SOCIO-AFFECTIVE FACTORS THAT INFLUENCED THE TOEFL ITP TEST RESULTS OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN ENGLISH AT UNICORDOBA

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THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

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Acceptance Note

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Abstract

This research aimed to explore the socio-affective factors that affected the performance on the TOEFL ITP test of undergraduate students in basic education with emphasis in Humanities-English at University of Córdoba. This study used a qualitative approach and a descriptive case study design, which is an in-depth, detailed examination of a particular case within real-world contexts. After the analysis of results, it was found a set of socio-affective factors such as anxiety, insecurity, and demotivation which influenced graduates' outcomes in the test. The main aspects that generated anxiety were time pressure, that is, the lack of time to answer all the test questions; the technicality and rigor of the texts, which in turn generated a type of physical anxiety such as mental or physical exhaustion. Also, the poor sound conditions generated by the poor quality of the audios. All of these generated negative feelings which evidenced a decreasing TOEFL ITP results. Some pedagogical suggestions are made such as a socio-affective strategy training during the international preparation course in order to mitigate these feelings and be more successful in the test.

Keywords:*, socio-affective factors, foreign language testing, graduates, TOEFL-ITP test.*

Resumen

Esta investigación tuvo el propósito de explorar los factores socioafectivos que incidieron en el desempeño de los estudiantes en la prueba TOEFL ITP del programa de pregrado Licenciatura en educación básica con énfasis en Humanidades - Inglés de la Universidad de Córdoba. Para ello, se siguió una metodología de enfoque cualitativo con diseño de estudio de casos de tipo descriptivo que se caracteriza por la examinación profunda y detallada de un caso particular dentro de contextos reales. Luego de analizar los resultados, se evidenció un conjunto de factores socio afectivos como la ansiedad, la inseguridad y la desmotivación que influyeron en el desempeño de los graduados. Los principales aspectos ue generaron la ansiedad fueron la presión del tiempo, que es la falta de tiempo para responder a todas las preguntas, la tecnicidad y el rigor de los textos que generó un tipo de ansiedad física como cansancio físico o mental, además de las limitadas condiciones del sonido generada por la pobre calidad de los audios. Todo esto generó sentimientos negativos que se evidenciaron en los resultados del examen TOEFL-ITP. Se sugiere el entrenamiento en estrategias socio afectivas en el curso de entrenamiento con el fin de mitigar esta experiencia y ser mas exitosos en la prueba.

Palabras clave: factores *socio afectivos, examen TOEFL ITP, egresados, evaluación de idiomas extranjeros.*

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1. Introduction

Current literature has been studying about the influence of affective factors in language learning." Whereas learners' beliefs are likely to be fairly stable, their affective states tend to be volatile, affecting not only overall progress but responses to particular learning activities on a day-by day and even moment-by-moment basis" (Ellis, 1994, p. 483). On this basis, language tests have become a pervasive phenomenon in educational systems and are frequently used to play a crucial role in political, educational, and social contexts.

TOEFL ITP test means a challenge for test-takers when it comes to face their testing process (Kim, 2017). This matter of concern has caught the attention of academics who are interested on the academics in the educational and language assessment. Specially, to identify potential issues that impact test-takers experience and outcomes (De Luca et al., 2013). Thus, the testing process is not aliened to be affected by external elements that influence on visible effect on test-takers' results. Therefore, to denote the level of employee training and English language use is determined by different factors that describe the communicative abilities in a foreign language that each learner has evidenced.

Consequently, there is a dearth of studies that explore test-takers' internal elements and affective factors concerning the TOEFL ITP as a requirement for academical process. As a result, it is seen test-takers are usually influenced by internal elements when solving their test; internal elements such as socio-affective factors that affect students when completing their language learning process and testing. In this regard, Temirkhanova (2022) states that these socio-affective factors "Represent a group of feelings, emotions, mood and attitudes that people have about themselves or the encompassing environment. They can have either positive or negative influence on the process of language learning" (p. 7). Which means

that testing as part of the language learning process is not exempt of being influenced by factors that could affect results of TOEFL ITP process.

In this sense, the Bilingualism Policy Agreement of the University of Cordoba of 2019 has established those undergraduate students in the Bachelor of English must present a standardized proficiency test that certifies the level of English achieved at the end of their last English course. The certification level must be level C1 according to the CEFR *(Common European Framework of Reference for Languages)* to guarantee the monitoring of the public policy of Bilingualism in Colombia. In the case of the University of Córdoba, the standardized test chosen during the years 2016 to 2019 was the TOEFL - ITP *(Test of English as Foreign Language – Institutional Testing Program).*

Also, the TOEFL ITP tests is paper-based and uses 100 percent academic content to evaluate the English language proficiency of non-native English speakers. All questions are in multiple-choice format, with four answer choices per question. The tests evaluate skills in three areas: *Listening Comprehension:* measures the ability to understand spoken English as it is used in colleges and universities. *Structure and Written Expression:* measures recognition of selected structural and grammatical points in standard written English, and *Reading Comprehension* measures the ability to read and understand academic reading material written in English.

The University of Córdoba has designed a special course to prepare students before taking the exam. This course offers students a set of plans to prepare them with the necessary skills and strategies to deal with the main components of the TOEFL ITP. It uses scales from the Common European Framework of Reference to place students in their corresponding English level (A1-C1). It assesses students' ability to listen to and read terms of general

English language proficiency in social, educational, and workplace contexts. This preparation course is designed to help students develop the necessary skills required for the TOEFL ITP test: speaking, listening, writing, and reading. In this course, the students not only develop their language skills but also must focus on developing language test-taking strategies and critical thinking skills, particularly for reading development and listening skills.

The Bachelor Program in Basic Education with Emphasis in Humanities-English at the University of Córdoba has the mission of training teachers to perform in the field of teaching English. The teachers are formed in quality at different educational levels, with a high level of communicative, professional, investigative, and socio-cultural competence plus a high sense of community building in the local, national, and international context (Universidad de Córdoba, 2020).

Within the study plan of the Bachelor Program in Basic Education with Emphasis in Humanities-English, it was stipulated that students in their last semester must take the TOEFL ITP test to be able to certify the level of English in which they are, and thus be able to check if the English teaching program is complying with article number six of the university's bilingualism policies which says that *"graduates of the degree in English must certify the C1 level"* (Universidad de Córdoba, 2019, p.5). This C1 level which is according to the CEFRL as a high proficient level of English language is the required by the National Bilingualism Program - Colombia Very Well. This requirement and program of National Bilingualism is supported in the Resolution 02041 of February 3, 2016.

An analysis of the results of 364 participants in the TOEFL ITP test from 2016 to 2019 of students in the last semester of the degree in English revealed   that 6.3% of the

students, 23 of them, reached only level A2, which, following the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, is a basic level called *Basic User: Level A2 (Waystage).* Furthermore, 52.7% of the participants, that is, 125 of them reached level B1, which according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages is a level called *Independent User: Level B1 (Threshold)*. It is also observed that 136 students representing 37.4% of the population reached level B2, which according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, is a level called *Independent User: Level B2 (Vantage).* On the other hand, only 13 students corresponding to 3.6% reached level C1, which by the Common Framework of Reference for Languages this level is called *Proficient User: Level C1 (Effective Operational Proficiency)*.

Table 1.

TOEFL ITP results from 2016 to 2019 according to the CEFR Levels Methods

Year	Number of students	A2	%	B1	%	B2	%	C1	%
2016	103	7	6,8%	65	63,1%	29	28,2%	2	1,9%
2017	90	2	2,2%	47	52,2%	40	44,4%	1	1,1%
2018	83	13	15,7%	41	49,4%	27	32,5%	2	2,4%
2019	88	1	1,1%	39	44,3%	40	45,5%	8	9,1%
TOTAL	**364**	**23**	**6,3%**	**192**	**52,7%**	**136**	**37,4%**	**13**	**3,6%**

Note. Results were collected by the documents from the language department at University of Córdoba.

According to the Table 1, it was observed that only 3.6% of all the students in those consecutive four years who took the TOEFL ITP test reached the C1 level, the rest of them that represent 96.4% did not reach the level required by the aforementioned authorities. These results call into question the mission and the vision of the university, general and specific

competencies of the graduates, and the professional profile stipulated in the Educational Project of the Bachelor Program in Basic Education with Emphasis in Humanities-English at the University. As well as the policies of the university and the nation. As it has been observed, this situation has recurred during the four consecutive years, from which it is inferred that there is a problem that has negatively influenced the performance of the students concerning the results of the TOEFL ITP test.

In this regard, this problem affects students, teachers, and the university. It affects students because most of them only reach the B1 level, which is not appropriate for a bachelor's degree student in English. In addition, the professional profile will be affected, and students may miss out on many job opportunities. It also affects the teachers of the English language teaching program because doubts are generated about their teaching strategies. It also affects the reputation of the university as an institution of higher education, calling into question its high-quality accreditation. If this continues, the institutional horizon of the university will not make sense and its prestige as one of the best universities in terms of English teacher training will be affected.

Several factors may be influencing student performance on TOEFL ITP test, such as academic, cognitive, methodological, social, and affective. Previous research has studied academic and methodological factors and suggests that further research be carried out on topics such as motivation and students difference such age and social status. Additionally, it was also found that exist cognitive factors that influences the performance and suggested that further investigations be carried out social and educational variables that help determine their relevance to test performance (Mahmud, 2014, Cheng et al., 2014). Other studies have also been carried out on the three sections into which the TOEFL ITP test is divided, such as the

work of Abboud and Hussein (2011) who suggest that future research should explore into socio-affective factors more than cognitive or academic issues, since universities generally offer preparation courses for this type of test regarding the academical and cognitive processes (p. 68).

There are few qualitative studies about socio-affective factors and their influence on the TOEFL ITP outcomes. Some intentions have been developed at a national level but still it remains uncertain how this may happen in future English teachers. Researchers such as Castro (2009) conducted a study based on the perceptions of a group of students, alumni, and professors of the Bachelor of Modern Languages regarding standardized English exams IELTS, TOEFL, and CAE respectively. Anxiety and perception tests were used to achieve the study objective, and it was concluded that there must be good preparation before the test, which implies making a thorough study of the test format to adapt to it in terms of the expectations and existing needs of those involved.

On the other hand, at the international level, Muliawati and Nyak (2020) conducted research on the degree of anxiety students experienced during the TOEFL test. The participants for their study were 50 university students from various non-English majors, who developed a 10-question questionnaire. At the end, the researchers concluded when a person experiences a high level of anxiety, it can result in emotional or physical distress, difficulty concentrating, and/or paranoia.

In addition, Pacas (2015) identified some of the factors that contribute to the TOEFL performance of graduates. To achieve the objectives of his research, the 30 graduates of the English Language Teacher in the years 2012-2014 were taken as a sample. A questionnaire with direct and selection questions, and a semi-structured interview were developed. After

the entire investigation process was carried out, it was concluded that most of the students did not reach the minimum score required by the University which was a requirement to graduate. In addition, only a quarter of the examinees reached the minimum level in the first attempt, while the rest had to take the test again. Furthermore, there was no high correlation between the development of higher cognitive processes (self-regulation, metacognition) and the results obtained. However, the attitudinal factors of the graduates presented a high degree of incidence, being the degree of anxiety and the ability to control it the most correlated with the global TOEFL score.

