>69</b>  | <b>28.6%</b>  |
| <b>Total</b>                    | <b>241</b> | <b>100.0%</b> |

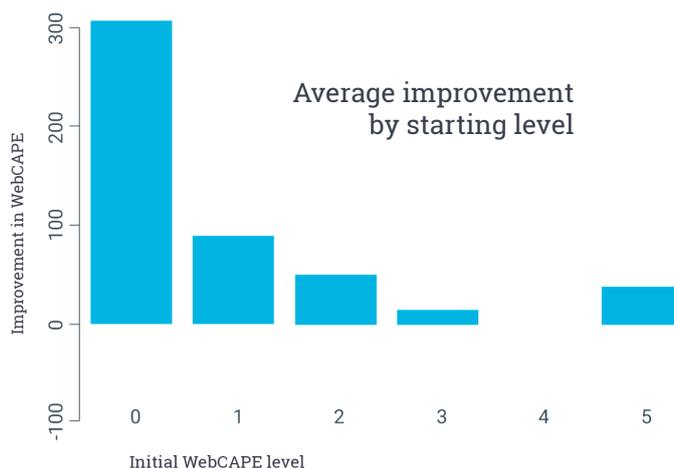
Table 6. STARTING LEVEL IN THE PRE-TEST FOR STUDENTS WHO IMPROVED ONE SEMESTER

| WebCAPE LEVEL             | 0     | 1     | 2     | 3   | 4    | 5    | 6   |
|---------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-----|------|------|-----|
| <b>Student percentage</b> | 27.9% | 54.1% | 11.5% | 0.0 | 3.3% | 3.2% | 0.0 |

No student scored above 783 points<sup>11</sup>, which is understandable considering that this score is equivalent to near-native proficiency, so not only is it an extremely difficult level to reach but it also hard for these learners to make any noticeable progress other than maintaining their level, which already requires a laudable effort.

### IMPROVEMENT BY STARTING LEVEL IN WEBCAPE PRE-TEST

The mean difference of the WebCAPE results did show statistically significant differences depending on the placement levels assigned according to the results of the pre-test. In other words, there is evidence that students initiating the ABA English course at lower levels made more noticeable progress than those starting at higher levels.



Regarding advancement in terms of learner profile, no significant improvement correlated to variables such as age group (Table 7), country (Table 8), educational background or hours of study.

In Table 8 we can see that there is a balanced rate of improvement in terms of language learning throughout the three geographical regions targeted in the study.

The mean difference in the WebCAPE scores achieved in the post-test compared to the pre-test for the total sample, amounts to 69.52 WebCAPE points. There are no statistically significant differences of this variable according to country or age group.

The average number of hours devoted to course study amounts to 39.82 hours. Empirical data shows that more study time does not necessarily have a greater positive impact on language improvement, especially because this relationship is largely dependent on the learner's cognitive capacity.

### IMPROVEMENT

Table 7. PER AGE GROUP

| AGE                | < 18 | 18 – 24 | 25 – 34 | 35 – 44 | 45 – 54 | 55 – 59 | + 60  |
|--------------------|------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|-------|
| <b>Improvement</b> | 50%  | 54.5%   | 73.5%   | 71.7%   | 70.2%   | 80.6%   | 65.5% |

Table 8. PER COUNTRY

| BRAZIL | ITALY | SPAIN | TOTAL |
|--------|-------|-------|-------|
| 67.6%  | 72.3% | 73.8% | 71.4% |

<sup>11</sup> See Table 1 "WebCAPE English language test cut-off scores and their equivalent".

## Results according to learner profile

According to the responses in the pre- and post- questionnaires, ABA English is effective across a broad range of learners and is not restricted to any clear-cut learning group.

There are **statistically significant differences which are related to motivation and the need to learn the language**. These findings lead us to believe that **motivation is no doubt one of the leading factors to influence learner performance. Motivation can be linked to career goals more clearly than other reasons, such as family or leisure**. This finding is in agreement with other studies such as Sevilla-Pavón, 2013, Martínez-Sáez, 2015; and Gimeno, 2015.

It is noteworthy that there is a very similar value between the percentages of learners who stated in the questionnaire that they did **not consider themselves good at learning English**, specifically 25.7%, and the amount of students, 29%, who did not improve their English language proficiency by at least one level. Although we cannot prove a direct correlation, it is in keeping with important expectancy studies, starting with Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson as far back as 1963, that claim that negative expectations usually have a negative impact just as positive self-image provides a boost in the learning curve in general education.

Another interesting finding relates to the **relationship between higher success rates and learner attitude towards ICT** (Information and Communication Technologies). When asked about the reasons for using ICT in their daily lives and the frequency of use, **learners who answered they frequently use ICT “to socialise and keep in touch with other people”, achieved a significantly higher performance rate and better scores** in the post-test, compared to those who claimed lower ICT use.