Furthermore, Amiryousefi and Tavakoli (2011) empirically explored the effects of Test anxiety, Multiple Intelligences, and test takers' performance motivation on the listening, reading, and writing sections of the TOEFL test. Thirty participants were involved in this study, and a Multiple Intelligences Development Assessment Scales (MIDAS) questionnaire, a Test Anxiety Scale, and a Motivation Test Battery were applied After all research process, investigators concluded that the TOEFL test could be biased towards test takers with a musical and kinesthetic intelligence base. Test takers' responses to questions exploring possible causes of test anxiety ranked time limit, test duration, and lack of confidence among the most common sources of test anxiety. Therefore, time management strategies can be helpful in this regard.

Likewise, Mahmud (2014) explored the students' problems in answering the TOEFL, where 60 students of three different classes from the Graduate Program were taken as a sample for this study. Mahmud conducted an in-depth semi-structured interview as an instrument with representatives of these three classes and concluded based on the intensive interview and classroom observation, "The main reasons were due to several conflicting

factors, such as low English proficiency, test practice, motivation, and student differences, such as age and social status" (Mahmud, 2014).

Moreover, Stankov and Lee (2008) examined the nature of confidence on abilities, personality, and metacognition during TOEFL test application. They worked with 824 participants from two universities. After the procedures were carried out, it was concluded that confidence is a separate psychological trait, somewhere between capacity and personality.

As it was mentioned above, most students fear that they will fail the test due to the high pressure they have when applying for the test. As it is deeply attached to their future, students tend to get anxious and nervous. Some authors have claimed that these emotions are brought about because of the anxiety computers generate related to TOEFL IBT. In addition, it appears during the test some difficulties such as methodological factors and timely preparation to face the TOEFL IBT. Also, there are motivational factors and some socio-affective factors such as degree of anxiety and higher cognitive process.

As can be seen, this type of research to date has tended to focus on methodological factors and test structure factors rather than delving into socio-affective factors which play an important role when presenting these types of tests. Little is known about how socio-affective factors influence the TOEFL results, especially in future English teachers and even when they must correspond to the demands of official requirements. Thus, it is necessary to find out about this issue and thus respond to the challenges asked by the MEN, University and the English programs.

Thus, the purpose of this qualitative study is to explore which factors affected the graduate students when taking a standardized test of English, in this case, the TOEFL ITP test at Unicordoba during the years 2016 – 2019 since for four consecutive years the 59% of the results of the students of the degree in English have fallen below the levels (B2 and C1) required by the university for degrees in English. The results obtained will provide information that can help strengthen the pedagogical and academic processes of the career in English, will generate new ideas on how to strengthen teacher-student relationships to manage test development, and will help to understand the behaviors, attitudes, and states of mind in students, and progressively help them to described a combination of effort and desire to reach the aim of learning the language plus positive attitude towards the learning process.

Research Question

This research was conducted to answer the following question:

- What socio-affective factors influenced the TOEFL ITP test results of

  undergraduate students in English from Unicordoba during the years 2016 to 2019?

This research follows some chapters, associated with the description and formulation of the problem in terms of socio-affective factors that imply on the TOEFL ITP performance. The second chapter presents the theoretical and conceptual framework where it is possible to appreciate, in first place, the literature review. Then, there is a third chapter that describes the methodology carried out on this proposal, which is framed in the qualitative approach.

The fourth chapter presents findings based on teachers' and graduates' description about the factors that might have influenced on the TOEFL ITP result of the test-takers using the data collected. In the fifth chapter, the discussion is settled between findings, literature

review, and theoretical framework about socio-affective factors. Specially, *anxiety, demotivation, and insecurity*. Finally, conclusions and pedagogical recommendations are presented in relation to the importance of strategies to decrease some issues such as mental blocking, time pressure, and body rigidity before and during the TOEFL ITP test.

2. Theoretical Framework

This section seeks to address a line of research that is theoretically based on students' development and socio-affective factors from evaluation revealing an integrated systemic conception and an important social vision that allows sustaining the study approached. As a result, it is presented the conceptual framework, environments and resources for learning towards the use of internal and external elements as innovative pedagogical strategies. Also, it appeared some relevant concepts that emerge from literature review such as, evaluation, standardized test, TOEFL ITP, socio-affective factors, motivation, anxiety, and self-confidence. To sum up, the next literature review presents a critical review of previous studies that are relevant to this work.

Conceptual Framework

For a better understanding of the research work, it is necessary to define the most relevant concepts of this study, such as assessment, evaluation, standardized test, TOEFL ITP, socio-affective factors, motivation, anxiety, and self-confidence;

The terms 'testing' and 'assessment' are often used interchangeably and therefore cause confusion among language educators. Clapham (2000), for example, points out that 'assessment' is "used to cover all methods of testing and assessment" (p. 48) even though some language teachers and testers distinguish between 'testing' as a form of standardized testing such as the TOEFL test and 'assessment' used for informal methods without using a test. For the purpose of the present study, the term 'assessment' is adopted as a general term to include all forms of language testing with or without an actual test. These concepts will be described below:

Assessment

Assessment for this research denotes a systematic process-oriented towards identification, analysis, and interpretation of students' basic learning processes with possibilities to propose a didactic sequence that mitigates or generates fundamental changes based on learners' cognitive needs. In this sense, it is pertinent to consider that assessment is "A process that involves documenting knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs, in measurable terms, with a view to making improvements, not just to make judgement" (Chetty & Mokwele, 2020, p. 6).

Evaluation

On the contrary to assessment, when defining evaluation, this could be defined as product-oriented or the product of that process; others would say that it refers to the teaching practices and learning environments. Therefore, "evaluation is thus usually focused on a program or course or at an organizational level" (Chetty & Mokwele, 2020, p. 3). However, some authors such as Alonso-Cifuentes et al., (2019) believe that evaluation methods for passing exams and tests are subjective and insufficient, because they do not always truly reflect students' skills and knowledge.

Therefore, continuous evaluation systems are used in many places to monitor constantly the learning process, allowing students to observe their progress and control their learning. Evaluations can also be carried out for teachers and professors, or applied to schools, colleges, and universities, as well as to educational programs and school curriculum. Rea et al. (1998) states that evaluation is an intrinsic part of teaching and learning. "It is important for the teacher because it can provide a wealth of information to use for the future direction of classroom practice, for the planning of courses, and for the management of

learning tasks and students" (p. 3). In other words, the evaluation is a product that provides valuable information about the performance of a process and how effective it could be by inquiring on the results of the evaluation process.

In addition, Natriello (1987 as cited in William, 2011, p. 4) proposed a model of the evaluation process as consisting of eight stages:

1. Establishing the purpose of the evaluation.
2. Assigning tasks to students.
3. Setting criteria for student performance.
4. Settings standards for student performance.
5. Sampling information on student performance.
6. Appraising student performance.
7. Providing feedback to student performers.
8. Monitoring outcomes of the evaluation of students.

These eight principles of evaluation can be considered as the step-by-step construction of a correct evaluating process in which the evaluated gets tested but also feedbacked from the process in order to improve or correct the process. Also, formative evaluation allows to observe three moments when teachers make the goal understandable and visible to all students so that it becomes a shared goal that tells where they are going.

Figure 1.

Formative Evaluation Cycle

As shown in Figure 1, the final point of the cycle is "Feedback and Adjustment", with the purpose of closing the distance between current learning and the learning that the teacher and students expect to develop at the end of a class. In terms of assessment, adjustment is the process of obtaining, synthesizing, and interpreting information to facilitate decision-making for providing feedback to learners. That is, to modify and improve learning during the teaching period. Feedback is a central component in this cycle, since the decisions that are made based on the evidence generates changes in the learning state of the students and helps to close the gap. To provide feedback may lead students on current state of their learning in relation to the achievement criteria for reaching the goal and provide guidance so that they know what to do to. When talking about evaluation, it is important to mention testing as a complementary process of it.

Test

The test is a method by which an evaluation of knowledge, attitude and performance of a person is made. It is the value, importance, or significance of something in consideration of a set of standards or norms. According to Villalobos (2001), the main characteristic of evaluation consists of "determining if the purposes and objectives of a course have been obtained, and if the procedures used during the course have been effective for learning to take place" (p.129). Therefore, testing is applicable to different fields of human activity, such as education, industry, health, psychology, business management, economics, finance, and technology.

Accordingly, many activities can be evaluated: personal performance, the value of the product in the market, project development, patient health, product quality and the economic situation of the organization, etc. However, Kizlik (2012) states that "when we

test, what we are doing is engaging in some process that is designed to provide information that will help us make a judgment about a given situation. Generally, any evaluation process requires information about the situation in question" (p. 2). That is to say, the evaluation is an instrument that allows tracking a process which may help teachers to be aware of a certain situation. It is through the test that is revised whether the strategies a teacher is using at the time of evaluation meet the objectives set during the process, and if they facilitate the learning process of the students.

In addition, testing implies analyzing situations critically to unveil inconsistencies, opportunities, ability, critical thinking, and problem-solving capacity; as mentioned by Kizlik, (2012), "…When we test, we are saying that the process will yield information regarding the worthiness, appropriateness, goodness, validity, legality, etc." (p. 2). In this sense, testing is more than giving a value. It helps to measure and track a process to identify strengths and weaknesses. Among the different existing testing strategies to measure the quality of written production are "informal observation, the technique of general comments and the use of the portfolio" (Hyslop, 1990, p. 13). This allows collecting the information that demonstrates the abilities and student achievements, how they think, how they question, analyze, synthesize, produce or create, and how they interact (intellectually, emotionally and socially) with others. That is, it allows identifying the learning of concepts, procedures, and attitudes of students.

In the field of pedagogy, the test is a systematic process of recording and evaluating students' achievements in the learning process. In this regard, Manzi and Rossetti (2004) state that, through educational test, "it is possible to measure the quality and effectiveness of the teaching-learning process that has already been carried out, but the evaluation sets a pattern

that can become useful in the future process" (p. 242). Therefore, it is carried out considering the educational goals specified in the school plan. The testing process can be carried out in different ways: by means of tests (written or oral), essays or monographs, and considering students' participation in the classroom. In relation to, the analysis from a standardized test such as TOEFL - ITP it is important to know each detail about this exam in terms of sections, period of time for each question and content examined.

Standardized Test

Standardized tests are essential to measure the learning or development of an individual based on different standards according to stablished levels. In accordance with Cronbach (1949) it is stated that:

> Standardized is one in which the procedure, apparatus, and scoring have been fixed so that precisely the same test can be given at different times and places. Standardizing testing conditions and content is meant to increase the reliability of examinees' scores by reducing sources of error extraneous to the abilities or skills being measured (p. 96).

This is the mechanism used to measure the communicative competence in English of university students, therefore it is necessary to clarify its concept to understand the situation that students face when taking a standardized test such as the TOEFL ITP test.

Test of English as Foreign Language – Institutional Testing Program (TOEFL ITP).

This study emphasizes in the TOEFL ITP standardized tests since it is necessary to know what the test that the graduates faced consists of. The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is developed by Educational Testing Service (ETS) to measure English proficiency of test-takers whose native language is not English. TOEFL ITP tests are paper-based (PBT) and use one hundred percent academic content to evaluate the English language proficiency of non-native English speakers. The TOEFL ITP Level 1 and TOEFL ITP Level 2 tests evaluate skills in 3 areas: Listening comprehension measures the ability to understand spoken English as it is used in colleges and universities; structure and written expression measures recognition of selected structural and grammatical points in standard written English; and reading comprehension measures the ability to read and understand academic reading material written in English (ETS, 2022).

According to Educational Testing Service (ETS), TOEFL ITP tests are paper-based and use 100 percent academic content to evaluate the English language proficiency of non-native English speakers. All questions are in multiple-choice format, with four answer choices per question. This is the test that students at Unicordoba are facing at the end of their English careers.

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching Assessment (CEFR)

The Common European Framework "Provides a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe. It

describes in a comprehensive way what language learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively" (CEFR, 2001, p. 1).

The Common Reference Levels: English Language Levels.

The following are the levels required internationally by the CEFR, for an English learner.

Basic User: Level A1 (Breakthrough) – is considered the lowest level of generative language use, the point at which the learner can interact in a simple way, ask and answer simple questions about themselves, where they live, people they know, and things they have, initiate and respond to simple statements in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics, rather than relying purely on a very finite rehearsed, lexically organized repertoire of situation-specific phrases.

Basic User: Level A2 (Waystage). At this level are found most of the descriptors that indicate social functions, such as the use of simple and courteous forms of everyday greeting and direction; greet people, ask how they are and react to the news; handle very short social exchanges; ask and answer questions about what they do at work and in their free time; make and respond to invitations; discuss what to do, where to go, and arrange to meet.

Independent User: Level B1 (Threshold). At this level the user has the ability to interact and transmit what he/she wants in different contexts, for example: generally, follow the main points of extended discussion around him/her, provided speech is clearly articulated in standard dialect; give or seek personal views and opinions in an informal discussion with friends; express the main point he/she wants to make comprehensible.

Independent User: Level B2 (Vantage). Here the user is able to converse naturally, fluently, and effectively; understand in detail what is said to him/her in the standard spoken language even in a noisy environment; initiate discourse, take his/her turn when appropriate and end the conversation when he/she needs to, though he/she may not always do this elegantly; use stock phrases (e.g. 'That's a difficult question to answer') to gain time and keep the turn whilst formulating what to say; interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without imposing strain on either party; adjust to the changes of direction, style and emphasis normally found in conversation; sustain relationships with native speakers without unintentionally amusing or irritating them or requiring them to behave other than they would with a native speaker.

Proficient User: Level C1 (Effective Operational Proficiency). At this level, the user can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously, almost effortlessly. The user has a good command of a broad lexical repertoire allowing gaps to be readily overcome with circumlocutions. There is little obvious searching for expressions or avoidance strategies; only a conceptually difficult subject can hinder a natural, smooth flow of language.

Proficient User: Level C2 (Mastery). At this level is not intended to imply native-speaker or near native-speaker competence. What is intended is to characterize the degree of precision, appropriateness, and ease with the language which typifies the speech of those who have been highly successful learners. Descriptors calibrated here include convey finer shades of meaning precisely by using, with reasonable accuracy, a wide range of modification devices; has a good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms with awareness of the connotative level of meaning; backtrack and restructure around a difficulty so smoothly the interlocutor is hardly aware of it. In this regard, some factors

as the socio-affective influence significatively the performance of the students when taking the test.

For researchers, levels of communicative competence from different standardized tests have been of interest to investigate in depth since it has been found that there are different factors, according to literature review that can influence on test-takers results. The factors identified on the documentary analysis are related to cognitive, academic, and socio-affective factors, among others. The interest for this study is concentrated on investigating about socio-affective factors. Thus, these factors will be described and explained bellow and how they are related to test-solving and the influence they have on test-takers.

Socio-affective factors

The socio-affective factors such as intrinsic and extrinsic elements have also been deemed as important because it drives cognition (Alvermann, 2002). Therefore, the learning process is mediated by socio-affective factors in which context could be natural settings, associated with educational development (Guédez-Fernández, 2011). In this sense, it is important to carry out a descriptive study of the characteristics concerning socio-affective factors that the participants present when facing an English level test since identifying them it would be possible to address them properly in benefit of improving the students testing process (Boakye et al., 2014).

In this regard, it is essential that socio-affective factors should be attended appropriately by characterizing them since it would help the process of the students by providing them of tools and elements to effectively face a test. It is believed socio-affective

factors may cause cognitive interference while preparing for examination, taking examination or both. During the preparation for a test these factors may lead to poor understanding and organization of the concepts and hence make the retrieval cumbersome (Amiryousefi & Tavakoli, 2011). Based on the above, some socio-affective factors may be identified when presenting a test, specially a standardized test such as the TOEFL ITP.

Anxiety

Anxiety, based on authors as Muliawati et al., (2020) and Castro (2009), is a common factor that influence on students' performance when taking a test. Being evaluated in some students represent emotions characterized by phenomenological (cognitive: worry) and emotional: effects on emotions, psychological, and behavioral responses or changes. The cognitive component (worry) refers to thoughts related to with the evaluative context, such as thinking about the possibility of failing the test and its impact; not being able to finish it or not answering all the reagents and the shame of fail the test. In this sense, excessive concern about exams can negatively affect motivation and self-esteem as suggested by self-efficacy theory (Alvermann, 2002).

Foreign language learning anxiety has been defined as "a distinctive complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986, p. 128). The emotional component refers to the actual arousal that people experience when they take a test, such as fear and discomfort (Dias et al., 2010; Freeman & Freeman, 2012). Anxiety problem is an emotional condition; therefore, there is a combination of feelings, cognitive, physiological, emotional, and behavioral expressions. This emotional reaction

occurs mainly in situations of social or academic evaluation, in which a subject perceives in a threatening way the assessment that can be formed about his level of competence and a possible low performance in the work and the consequences that could bring him. Anxiety based on Bodas et al., (2005) causes students to focus on self-evaluative thoughts that are generally derogatory in relation to their own skills and abilities, rather than the task itself. In consequence, this will lead the students to fail tests or doubt about their capability of achieving the required level or objective.

Anxiety becomes excessive in frequency and intensity, it can become a very serious obstacle, appearing obvious symptoms such as physical, psychological, and social discomfort. Anxiety in normal cases is a temporary emotional state or situation of the human organism. This may be characterized by subjective impressions of tension, apprehension, or worry which may vary over time and range in intensity. Thus, as mentioned previously, anxiety is an emotional symptom. This could make test-takers experience indecision, hopelessness, worry, confusion, fear, and pessimism. Anxiety is also a cognitive symptom which may lead students exhibit a feeling of insecurity (Amiryousefi & Tawakoni, 2011).

Insecurity

Insecurity before exams is closely associated with anxiety. This type of insecurity is characterized by causing a sensation that a person can experience in a situation where performance matters a lot or there is great pressure to do things well. The insecurity of the student before a written test, can be motivated by several reasons, among the most common there is the lack of preparation for the exam, as well as the lack of confidence in the acquired knowledge. The latter could result or be caused by the lack of "time management, lack of

vocabulary, lack of linguistic skills, and computer anxiety, which considerably affect test-takers' performance" (Zamora, 2021, p. 9). On the other hand, providing test-takers with tools, strategies, and training to face exams will lead to have a better performance for the students when they feel confidence to solve what they were prepared for.

Motivation

Motivation is referred to those psychological processes that cause the arousal, direction, and persistence of voluntary actions that are goal-directed. (Shah & Gardner, 2008). Motivation is key for the teaching and learning processes to be carried out successfully, that is why it is important to take this concept into account within research processes. The personal motivation of each student and the motivation that English teachers exert on each one of them, is a crucial factor to be able to make the most of the teaching-learning process at the university, so it is necessary to know how motivated the students are for their learning of English and how each teacher motivates them to move forward in this process. In this regard, students' motivation is essential when taking a test since it will help them to find a purpose on what they do and will make them set objectives to achieve before taking the test.

Demotivation

The lack of motivation is considered one of the causes or incidences in the failure of internal or external tests, standardized or not standardized test. In addition, this could also be promoted from internal and external agents. Demotivation could even lead to other characteristics normally associated with stress such as "low self-esteem or poor self-worth" (Chong et al., 2019, p. 69). Demotivation intervenes negatively in the good performance of

the students during the tests. The lack of motivation decreases the level of energy and the level of activity that the student directs towards certain goals.

Thus, demotivation could be defined as "specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioral intention or an ongoing action‖ (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013, p. 139). This would cause a loss of interest and, therefore, the students end up abandoning or stopping insisting on the cognitive task. demotivation causes appearance of negative expectations regarding their abilities as students and a feeling of being incompetent, in addition to feeling negative emotions regarding the development and performance on the test.

Confidence

Confidence is a state of being clear-headed either that a hypothesis or prediction is correct or that a chosen course of action is the best or most effective. Confidence comes from a Latin word 'fidere' which means "to trust"; therefore, having self-confidence is having trust in one's self (Snyder et al., 2009). Scholars distinguish between generalized trust (also known as social trust), which is the extension of trust to a relatively large circle of unfamiliar others, and particularized trust, which is contingent on a specific situation or a specific relationship (Schilke et al., 2021).

Self-confidence

In attention to Bandura (1997) self-confidence is defined as "self-evaluations by the individual about what they believe they can do" (p. 36). In this context, "self-confidence" is

the belief or perception that the individual has of her own capacity to carry out a set of activities or tasks.

Self-esteem

It is confidence in one's own worth or abilities. Self-esteem encompasses beliefs about oneself (for example, "I am loved", "I am worthy") as well as emotional states, such as triumph, despair, pride, and shame (Hewitt, 2009). Self-esteem is crucial so that students can continue with their academic processes in order to be successful in everything they set out to do.

Stress

It is a feeling of emotional strain and pressure; it is a type of psychological pain. Small amounts of stress may be beneficial, as it can improve athletic performance, motivation and reaction to the environment. Excessive amounts of stress, however, can increase the risk of strokes, heart attacks, ulcers, and mental illnesses such as depression (Sapolsky, 2004). Stress can be external and related to the environment but may also be caused by internal perceptions that cause an individual to experience anxiety or other negative emotions surrounding a situation, such as pressure, discomfort, etc., which they then deem stressful. (Jones et al., 2001). Stress can atrophy learning processes in students, it can also hinder other processes such as taking tests, exams, homework, among others.

As it can be seen, it is revealed that internal and external elements represent an important issue on students' outcomes when facing situations that test their language knowledge, learning, and proficiency.

Literature Review

The results of students taking a standardized English proficiency test, such as the TOEFL tests, whether positive or negative, largely depends on multiple factors, which can be some of the following: academics, methodological, and social. On this basis, some research have carried out studies on these topics to understand reasons from students' performance and factors affecting the TOEFL ITP test results. For instance, affective factors have been addressed as the study conducted by such as Muliawati et al., (2020) who focused on investigating the extent of anxiety experienced by TOEFL ITP test-takers in the Indonesian context as EFL learners.