Replies to “What do you think your level of English is?”<sup>12</sup>, also have a significant relation to learner improvement rates. **Students who claimed to have a beginners’ level achieve significantly higher scores compared to those who claim to be at an intermediate level**. The analysis of results drawn from this item lead us to believe that **lower-level learners make more visible progress in their learning compared to the ones who start at higher levels**, not because the course is better suited to a particular level but because of the specific characteristics of foreign-language learning. As a learner moves up the level scale there are diminishing returns proportional to the amount of time and effort that is invested.

Interesting findings came to the fore upon analysing the participants’ preferred modes of tuition.

When asked what they thought was **the best way to learn a foreign language**<sup>13</sup>, the most popular answer from nearly half (48.3%) was **“an online course with assistance from a teacher”** in line with their decision to use ABA English Premium subscription course. **Next in preference**, with 23.1% was “a face-to-face course using technology in the classroom”.

These answers are in tune with the 81% responses reporting that their preferred language-learning modality was blended learning,

## The best way to learn a foreign language is “an online course with assistance from a teacher”

that is, a combination of distance learning and face-to-face guidance. Those who preferred completely autonomous learning without any tutor support amounted to 7.56%.

## User Satisfaction

The post-course questionnaire made it possible to gather relevant information about learner satisfaction after completing the three-month study period and a full ABA English level. Table 9 summarises the most important findings of the data analysis, for which ABA learners either agreed or strongly agreed with. Items from the questionnaire are ordered according to relevance and importance in foreign-language learning.

**Table 9. OVERALL USER SATISFACTION - POST-QUESTIONNAIRE**

| %     | Agree & strongly agree responses  |
|-------|---|
| 98%   | ABA English course content is useful and relevant                           |
| 87.5% | ABA English is easy to use for someone with minor computer skills           |
| 95%   | The situational films that characterise ABA English are useful and relevant |
| 85%   | The theoretical and grammatical explanations are sufficient                 |
| 98%   | Navigation is intuitive and easy to use                                     |
| 71.5% | Feedback received from tutors was useful and relevant                       |
| 97%   | Satisfied at being able to monitor their own progress                       |
| 81%   | The practice content is sufficient  |
| 61.5% | Received help from a tutor when needed                                      |
| 79%   | The audio input is clear and loud enough                                    |
| 97.5% | The ABA graphical interface is user-friendly                                |
| 93%   | ABA English encourages autonomous and independent learning practices        |
| 98%   | The graphics/symbols are clear  |
| 95%   | The layout is appealing   |

<sup>12</sup> Participants could choose from: beginner, lower-intermediate, intermediate, upper-intermediate, advanced or business.

<sup>13</sup> The options to choose from were: a) A face to face course in a classroom with a teacher; b) A face to face course using technology in the classroom; c) An online course with assistance from a teacher; d) A self-access online course, working by oneself.

## Satisfaction regarding contents

Respondents were **highly satisfied with the contents of the course** as shown by their answers to fourteen items that asked about this aspect, summarised in Table 10.

**Table 10. CONTENT SATISFACTION - POST-QUESTIONNAIRE**

| Satisfied & very satisfied  | %   |
|---|-----|
| Clarity and precision of the instructions   | 97% |
| Usefulness of the listening comprehension activities (ABA films, video lectures...) and exercises | 96% |
| Usefulness of the writing exercises   | 88% |
| Usefulness of the speaking activities and exercises   | 90% |
| Usefulness of the grammatical explanations (video lectures, interactive grammar tools)            | 94% |
| Usefulness of the role-play activities and exercises  | 85% |
| Usefulness of the vocabulary sections   | 87% |
| General interest and relevance of the topics in the ABA films                                     | 95% |
| General interest and relevance of the tasks and exercises   | 91% |
| Variety of contents and tasks   | 91% |
| Originality of contents and tasks   | 91% |
| Using films as the basis (with and without subtitles) to learn English                            | 97% |
| The natural method of ABA English is an effective way to learn                                    | 93% |
| Listening to different English accents is useful in the learning process                          | 87% |

**All of the values are above 85% satisfaction.** This is evidence of a **high degree of learner satisfaction with ABA English course content and the methodology** that goes with it.

The final section of the post-questionnaire (20 items) is about self-perception of students' EFL progress. **More than half (59%) reported that they found e-learning more motivating** than otherwise, and **over three quarters (77.5%) felt more comfortable learning online** (distance e-learning). **Almost nine in ten (88%) said that they enjoyed learning languages online.** Taken together, **these three figures constitute clear evidence of the learners' high degree of motivation and favourable attitude and their commitment toward completing the course**, confirmed by their finishing within the stipulated time.

Expectations can be a powerful force, so **those who have positive expectations about e-learning** as deduced by the four questionnaire items just mentioned, **are about 70% percent**, and, again, **this figure is revealing**, or symptomatic because it **coincides so much with the 71% figure of improved proficiency** by at least one College Semester after completing 24 Units of ABA English.

Self-assessment and self-awareness are also deemed to be important learning factors. **The data revealed** in our research describes an undoubtedly **favourable picture of learner perception through self-assessment.** Personal **satisfaction with overall EFL improvement rises as high as 93.5% among ABA students**, about the same figure as self-perception of improvement in the specific areas of grammar and vocabulary. However, when it comes to asking about any of "the four skills" (reading, writing, listening and speaking), their satisfaction is clearly lower (about 70% improvement) while 59% are satisfied with how their speaking has improved. There is almost total unanimity (99%) in expressing satisfaction regarding the length of the course covering 24 Units, which means that 3 months is enough time to complete 24 Units.