There are some studies carried out on different standardized tests such as IELTS, CAE, TOEFL, CET-4, CAE, CET, and GEPT, among others. These studies have followed qualitative, quantitative and mix-methods approached. The common findings among these tests confirm that there is a negative impact of anxiety on language achievement. In the national context, Castro et al., (2009) explored the perceptions of some of the members of the educational community of the Bachelor of Arts in the Teaching of Modern Languages at Javeriana University about the TOEFL, IELTS and CAE exams required as a graduation condition of the major since 2005. The study analyzes not only the national and local contexts about English demands, but also the tests' characteristics and the perceptions of some students, teachers, and ex alumni with the goal of describing them and considering their implications in our context. Methodologically, the three tests were analyzed and the perceptions of the three groups were gathered through surveys to describe the similarities and differences which are perceived about the tests. One of the findings revealed that the participants felt more affected by the cultural contents of the tests, something they were not

familiarized with, and which generated a sense of frustration among them to then end up with the half of the participants without the required score.

In the international context, several studies have addressed the issue of text anxiety. For example, Wu and Chia-Lung (2017) after investigating university student´s views of graduation policies to take the GEPT after graduation in Taiwan´s universities, they found that test anxiety had a significant negative effect on test performance, and they specify that students who showed more anxiety about the text were the ones who showed poorer performance. Equally, Zheng (2010) examined factors such as anxiety, motivation, and linguistic confidence, among others, and their relation to language test performance in Chinese university students who took the standardized test CET-4 by using a mixed methods approach and applying surveys and interview inquiries.

These researchers confirmed the negative impact of anxiety on language achievement. Similarly, Cheng et al., (2014) examined test takers 'anxiety, motivation, and test performance in social and educational contexts in three standardized tests such as GEPT, CAEL and CET. These authors found complex interrelationships of participants´ anxiety and motivation in their test performance. They also revealed that the differences in motivation and text anxiety came from social variables.

On the other hand, it is found that some researchers have addressed studies about the TOEFL-iBT but focusing in different skills from the test. For instance,   Amiryousefi and Tawakoni (2011) conducted a study to provide empirical evidence to analyze if there is a relation between test anxiety, type of motivation, and intellectual abilities of test takers. Furthermore, researchers aimed to explore their scores on TOEFL iBT reading, listening, and

writing sections, especially the verbatim use of the input texts in the integrated writing task, read and listen to write.

To carry out the study, Multiple Intelligences Development Assessment Scales (MIDAS) questionnaires, a test anxiety scale, and some survey questions detecting test anxiety-provoking factors were given to 30 subjects attending TOEFL iBT classes at ACECR. Then, their scores on a TOEFL iBT test were compared, and the language features in their written texts were analyzed for sources used to determine the possible effects of the given characteristics. The results revealed that, test takers usually had test anxiety which is an element that coexists with the test-taking process and, some factors like time limitation, length of the test and lack of self-confidence provoked test anxiety. Although this study was not focused on the TOEFL-ITP which is the case of this study, the results help this study as support to understand the affective factors that are decisive when taking the TOEFL-ITP test.

Muliawati et al., (2020) also focused on investigating the extent of anxiety experienced by TOEFL ITP test-takers in the Indonesian context as EFL learners. Although a high number of studies were devoted to anxiety within English classroom contexts, such as anxiety in reading, writing, and speaking skills, and the relationship between anxiety and motivation, besides intelligence dominance among non-low proficiency students, these authors decided to research into the TOEFL ITP test, which had not been studied previously by researchers before this study.

The research design was a descriptive quantitative method in which a 10-question questionnaire was used as the research instrument in a sample of 50 university students from various non-English majors. They were selected by using purposive sampling. The questions were scored using a five-point scale, and the data were analyzed using the three steps of data

analysis. The data analysis showed that more than 80% percent of students experienced moderate anxiety before and during the TOEFL ITP test-taking, which means that test anxiety is present in every testing process and many test-takers. At the same time, the rest (20%) suffered from mild anxiety. The findings of this research can benefit TOEFL Preparation classes instructors by taking the anxiety variable into account when teaching TOEFL so that students' anxiety before and during the test can be minimized.

Additionally, Pacas (2015) conducted a descriptive correlational STUDY which objective was to identify factors related to the TOEFL performance of graduates of the English Language Teaching Program for Third Cycle and Secondary Education at UCA from 2012-2014. The research was done with 30 graduates in the mentioned years and a focus group of 5 teachers of the specialty, using two types of instruments elaborated by the researcher: a questionnaire to collect the graduates' perceptions and a semi-structured interview for the mentioned focus group. Only a little more than a quarter of the total number of graduates reach the minimum score for graduation.

Moreover, this performance was diagnosed and related to personal and institutional variables. The factors most highly related to the results are the degree of anxiety and the ability to control it, which means that students face a challenge in handling test anxiety. The researcher recommended that the TOEFL should be eliminated as a graduation requirement for the English Teaching Program and that a specific test is congruent with the competencies and components of the career curriculum. Although the recommendations found in Pacas' study are in contrast with the current study, the findings help this study to understand its findings and to support what the aspects that may arise from it.

De Luca et al., (2013) after conducting an exploring study on the TOEFL-iBT to identify and raise potential issues associated with this test, they suggested that more time may be needed or the number of tasks should be diminish since the overall impact of the inability to complete the different tasks in the test due to timing, might diminish the test performance of test takers which could also lead to results that may be less valid. Similarly, Razaq and Hussein (2011) after studying the difficulties that the students face during the TOEFL-ITP test, they recommend taking into consideration time management as a strategy to be successful in this test since TOEFL-ITP sections are taken under time limited pressures.

Another factor to attend, in the literature review on this research is the test preparation that is described as "management, drilling, memorizing, and socio-affective factors in turn. Learning strategies focused on the development of language skills via extensive and functional uses of English language were used scarcely" (Qin, 2013). Based on this statement, the study centers attention to promote internal and external factors that leads on test results. Moreover, Mu-Hsuan (2018) reveals five factors that are related to the impact of the test:

> (a) the impact of the test on English skill development in test preparation, (b) the
> negative impact of the test on English learning, (c) the impact of the test content
> on preparation and the test-taking process, (d) the impact of the official policy
> on individual preparation, and (e) the perceived value of the test (p. 3).

The previous practical implications appear on beneficial effects on test results. Furthermore, socio-affective factors like self-efficacy in test preparation can be strengthened

by the process of test preparation, the use of strategy, and self-regulation of resource management, rather than purely by test-taking practices. Finally, affective strategies involving self-motivating and self-regulating skills can be introduced to learners to alleviate their learning anxiety and to enhance internal elements.

To sum up, Amalu and Bekomson (2020) mentioned that "the word test might seem familiar, but it has the potency of eliciting varying degrees" (p. 311). This means that although test-takers are being prepared it is possible to help them to self-regulate possible difficulties at a cognitive, social, or physiological level; and there is no apparent way to stop feeling anxious, or under pressure or even feel fear of failure. In any case, being prepared in the aforementioned aspects will make a big difference.

3. Methodology

In this chapter, it is described the procedure of this research starting from research design to data collection methods applied with the purpose of collecting information leading to answering each of the research categories and research questions mentioned in the first chapter of this study.

Research Design

This study followed a qualitative research approach which is in accordance with Leavy (2017) as an approach used to "Explore; to robustly investigate and learn about the social phenomenon; to unpack the meanings people ascribe to activities, situations, events, or artifacts; or to build a depth of understanding about some dimension of social life" (p. 36). Through this type of research, it was possible to identify, from the perception of those involved, aspects related to socio-affective factors and how these factors affected test-takers when taking the TOEFL ITP standardized test of English language proficiency.

Conducting qualitative research seems to be part of the search for knowledge to understand and interpret what we do. In this sense, "qualitative research aims to discover and describe how they behave and how they make sense of what they do. It can be said that throughout the history, it has always been searched for this kind of knowledge" (Bozkurt & Öztürk, 2022, p. 248). Therefore, conducting qualitative research seeks to make sense of daily or routine activities in order to signify or resignify the subjective value assigned to social practices. This could explain why "qualitative research is an approach emphasizing the holistic and realistic manifestation of the events in the natural environment they are attached to and using different qualitative data collection tools such as observation, interview and document analysis" (Ezer & Aksüt, 2021, p. 16). In this sense, qualitative research tends

towards the in-depth investigation of the events to be studied to achieve a descriptive approach based on those participants who experience the events to be analyzed.

This research followed a descriptive case study design, which is an in-depth, detailed examination of a particular case (or cases) within a real-world context (Bromley, 1986). This type of research allowed, through the application of different data collection techniques such as interviews, surveys, observation, and focus groups, qualitatively analyze the information collected and thus be able to answer the research questions.

Taking into account the nature of the object of study of this research (socio-affective factors), to find descriptive meanings on the deep analysis of the experiences lived by these participants, when taking the TOEFL ITP standardized test of English language. A case study was chosen because "case studies have been found to help students develop problem-solving skills, encouraged reflection and decision making, and allowed the analysis of problematic situations from different levels and points of view" (Soon & Lauridsen, 2021, p. 54). In fact, this type of research facilitated a projective approach, therefore it transcended mere description; because it allowed the realization of pedagogical suggestions as a way to provide possible solutions to this problem from other investigative instances. Hence, Pekary et al., (2021) suggests that "case studies are student-centered activities that contextualize concepts by giving students realistic practical problems to solve […]" (p. 31).

Context and Participants

Context

The Bachelor Program in Basic Education with Emphasis in Humanities-English from the University of Córdoba has a preparation course for the international standardized test, in this case, the TOEFL ITP test. This course was taught by the English professors of the program. Every year, students of the eighth semester degree are prepared to take an international English test which in the mentioned period was the TOEFL ITP test.

Population and Participants

The population of this research was made up of students who attended one of the last semesters of the Bachelor Program in Basic Education with Emphasis in Humanities-English and therefore took the TOEFL ITP exam between 2016 and 2019. The entire population that took the test corresponded to 364 students. On the other hand, the population was also made up of 8 teachers who taught the international exam course (which was oriented in the eighth of ten semesters of the degree in English) during 2016 to 2019 to analyze and have a deeper insight on the processes of the students.

To make up participants graduates were contacted by email because the university was currently closed due to the Covid-19 contingency, and this did not allow contacting people in person. Only 34 graduates responded the survey and 5 graduates participated in the focus group. Also 3 teachers from the international exam course participated in this study for the semi-structured interview.

Research Categories and Data Collection Methods

Research Categories

The research categories resulted from the research question proposed in the introductory section of this study. From these categories there were a few sub-categories that emerged from the analysis of the data gathered and that were reported in the findings. This same order was considered when reporting the findings. In this sense, the research categories were factors of graduates regarding their performance on the TOEFL ITP test; teachers' factors regarding graduates´ performance of the international exam; and emotion management activities in the course plan.

Data Collection Methods

In regard to the data collection methods, an interview to teachers, a survey, and a focus group to graduates were applied. It is important to mention that each instrument was validated by experts in the field and the tutors from the master's degree on seminars related to data collection techniques. The considerations or theoretical supports of each of these methods for collecting information were described. In the same way, it was described the objective of each one of the applied methods as well as the analysis of the international exam preparation course.

A graphic representation of the research categories and the data collection methods was provided as follows:

Table 2

Research Categories and Data Collection Methods

Research Categories	Semi-structure interview to Teachers	Survey to Graduates	International Exam Course Plan	Focus Group
Factors from graduates regarding their performance on the TOEFL ITP test.		X		X
Factors from teachers regarding the graduates' performance on the TOEFL ITP test.	X			
Emotion management activities in the course plan	X		X	

Semi-structured Interview

It was a resource that the researcher applied to gather information through directly posing questions, that is, personally and orally (Moreno, 1987). A semi-structured interview was applied to the teachers of the international test preparation course in order to identify internal and external factors of affective nature that may have affected graduates when taking the TOEFL ITP test.