To conclude this section, there is **total unanimity among the sample population (100%) that they will recommend ABA English** to a friend.

### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Typical studies of language learning revolve around the 4 traditionally defined skills (oral & written expression & comprehension). But modern society is becoming increasingly multimodal and audiovisual, so there is a need for language proficiency placement tests that can take into account multimodal communicative competences and skills. ABA is well suited to this type of tuition, whereas WebCAPE does not actually test use of English in multimodal environments but is still very deeply rooted in monomodal rather than multimodal skills, such as writing on paper rather than writing on screens in different formats.

This means that there are inevitable gaps on both sides, i.e. aspects of the tests that the course may not cover, and likewise, elements of the ABA course that are left untested by WebCAPE.

The number of students in certain age groups prevented a picture of significant percentages. This was particularly the case of learners in the youngest age brackets. Students under 45 made up 48.6% of the total sample population, with under 18's as the smallest group of all providing just 1.7% of the volunteers. Although age has not revealed itself to be a factor influencing results, a more balanced distribution of age groups would have been desirable.

The fact that all participants were requested to do a minimum of 24 units in a maximum period of 3 months, means that it is not possible to establish how the volunteers would have advanced spontaneously, if they had been given the freedom to do however many units in however much time needed. Since in this research half of the students improved by two levels, it seems like a relevant question to explore in future studies.

Although there seems to be a correlation between language level and improvement in language proficiency, there was an insufficient number of high-level students to give any categorical statement. Moreover, WebCAPE is better suited for testing lower levels.

# Conclusions

The results show unequivocally that a broad majority of learners improve their proficiency in English, and that **overall learner satisfaction is extremely high** among the sample population of the study.

Empirical data provides evidence that 71.4% of the learners improved their English language skills by at least one level, equivalent to a full US College Semester. **An additional figure is 47%, the empirically proven amount of students to progress the equivalent of two College Semesters**, according to the improvement of their scores in the WebCAPE EFL pre- and post-tests. **These two figures might be said to be the most objective measure of ABA English efficacy over a period of three months, for which students averaged 40 hours to complete 24 units. This answers our first research question**, i.e. How effective is the ABA English e-learning course in terms of EFL language improvement over a period of three months?

There are no hard data to correlate variables that might account for the 28.6% who did not improve as much as the majority. However, here are two highly plausible reasons in the absence of irrefutable proof. One can be found in a limitation in the research methodology and the other in reasons of personal profile.

The former has to do with the mismatch between WebCAPE design and its emphasis on certain aspects of language, even on metalinguistic awareness and the whole ABA methodology based on a more natural, intuitive and communicative approach to language learning and use. Such important features of communication and language proficiency improvement are not tested by WebCAPE in any way.

## 99% of students perceived their English improved overall

The other possible reason has to do with the nature of the learners' personalities, interests, confidence and concentration. There is a certain correlation between having a clear motivation and making better progress, and likewise (or even more so) for frequent use of ICT in socialising.

So, it seems quite likely, although it remains unproven, that students who progress less remarkably were not motivated enough and/or were less inclined to online, anyway, for other purposes.

**Regarding the second research question** (what initial language level improved the most by learning English with ABA English e-learning course?), the findings clearly indicate that learners at lower levels experienced the best results in terms of improvement and more advanced learners progressed more slowly.

**The third research question** (what variables, such as motivation, bias or demographic profiles, may have an influence on language improvement within the scope of this study?) was answered by **two variables showing up as factors that affect a learners progress**: one is **motivation**, as a positive influence; the other one is **their use of ICT**.

Finally, it is important to go back to four revealing issues.

- **The overwhelming positive feedback for user satisfaction regardless of improvement.** This probably means that weaker performances from some students are more personal than related to ABA. When asked 'After doing the ABA course, do you think your English has improved overall?', 99% responded favourably. However, this positive self-awareness of improvement contrasts with the evidence that only 71.4% of the sample population empirically progressed by 1 level.
- **The interesting fact that nearly half the sample population jumped two levels.** It is encouraging and possibly the most positive empirical result of the whole research project. It invites further research in order to explore the ways in which ABA can develop its efficacy.
- **It is undoubtedly more difficult to jump from one level to the next as the proficiency gets higher.** This has two implications. One is that this is a factor that is beyond ABA and has to be taken into account in similar efficacy studies carried out on other EFL courses. The other goes back to the 47% of students jumping two levels and makes their achievement all the more remarkable.
- **There are clearly other skills involved in learning a language than the ones tested by WebCAPE**, some of which are actually very well addressed by ABA's natural approach, using audiovisuals and multimodal forms of expression, comprehension and explanations. These skills include, for example, translational skills, and pragmatic communicative competences, which are present in the national curriculum for language learning in many countries already, especially in Europe.

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