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Survey

It was a research method used for collecting data from a predefined group of respondents to gain information and insights into various topics of interest (Giuseppe, 1976). A survey (see Appendix 1) was applied to graduates of the Bachelor Program with an emphasis in Humanities-English in order to identify their perceptions regarding the TOEFL ITP test. To carry out the survey, a questionnaire was designed. This research method

consisted of a series of questions and other indications with the purpose of obtaining information from those consulted (Salavera, 2021). The purpose of this survey was to identify the characteristics of affective nature in graduates that emerged when taking the TOEFL ITP test.

Focus Group

The focus group is an interactive discussion from three or more pre-selected participants, led by a trained moderator and focusing on a specific set of issues (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011). Through the focus group technique, important valid information was gathered regarding the experiences of individuals related to the socio-affective factors that influence them when taking the standardized TOEFL ITP test. This instrument allowed to analyze and find valuable information about those factors that affected directly their performance and those that after the test solving.

The implementation of this focus group was virtual since the participants lived in different cities in the country. In carrying out the activity, 5 participants attended, even though the total number was 10. The focus group activity was conducted in Spanish since some participants stated that they did not feel comfortable speaking in English and that for greater clarity in the information they preferred to talk in their native language. The number of questions was 5 and the type of questions used was open-ended.

Documentary

A course plan could denote diverse conceptualizations in the field of research, thus suggesting a generic purpose. Still, for this research, a course plan, as a cognitive strategy, "are in essence making a series of decisions aimed at creating a design, which in this case

consists of a plan of activities for what the teacher and students will do in a course" (McBride, 2016, p. 257). A revision of the international exam course plan was made with the purpose of knowing what activities are proposed in terms of emotions management during TOEFL ITP test.

Ethical Considerations

Educational research contains ethical components. "Being ethical is part of a process planning, treatment and intelligent evaluation and sensitive, in which the researcher seeks to maximize the good products and minimize risk and harm" (Sieber, 2001, p. 25). Thus, educational research affects the practice and the knowledge in educational theory.

Educational researchers do research to expand knowledge or deepens understanding. Researchers may determine how results are disseminated and used in society. When conducting investigation, researchers have an ethical duty to show respect for people (participants). Participants have the right to autonomy (say yes or not), to know their benefits. Researchers must not harm participants; but guarantee justice, trust, fidelity, and scientific integrity. Researchers respect participants as valuable people who have the autonomous right to decide whether or not to include them in the investigation. Regarding the benefit principle, the investigator must plan and operate the investigation maximizing the benefits for the participants and minimize the possible risk, especially making sure that He/she does not make decisions thinking of his benefit but in that of the participants. Bearing this in mind, the names of the participants were not revealed; but changed to pseudonyms such as Gr1, Gr2, Gr3, etc., while the teachers' code was T1, T2, etc.

Data Analysis

The data analyzed was took from collection methods used to gather the data from the phenomena, which provided subjective information from each of the categories and the phenomena. Each information provided for the formulation of the problem was described, interpreted, and analyzed for the design of a proposal results-based activities to mitigate or lessen socio-affective factors that may influence TOEFL ITP test takers' performance.

The report, organization, and analysis of the findings was done sequentially and systematically according to the order in which they were arranged in Table 1. This assumed the following order: first, factors of graduates regarding their performance on the TOEFL ITP test; second, teachers' factors regarding graduates´ performance of the international exam; and third, emotion management activities in the course plan.

Taking into consideration that the informants provided information mostly on states of mind such as anxiety, motivation (being focused or encouraged) and self-confidence (completing a task correctly despite difficulties); the analysis had a qualitative descriptive approach. A qualitative descriptive approach;

> […] is motivated in part by the recognition that L2 teaching, and learning is complex. To uncover this complexity, we need to not only examine how learning takes place in general or what factors affect it, but also provide more in-depth examination and understanding of individual learners and their behaviors and experiences (Nassaji, 2015, p. 129).

Taking into consideration this particular approach, it was very useful to respond to the socio-affective aspects that were part of the present investigation. The data in this study

were analyzed using a qualitative descriptive approach and thematic analysis qualitative method (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). This method will reveal details that are hidden in the data by inquiring in different aspects regarding the situations, factors or elements that affect the

For "establishing trustworthiness during each phase of thematic analysis", phases of thematic analysis are provided: Phase 1: familiarizing yourself with your data; phase 2: generating initial codes; phase 3: searching for themes; phase 4: reviewing themes; phase 5: defining and naming themes; and phase 6: producing the report (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 4).

Data Analysis Procedure

Considering the aforementioned approach, it was intended to carry out the following phases to make a good data analysis: organize the data, identify framework, sort data into framework, use the framework for descriptive analysis.

Based on these phases, findings (transcripts) were read and re-read in order to comply with the first phase, which corresponded to the familiarization process with the information collected. Then, taking into consideration the main research question and each of the research categories; information reported in the findings that responded to each of the research categories were selected with the aim of establishing significant links to answer the research question.

In this way, the second phase was fulfilled, i.e., the creation or generation of codes. Later, each of the generated codes was classified and grouped to establish a common purpose that generalizes or brings them together in a particular and objective group which was called a theme. In this way, the third phase was fulfilled, the search for themes. After that, each of

the codes organized in each of the topics was reviewed in detail and the relevance of each of the codes was analyzed and validated through the tool Atlas TI. In this way, they were filtered and improved if necessary to respond to the fourth phase, the review of themes.

Then, each of the generating themes was refined and possible sub-themes and relationships among themes were established. The foregoing was in order to objectify the essence of each topic. In this way, the fifth phase was fulfilled, defining the themes. Finally, this process was completed by writing a report that was individual, organized, sequentially, and systematically responded to each of the research categories and therefore to the main research question.

4. Findings

In this chapter, the results obtained from the instruments will be described. Each result will be categorized and explained from the individuals' experiences. The names of the participants will be anonymous and replaced with "Gr" if a graduate and "T" if a teacher. It is done to keep the privacy of each participant and their collaboration is this study.

According to this, findings were reported and described from the repetitive codes that made up categories and subcategories such as anxiety, insecurity, and demotivation, which are directly related to themes such as desperation, body rigidity, mental blockage, poor sound conditions; lack of knowledge of vocabulary, difficulty in making decisions, low self-confidence; lack of willingness, readings of unknown topics and feeling useless.

The findings related to socio-affective factors were reported. In this way, the results of data analysis from the survey, semi-structured interview, focus group discussions and the documentary revealed some emerging categories and subcategories as follows:

Socio-Affective Factors

This section describes the socio-affective factors such as anxiety, demotivation, and insecurity through the characteristics of each factor that emerged from the data collected.

Anxiety

Regarding anxiety, some characteristics that are particular to this factor were found. These characteristics arose from the recurrence of elements mentioned by graduates, such as emotional order (e.g., desperation), physical (body rigidity), cognitive (e.g., mental blockage) and finally external elements that affected the emotional state of the graduates (e.g., poor technological quality). The recurring elements identified were time pressure,

technical readings or technical words (written in specific fields), and poor sound conditions, which led to understand what caused or generated anxiety in graduates.

In relation to time pressure, among graduates, there was a repetitive report on the anxiety generated by the lack of time during the TOEFL ITP test. For example, from the focus group, (Gr. 2) reported that:

"Yes, there was something that personally affected me a lot, it had to do with the readings; They don't give us the readings. It has to do with time; I had a lot of pressure, I felt that it was a lot and that if I didn't speed up; I wasn't going to make it, then".

In this report, it can be noticed that students felt desperation, anguish because of the time pressure that affected them a lot.

Another graduate in the focus group, (Gr3) mentioned that the time factor at the moment of reading was a determinant that negatively influenced them in their performance. For example, the graduate said: *"know that you have a stipulated time that is running out; that makes one get overwhelmed... then that makes one block and lose the idea; and that discourages you."* This comment made by the graduate shows the pressure that time exerted on them affected their emotional state, causing anxiety.

In addition, time pressure is an issue that employs socio-affective factors on the test-takers due to the fact that they state,

When you are looking at the international exam, they tell you that you have so much time to answer all the sections and at the minute such and such you should go for this question. Sometimes the professor who was taking the exam said there

are so many minutes left and you realize that you were not going for the question

that you were supposed to go for obviously, you say I must answer the other ones

running because otherwise I will not finish the exam (Gr2).

It is evident, test-takers face different believes when doing the TOEFL – ITP-Specifically, the length of time devote for each question and the period in which they could answer each section. Also, a teacher from the interview mentioned that time pressure could be a factor that influenced the performance of the students when taking the test; thus, teacher (T2) expressed:

"But time could be another factor, for example, the boys know that they have 30 or 40 minutes to do something, they always had a timer in front of them, that can also be a bit of pressure. That part of having to do something really fast because you're running out of time".

This evidence shows that teachers know that time pressure was an aspect for graduates to feel stressed or anxious when taking the test.

Furthermore, another characteristic that led graduates to feel anxious during the test was the aspect regarding the technicity of the texts. This theme arises from the recognition of elements from the TOEFL ITP test readings, such as the technical reading fields (scientific or specialized vocabulary) that involved unknown textual (linguistic) and topics (subject). Evidence from this suggested that the triad among long readings, the technicity and complexity of texts were highly reported common, the anxiety felt by them and which lead them to feel pressured, stressed and afraid of their results.

Moreover, another graduate, indeed, *(Gr.2)* considered that:

"The readings handle a lexicon, a vocabulary that, even for native speakers, is sometimes unknown because they are very technical and very specialized words. As for texts that we have not studied these themes before, that makes the reading and comprehension part a bit complex".

Furthermore, during the interview, one of the teachers (T3) mentioned this:

"I would suggest a change in the curriculum, ok, this is my point of view, give them also some classes on what the environment is, that is, as a general culture based on the previous TOEFL ITP tests which talked about geography, mathematics, social studies or chemistry; even about mollusks... once a question about mollusks and believe me nobody knew how to write mollusks in English or shrimp or prawns... we are talking about the sea and the environment and dolphins and whales."

According to this evidence, lack of vocabulary of the graduates, the technicality and the complexity of the texts were issues that caused absolute despair in the examinees, due to the lack of vocabulary, topics which led the test-takers to make mistakes answering the test.. In addition, the topics covered in the exam are unknown to the graduates, as expressed by the teacher (T3):

"In the test, they talk to you about the environment they talk to you about biology. And even things that are political. So it is that vocabulary, no, no, no, it is not taught itself, specifically then that third part or the last part of the TOEFL and reading comprehension that he is very good, he did not want extensive, this part it's hard. It hits them hard."

This evidence is an acknowledgment by the professor that the graduates' lack of vocabulary caused them to despair, which put weight on the graduates.

Another theme that emotionally influenced the performance of the graduates when they took the TOEFL ITP test had to do with poor sound conditions. This aspect dealt with the poor acoustic conditions felt or experienced during the listening section from the test. This generated anguish, pressure, lack of attention, nonconformity, and discomfort; all these aspects made graduates feel anxious due to a lack of essential conditions to take the test. In this sense, the following evidence comes from *(Gr.4): "the bad sound; noise... also greatly influences the performance of all those who are taking the exam".* Based on this report, poor acoustic conditions generated anxiety on the test-takers.

In relation to this, graduate *(Gr.2)* also mentioned that *"the audio, sometimes the sound quality... the audio quality is not good."* In addition, graduate *(Gr5)* mentioned that: *"I agree with what (Gr.3) says; the listening... the audio and the time… definitely generated a lot of anxiety when doing the listening of the test."* Also, the teacher *(T3)* from interview, said:

> "Another of the factors that was seen when I was there, for example, the loudspeaker we used didn't sound good, there weren't enough loudspeakers at the university, at that time, there weren't enough loudspeakers, of course there still aren't, so the sound was not very good."

Thus, poor sound conditions generated a prolonged increase in anxiety when responding to the listening section.

In addition to the above issues, some elements of body-type anxiety were found also come up in the results. In this sense, the results showed some mental or physical exhaustion in graduates. For example, the reports in the teachers' interviews showed how the teacher (*T1*) mentioned that: *"it is quite a rigorous test... that mentally exhausts the students because they have to read for hours and solve questions that are quite complicated, which exhausted them mentally and also generated anxiety and stress"*. From this, it can be noticed that teachers recognize that the TOEFL ITP test was complicated and that it could generate emotions such as anxiety in students at the time of taking the test and thus affected their performance.

Besides this, the results from the survey also showed 50% of graduates experienced "heart pounding/racing during the test" (body level) when responding to different test sections. Also, 55.9% of them reported the experience of "feeling unsteady" due to time pressure, and 82.4% of them stated that they felt nervous when taking the test. Therefore, according to these results, graduates experienced body-type anxiety, which caused them to have a negative influence on their cognitive and emotional levels during the test, and thus their performance was affected.

Additionally, another aspect that emerged during the focus group had to do with memory failure. Although this topic is not connected to the main focus of this study, it emerged from the data and it leaves space for further investigations. In this sense, the amount of information that graduates must retain in their short-term memory to respond to statements or questions during the test appears to produce an amount of anxiety that impedes them from performing as required. For example, graduate (*Gr*.2) reported:

"I believe that this type of exam….. evaluates other types of skills such as retention, and memory, and that goes beyond the abilities that this exam evaluates. For example, in the listening part where from a single question, from a single audio, you have to answer several questions... in real life many times you don't answer that way. What I mean is that many times you are not going to retain as much information and at the same time give a valid answer."

It was noticed how the graduates did not cope up to some point with the complexity of the audios and the amount of information needed to answer the test questions which had a negative impact on the graduates causing them, in consequence, anxiety when solving the test. It provoked the students feel insecure about what to do when facing the listening section However this still remains to be studied further.

Another aspect that emerged from the data collected was the social pressure, which generated anxiety on graduates when taking the TOEFL ITP test. Here the pressures of external agents that generated anxiety in the graduates are highlighted. These characteristics are related to university environment (pressure by academic commitments, pressure by classmates), work environment (not being hired), the age (amateurism), and Graduates were afraid of disappointment and fear of do not achieve their objective of having a high level which mean success for them.

Regarding the pressure by academic commitments, the graduate *(Gr.4)* stated:

"When we had to take the exam on a mandatory basis, we were in the eighth semester; I remember that the following year they gave us the opportunity to repeat it and I decided to sign up to repeat the exam to see if I could improve on the previous one.

But at that time, I was in the middle of delivering my thesis and the day before I went to bed around 5 am in the morning and at 7 am I had to be in the place to take the exam and this score was much lower than the previous one."

From this, it is evident that other academic commitments affected the performance of the graduates when they took the test.

Furthermore, in terms of pressure by classmates, the graduate *(Gr.3)* expressed: *Sometimes your classmates say: if you don't get this score, then you are not going to graduate... Then there is also social pressure in one way or another.* From this, the social pressure from classmates had a significant impact on the performance of the graduates. In this regard, *(T3)* reports that: *"they felt anxiety, also fear of losing; because everyone wants to be in C1. Sometimes, they also experienced a feeling of frustration".* This showed that some social factors had an influence among graduates' performance.

Moreover, in relation to the work environment, the graduate *(Gr.2)* expressed:

"Because these results in one way or another are going to be asked of you, in the job where you are going to enter, and although you know that this result does not define you, that is how companies are going to see you, for a number, is he good or is he bad in English?"

Accordingly, the pressure graduates feel to obtain the necessary scores to work in a company caused them frustration.

Also, according to amateurism, graduate *(Gr.5)* stated:

"When I did it, I was also a young man who had never yet faced a type of exam of that quality and well, the first time you had to present it, obviously you are not going

to have the same, I don't know, emotional intelligence to present it, that when you already know you are an old man that you present it and you already know what you are going to."

In this sense, inexperience linked to age is a characteristic that affects the emotional state, leading them to obtain results on the test.

Furthermore, the characteristic of personal issues related to family environment emerged from the perception of the teacher *(T2)*, who said:

"And there are things at home that sometimes one does not know about the boys, that suddenly they do come up with certain personal problems, right! and in one way or another, because that reflects or influences them already in the classes in general or the same exam day."

As it is observed, the family environment is a determining social factor that positively or negatively influences the performance of the individual, which means that the graduates were influenced by this factor when they took the TOEFL ITP test. Finally, in accordance with documentary revision from the International Exam course plan the socio-affective factors and emotions management such as anxiety during TOEFL ITP test are not presented deeply during classes.

An aspect to highlight here after the revision of the international course content is that there were not found activities or strategies related to socio-affective factors.

Insecurity

Regarding this category, evidence was reported from the instruments applied for data collection and some characteristics very typical of this factor were found. These

characteristics emerged from the responses of the graduates regarding their experience when they took the TOEFL ITP test and the teachers' opinions. The characteristics found were lack of knowledge of vocabulary(cognitive), difficulty in making decisions, and low self-confidence.

According to the lack of vocabulary knowledge, it is a determining factor during the presentation of an exam such as the TOEFL ITP. Besides, during the training process in the international exam course, some teachers have expressed their comments about it. For example, the teacher *(T1)* stated:

"It is always a grammatical issue, it is always a role play that attends to something grammatical, they always get a reading to attend to something grammatical... so we are not teaching to develop this student's thinking or to develop, for example, cultural knowledge about the texts and I think we are moving away and therefore the student."

According to this, the students have received grammatical knowledge of the language.

However, something from vocabulary knowledge is missing, such as cultural knowledge that allows the development of more profound thought, as expressed by the teacher (T1):

"The student can have a text. For example, an argumentative text and ask him what the structure of an argumentative text is. In the TOEFL exam, or they say, well, this anaphoric referent, what does it refer to? or this referent here in this question, what does it refer to? The students are incapable because they do not know how to make those relationships in the text, which is not learned by inertia."

As observed, the lack of vocabulary knowledge was expressed by the graduates, increasing their insecurity when facing the test.

Moreover, another teacher expressed something rooted in the graduates' lack of vocabulary knowledge. For example, the teacher *(T2)* reported:

"I have my own conception...it is that when we go to what the exam evaluates, not so much the type of questions, but rather the content of both oral and written texts versus what we teach in language acquisition courses during the career, that is, above all communication and grammar, that is where I feel that there is no connection."

Apparently, there is no connection between the graduates' preparation during the English major and the type of content that the TOEFL ITP exam evaluates. Consequently, this issue has made the graduates' insecurity much more noticeable during the test.

In addition, it was reported a gap between the vocabulary level from the students when facing the test and the kind of vocabulary they found in the TOEFL ITP test in the focus group. This gap represented to the students a challenge when solving the test since they felt insecure about their skills and knowledge. In this regard, Graduate *(Gr.4)* expressed: *"The readings were very complex. It was very tedious because there were many unknown words and also the topic was unknown; I had no prior knowledge and at the time of answering I was not sure."* Thus, the reports regarding the test itself referred to the difficulties in the readings, problems of lack of vocabulary, and textual and thematic knowledge. Moreover, facing readings with a vocabulary level and complexity different from the one they were trained for, discouraged participants to do well in the reading part.

Furthermore, this generated insecurity when answering the reading questions, leading graduates to doubt at the time of solving the test.

On the other hand, the other characteristic of insecurity related to difficulty in making decisions was reported by the graduate *(Gr.1)* who said:

"I am a bit insecure, and I always think a lot because when one finds very easy questions, which one thinks are very easy, well what I tend to think is that…no, this is not going to be the answer, because this is very obvious here, and suddenly no... So, it's a mixture of feelings, that is, it's confusion, doubt..."

It is observed that doubt is present when making a decision; this feeling makes the graduates feel insecure and thus make mistakes that are reflected in the test results.

Moreover, in terms of low self-confidence characteristic, the graduates stated that they did not feel confident when solving some questions, in this sense, graduate *(Gr.5)* expressed: *"the truth is there are many questions in which I did not feel confident. I believe that the score is directly related to the whole emotional part. Obviously, there is a lot of anxiety and a lot of insecurity."* As it is seen here, insecurity invaded the state of mind of the graduates since in some questions they did not feel so confident, and this could influence negatively in their performance. Besides, the graduate *(Gr. 2)* reported: *"in general, when I found difficult questions, that feeling of doubt invaded me, I felt doubtful about the answer that I placed, verify, read the text again and know that one is consuming a lot of time."* According to this, tricky questions to answer generated feelings of insecurity in graduates when taking the TOEFL ITP test.

Demotivation

According to this category, some characteristics came into the light from the data collected. These characteristics are related to lack of willingness (mood), readings on unknow topics (cognitive), and feeling useless (emotional). Before anything else, regarding the characteristic of lack of willingness, from the interview, a teacher (*T3)* answered the question *"what is the willingness of the students when taking the international exam course?"*

In addition, the teacher (T3) also expressed:

"Despite the years, they are different generations, I say, well I don't know, they are different people, they all had a, I don't know, a different mood compared to the boys there are now, I saw the students of many years ago very motivated, those of now I do not see them so motivated".

Based on this, teachers' comments revealed that mood is a factor that influenced graduates when taking the test.

Therefore, the teacher *(T3)* said: *"I think that we teachers need to encourage them more, make them understand the importance of this exam because it is super important to have an exam with a C1 level."* According to this, the lack of willingness emerged due to a lack of motivation, which was a determining factor in the unsatisfactory results of the TOEFL ITP test of the graduates. On the other hand, concerning the characteristic of readings on unknown topics (complex content), the graduate *(Gr.3)* stated:

"When they were texts and texts that you did not know, no matter how much because of the context, you tried to find the meaning of a word, but if you do not know the

subject even in your native language, how are you going to know about it in another language, that sometimes made it difficult to understand or retain the theme."

From this, the lack of knowledge of specific topics related to science, technology, or culture, among others, generated demotivation in the graduates since it seems very difficult for them to answer the questions.

Moreover, the graduate (Gr.4) expressed: *"I think that when doing something for English, we cannot take into account that we are studying to become teachers, we are taught to be teachers and being teachers does not imply being walking dictionaries."* This thought is evidence that graduates are discouraged by the complexity of the test since the rigor of the test bores them, and they lost interest in continuing. Likewise, considering the aspect of *"feeling useless,"* the graduate survey reveals that 61.8% of them stated they had felt this emotion due to *"being unable to answer one or several questions on the test."* Again, this issue was closely related to demotivation produced by the degree of the test difficulty. In addition, also 76.5% of graduates did not feel comfortable or satisfied with their performance on the test, which is a typical feature of demotivation.

5. Discussion

This chapter aims to discuss the findings, their implications for the future and the correlation that exist between them and the objectives of this research such as exploring socio-affective factors that influenced on graduates' results from bachelor's degree at English teaching program with emphasis on Basic Education from University of Córdoba; identify the alignment between TOEFL ITP test performance and the International Exam preparation course. In this regard, those findings will be explained and contrasted with the current literature that exist regarding the factors that affect the students' performance when taking the TOEFL ITP test.

It was found in this study that socio-affective factors such as anxiety, insecurity, and demotivation provoked on the students' certain affectations among their test solving process which were shown in form of desperation, body rigidity, mental blockage, tension, fear of failing and disappointing of their families. In consequence, these factors caused the students to feel insecure and anxious towards the testing process which provoked that they feel non-capable of achieving a the level which was the expected of the students in the results of the TOEFL ITP test. At University of Córdoba in the Bachelor Program in Basic Education with Emphasis in Humanities-English in compliance with article number six of the university's bilingualism policies which states that graduates of the degree in English must certify the C1 level.

Considering evidence of anxiety as a socio-affective factor it can be said that it influenced on students' test performance significantly. this is related to what Lowe (2021) mentioned on his findings about TOEFL ITP test. According to his results, anxiety generates cognitive, behavioral, and physiological symptoms which could influence negatively on the

results and performance of the test-takers. In addition, Erözkan et al. (2017) and Muliawati et al. (2020) agree that test anxiety is derived from time pressure due to the length stablished for each section and the whole test duration. The result from this study confirms that students faced anxiety before and during the TOEFL ITP test because of long texts and a complex vocabulary. It may seem that this cause comes from a lack of training, preparation, control of emotions and time at the moment of solving the test which would lead to feel anxious during the process.

The above results are also in line with Erözkan et al. (2017) who perceived anxiety as consequence of external factors that influence on students' thoughts and it is expressed in different ways, such as demotivation, tension, and even fear of disappointing family members. According to these authors, these consequences will cause in the student inhibition for performing a better task due to the doubt of doing it well (Erözkan et al., 2017, p.10). This statement contrast with the stated by Muliawati et al. (2020) since they perceived anxiety as a benefit that makes the students aware of their preparation process before taking a test. On the contrary, in this study, anxiety has significantly affected graduates' performance which meant that students could not remember the answer even if they knew it.

Another issue of anxiety in this study´s results is associated with the technicity (specialized and specific language) that some texts had, and the vocabulary students faced during TOEFL ITP test that have affected participants in the outcomes. Although there are lack of studies on this matter, as stated before, some researches on socio-affective factors revealed by Amiryousefi & Tavakoli (2011) and Pacas (2015) agree that anxiety appears during tests and it comes due to time limits, test duration, and lack of confidence. In addition,

other researchers found that good preparation before the test is essential (Castro, 2009) which is related to what was expressed by some professors and graduates in this study.

In this way, the lack of preparation can cause a person to experience a high level of anxiety and that can result in emotional or physical distress, difficulty concentrating, and/or paranoia (Muliawati et al., 2020). Likewise, the graduates of this research experienced physical rigidity and emotional anguish when faced with challenging questions which is consistent with low English proficiency and exam practice mentioned by Mahmud (2014). Moreover, anxiety associated with the technicity from texts at TOEFL ITP was confirmed on present study when participants mentioned they faced these issues before and during TOEFL ITP test.

Also, an issue that deserves our attention since it was revealed in our findings and that researchers on this area has not mentioned too much is the one related to memorization and retention process. These processes were directly affected when participants on the investigation expressed those audios and readings at TOEFL ITP were too long and complex to memorize. In addition, when students faced questions related to the information they read or listened to. In this regard, memory and retention are two topics that arose from the data analyzed in this research that need further in-depth research since they are not related to the focus of the current study.

On the other hand, the insecurity created by different conditions as the gap of between the vocabulary learn and the vocabulary test, provoked in the students as a consequence, a doubt to accomplish the objective of getting the C1 level when solving the test. In addition, it was found that the gap of knowledge was caused due to the lack of knowledge on the topics students faced in the test. There is a disparity between the vocabulary learned during the

International Exam course and the vocabulary they found when performing the test. This disparity made the students feel insecure in their preparation and training doubting about their capacity of achieving the C1 level goal.

In agreement with the stated before, Cassadya and Johnson (2002) found that insecurity is related to aspects as the inhibition of retention, free flow of information and it provokes insecurity in the students affecting cognitive processes such as critical thinking, encoding, organization, storage, and retrieval of information. These findings are aligned with the data collected during this study since it could be noticed that insecurity provoked students to face barriers in their cognitive process while taking an exam, in this case, the TOEFL-ITP Test, which caused fear of failing and desperation when they could not solve the test with the knowledge they had.

Results from the study indicate that insecurity emerged due to lack of knowledge on students' vocabulary that TOEFL IPT test was evaluating since the training stage. As well as Zamora (2021) mentioned, the lack of knowledge on vocabulary derives in lack of confidence in the acquired knowledge (Zamora, 2021, p.12). To Sum up, participants face insecurity issues in the study, and it is related to insecurity when making decisions because students felt confusion and doubts at the time of solving test questions. Other issue is based on low self-confidence in the whole emotional part which produce too much insecurity.

For this study, emotional intelligence is a key component that relates to socio-affective factors due to the fact that both are cognitive and brain concerns. In reference to Polo et al., (1996) emotional intelligence allows better processing and assimilation of information. In fact, challenging questions on the TOEFL ITP test produced in students a feeling of doubt that led students to verify, read, and re-read the TOEFL ITP reading texts

many times which ended in too much time consuming. For this reason, it is important to focus on these types of intelligences to get better results on the target group for future research.

In addition to previous information, insecurity is shown as a negative thought and a worry that influences on the inability to act, make decisions and manage a situation. Based on the findings, it can be said that insecurity moves on participants the emotional intelligence because graduates could not process information from the TOEFL – ITP correctly and that produced high levels of psychological effects in individuals during the aforementioned test (Polo et al., 1996). Similarly, insecurity results in difficulty among participants when reading and understanding the questions from the test (Bausela, 2005). As a result, based on the findings it can be confirmed that insecurity was a socio-affective factor that did not let graduates organize their thoughts and remember concepts when they presented the TOEFL ITP Test.

Another factor related to the results after presenting the TOEFL ITP test was the demotivation which was born due to insecurity and anxiety faced during the exam. This demotivation also derived from the negative performance in the sections of reading (Complex content) and listening (technicity) on TOEFL even though students were aware and prepared to solve it. According to the results, it was shown the complex content students faced on the test although teachers manifested how they constantly motivated students to be prepared for the exam. These results are in accordance with Dörnyei and Ushioda (2001) who stated that demotivation is not related to elements that annul a positive motivation such as the constant commitment of the teachers to prepare the students for the exam, but a strong

negative component as the unexpected result that led to feel that the encouragement from the teachers was not enough to overcome that failure.

The lack of motivation decreased the level of energy and activity the student directs toward specific goals. Thus, demotivation could even lead to low self-esteem or poor self-worth (Chong et al., 2019, p. 69). The results of this study showed evidence to confirm Chong's statement because participants said the exam produced very selective implications among them like lack of motivation which could have its roots in the lack of preparation according to the exam components, lack of specific strategies on emotions management to face the exam, and lack of knowledge of specific topics different from what they had been trained in the International Exam course.

Also, Budak and Mede (2022) have found that inclusion of contextualized material to the TOEFL exam demands strategies to support the student's performance process because when students were prepared with a slightly misaligned objective of what the exam intends, this could affect in a certain way the performance of the students when they face texts in the listening and reading exam, in which they have received few trainings (p. 42). For example, they stated that the TOEFL ITP test readings were very technical texts (which corresponded to the objective of the exam (colleges and universities) but not to that of the course (complex oral and written texts likely to be encountered in social, professional, and academic life). This issue generated anxiety and insecurity when answering the questions in these sections (Listening and Reading) besides listening to the instructions from the test.

These findings are related to what Alvarez (2012) discusses. He states that during a test there can be some implications caused by feelings of discomfort, concern, hypervigilance, feeling out of control, strain, fear, difficulty to take decisions, negative

thoughts, and attention difficulties. Moreover, founded on teachers' perceptions about the international exam course and the TOEFL ITP test, participants showed on findings their beliefs about these types of evaluation as clear means of students' concerns. The study has evidenced graduates try to avoid negative thoughts and to be motivated during the test thinking about getting good results to access in different postgraduate studies, to obtain better jobs opportunities, and scholarships. Besides, attending socio-affective factors for success.

Furthermore, there was no evidence from the preparatory course before taking the TOEFL ITP test that suggested or was directly related to the development of socio-affective strategies and critical thinking skills to mitigate the findings reported by graduates and teachers concerning about socio-affective factors identified in this study. On this sense, analyzing the strategies for monitoring the teaching and learning process from the international exam course is needed. Due to students' demotivation and being these weaknesses because of the results in the exam, it is suggested for teachers to give feedback in terms of language competencies knowledge and teachers' development. This study has revealed that students needed to be characterized individually to have a source of internal information that exposes a baseline of weaknesses to attend in the target group and motivate participants for better outcomes during training sessions and when presenting the TOEFL – ITP test.

Also, During this research process, there were some limitations as in the case of the survey, since it was sent to many participants to answer it but few of them were the ones who responded, there were also difficulties in carrying out the focus group, most of them live in other regions of the country, which is why it was decided to carry out the focus group online, but it was also made difficult by the work schedule of the participants.

Finally, the results also led to suggest that it is important for more significant results in the TOEFL ITP test to offer better material resources, ITC tools, and health care for students who present TOEFL ITP test. So, they do not feel comfortable and do not know how to deal with socio-affective factors presented before and during the test. Data collected showed it was difficult for graduates to take decisions during the test and their degree of insecurity also decreased their confidence. For this reason, it is suggested to call on the help of a professional such as psychologist from the university staff to give students tips when taking a standardized test such as the TOEFL ITP what to do one or two days before the exam. And, set of strategies test takers deeply would apply before and during the TOEFL ITP test. Thus, the International Exam course objectives can also be expanded towards aspects that help students decrease the socio-affective factors that affect their students' performance and outcomes on the test.

It is also recommended that the weaknesses revealed in this study should be attended from the needs of students, especially those related to reading and listening skills since the content and context are challenging to them. In addition, these needs should be monitored and followed constantly to have a report of progression and detect the basis of the weaknesses that negatively influence and significatively the undergraduates' process before taking the TOEFL ITP test.

These recommendations encourage the students and generate a feeling of confidence in them when taking the exam. What is presented by Qin (2013) and Mu-Hsuan (2018) reveals the importance of test preparation on each individual when facing an International Exam like TOEFL ITP because it focuses on some internal and external elements such as socio-affective factors and cognitive processes that let careful references to test development

and validation rather than for the validation of a theory of strategic competence. Whereas the influence of test preparation implies language proficiency to build confidence in TOEFL ITP test-takers.

6. Conclusions

Based on the previous chapters, some conclusions can be drawn in this study. First, it can be concluded that the graduates' results in the TOEFL ITP test were influenced by anxiety, insecurity, demotivation, and misalignment with the test's objectives. In this order, the main aspects that generated anxiety were time pressure, that is, the lack of time to answer all the test questions; the technicality and rigor of the texts that the graduates faced, which in turn generated a type of physical anxiety such as mental or physical exhaustion, the poor sound conditions of which the poor quality of the audios and the poor speaker conditions. On the other hand, social pressure also generated anxiety in the examinees. In this sense, the pressure exerted by classmates with issues related to the Bilingualism policies each one knew at bachelor's program at University of Córdoba in terms of level that a graduate of the English degree must obtain in an English proficiency test. In addition, family pressure also influenced the performance of the graduates when taking the test.

Also, it was found that the students felt insecure when facing the test due to the questions with a complex vocabulary and the situations that were exposed in the text. The lack of knowledge provoked insecurity in the students due to their lack of comprehension of what has been asked to them and the lack of connection between what they studied for years and the content they faced when tested, which shows unbalance that exists between what was expected by students and what was tested. In addition, the difficulty in making decisions linked to the lack of knowledge and the low self-confidence linked to the complexity of the questions were aspects that also generated insecurity in the students when taking the test.

Another factor revealed was demotivation that influenced the graduates, which was generated from their lack of willingness when facing complex questions and long readings.

Also, the unknown topics addressed in the test generated feelings of uselessness and dissatisfaction. In consequence, demotivation was a factor that arose when anxiety and insecurity overwhelmed the participants during the test since they noticed a gap between what they expected and what they faced in the test.

Finally, it was found that the international course exam did not fulfill the needs of the graduates in terms of socio-affective strategies training which could have helped them to perform differently in the exam and thus being more successful in their scores.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1 *Student's Survey*

The following questionnaire is part of the instruments used in the research that is being carried out at the University of Cordoba with the graduates of the Bachelor Program in Basic Education with Emphasis in Humanities-English between 2016 and 2019.

Objective: To identify the experience of graduates from the Bachelor Program in Basic Education with Emphasis in Humanities-English have about the TOEFL ITP test.

Instructions

Please, answer the following statements according to your experience with the TOEFL ITP test you took during the Bachelor Program in Basic Education with Emphasis in Humanities-English.

Use an X to choose your response from question 1 to 15

N°	ITEM	Yes	No
1	*I felt nervous, when taking the TOEFL ITP test*		
2	*I felt wobbliness in my legs at the time of the test*		
3	*I felt heart pounding/racing when taking the TOEFL ITP test*		
4	*At the time of the test, I felt unsteady*		
5	*I felt hot/cold sweat during the test*		

N°	ITEM	Yes	No
6	*I had a positive attitude when I took the TOEFL ITP test*		
7	*I felt useless when I could not answer one or more questions during the TOEFL ITP test*		
8	*After I finished the TOEFL ITP test, I felt that I have a number of good qualities in terms of my English level*		
9	*I was very confident when taking the TOEFL ITP test because I am able to do things as well as most other people.*		
10	*After I finished the TOEFL ITP test I felt I did not have much to be proud of*		

N°	ITEM	Yes	No
11	*I felt excited when taking the TOEFL ITP test*		
12	*I prepared enthusiastically to take the TOEFL ITP test*		
13	*Taking the TOEFL ITP test was a pleasant experience*		
14	*Taking the TOEFL ITP test was something more personal than a requirement*		
15	*The content of the test was interesting*		

Appendix 2 *Teacher's Interview*

The following questionnaire is part of the instruments used in the research that is being carried out at the University of Cordoba with the graduates of the Bachelor Program in Basic Education with Emphasis in Humanities-English between 2016 and 2019.

Objective: To find out about the perceptions professors of the international exam course have in relation to what could be the socio-affective factors that influence the Bachelor Program in Basic Education with Emphasis in Humanities-English students' performance during the TOEFL ITP test.

1. What does the international exam course mainly focus on?

2. As a professor of the international exam course, what could you say about the willingness of students to take the course?

3. In your opinion, what is the main reason why most students did not reach the level required by the university on the TOEFL ITP test?

4. Do you think there are socio-affective factors (anxiety, motivation, etc.) that have influenced the performance of students when taking the TOEFL ITP test? Which ones do you think play a role and why?

5. Do you think emotional aspects could have influenced the results of the TOEFL ITP test of the graduates? (Emotional aspects related to motivation, anxiety, etc.) Why or why not?

6. What possible changes would you propose to make to the international exam course?

Appendix 3 *Focus Group*

The following questionnaire is part of the instruments used in the research that is being carried out at the University of Cordoba with the graduates of the Bachelor Program in Basic Education with Emphasis in Humanities-English between 2016 and 2019.

Objective: To find out about the perceptions of graduates from the Bachelor Program in Basic Education with Emphasis in Humanities-English in relation to what could be the socio-affective factors that influence the students' performance during the TOEFL ITP test.

Instructions

Answer the following questions according to your perception about the TOEFL ITP test

1. What did you think about the TOEFL ITP test that you took at the University of Córdoba?

2. How did you feel when confronting each of the different parts into which the TOEFL ITP test is divided?

3. Describe how you felt when you faced questions you did not understand or did not know the answer to on the TOEFL ITP test.

4. Specify how you felt when you answered easy questions on the TOEFL ITP test.

5. How was your score? Do you think your emotions influenced your score? Why or why not?

Appendix 4 *International Exam Course Plan*

Objective: Review the international exam course plan to verify the existence of activities focused on managing emotions during the TOEFL ITP exam.

1. INFORMACIÓN BÁSICA

1.1. Facultad	Educación y Ciencias Humanas	1.2. Programa	Licenciatura en Educación Básica con énfasis en Inglés		
1.3. Área	Language Acquisition	1.4. Curso	International Exam		
1.5. Código	212278	1.6. Créditos	4		
1.6.1. HDD	64	1.6.2. HTI	64	1.7. Año de actualización	2020

2. JUSTIFICACIÓN

> This course will offer students preparation to acquire and study the necessary skills and strategies to deal with the main components of the TOEFL INSTITUTIONAL TESTING PROGRAM. This test is an international examination designed and scored by Fulbright. It uses scales from the Common European Framework of Reference to place students in their corresponding English level (A1-C1). It assesses students' ability to listen to and read in terms of general English language proficiency in social, educational and

workplace contexts.*(listening Component in my paper)* This preparation course is designed to help students develop the necessary skills required for the TOEFL ITP test: speaking, listening, writing, and reading. In this course, the students not only develop their language skills, but also have to focus on developing language taking strategies and critical thinking skills, particularly for reading development and listening skills. Strategies taught in this course will help students prove to evaluators that they have the required skills needed to respond to questions about lectures and written texts. In this course, it is expected students to acquire a C1 level.

3. PROPÓSITOS DE FORMACIÓN

This course will offer the tools you need to improve your English-language skills: Listening Comprehension, Reading Comprehension and Structure and Written Expression.

Course Goal: On completion of the Program, examinees will demonstrate the C1 level of the Common European Framework as well as their knowledge of strategies and techniques to deal with TOEFL examination requirements.

4. COMPETENCIAS ESPECIFICAS Y TRANSVERSALES

By the end of this course students will be able to:

- Understand a wide range of lengthy, complex oral and written texts likely to be encounter in

    social, professional and academic life, identifying finer points of detail including attitudes, arguments, main points, as well as stated opinions. *(Reading Component in my paper)*

- Express fluently and spontaneously almost effortlessly during speaking preparation tests.

- Demonstrate an understanding of the schematic structured of texts encounter in TOEFL ITP reading chapter.

- Use multiple digital media as a required complement to test preparation.

- Use techniques for tackling with questions in reading, listening and written expression chapters of the test. *(Listening Component in my paper)*

- Use different techniques to deal with time management, concentration constrains during the test.

- Participate in online workshops preparing for strategies and techniques for the TOEFL test

- Understand and connect information, making appropriate inferences and synthesizing ideas, even when the text is conceptually dense and the language is complex

- Recognize the expository and opinion organization of a text and the role that specific information serves within the larger text, even when the text is conceptually dense.

- Analyze abstract major ideas from a text, even when the text is conceptually dense and contains complex language.

- Respect other responses and arguments when discussing options on texts, listening and written structure.

5. **LEARNING OUTCOMES**

By the end of the course students will:

- Apply specific strategies to answer questions related to the TOEFL to respond to the various test requirements.
- Follow recorded lectures, talks and conversations with relative ease.
- Write argumentative and opinion essays in a personal style, underlining the most important points in long talks or conversations.
- Participate in online learning communities to share experiences and improve their test takers' abilities.
- Come up with useful structures and rules to analyze real-life situations and conversations that require appropriate usage of the language.
- Create texts and writing questions for TOEFL test purposes to understand types of texts, questions and choices.
- Respond to questions about academic fields and familiar topics in the TOEFL speaking test.
- Respond positively to regular assignments.
- Respect the conventions of group work for specific tasks related to discussions and analysis of texts
- Use Apps to put into practice strategies and skills for answering the listening and written section of the test.

6. COURSE CONTENT

Unit 1: Learning what TOEFL is, content and useful tips.

Unit 2: Focusing on type of evaluation, results, and scales.

Unit 3: Identifying schematic structures of texts main idea, Topic, specific details.

Unit 4: Identifying purpose, attitude and organization in reading and listening.

Unit 5: Identifying anaphoric and cathaphoric expressions.

Unit 6: Using appositives for dealing with vocabulary in texts.

Unit 7: Reviewing written structures.

Unit 8: Studying grammar in context.

Unit 9: Applying skills, tips, and strategies.

Unit 10: Working with time management skills.

Unit 11: Inferring meaning from texts.

Unit 12: Studying time management skills.

Unit 13: Strategic reading, and listening every lesson.

Unit 14: Tips for taking the TOEFL test every lesson.

7. ESTRATEGIAS METODOLÓGICAS

The course is follows a learner-centered approach and a READING TO LEARN strategy for guiding reading comprehension that consists of a set of strategies to assist students during the analysis of texts. *(Reading Component in my paper)*Students will also learn strategies to cope with time, answer sheets and concentration. Tips for listening and written expressions will be used for learning how to answer listening questions and address structure analysis.

Students will be part of 3 online workshops from Fulbright, Cambridge and CAmila for online training on the test. These workshops will serve to understand the structure of the test and do online training of missing skills like speaking and writing. Some sample TOEFL ITP tests will be administered to students to put all the TOEFL ITP strategies and tips into practice for answering the test and characterize their proficiency level. In each lesson, strategies will be modeled so students learnt how to address readings tricks and respond to questions such as Main idea, specific details, purposes and inferences.*(Reading Component in my paper)* Constant reflections either oral or written might serve to understand students' progress, plan lesson and identify students' weaknesses and strengthens. Other strategies include competences, online activities for out of class practice, games and time management app control for scoring reading speed progress.

8. ACTIVIDADES Y PRÁCTICAS

Students will participate in different kinds of activities such as group-work or collaborative-work activities, online testing, reading competitions, paper based

tests, speaking online and face to face tests for TOEFL practice, class assignments, TOEFL book practice, workshops, online tests, etc.

9. CRITERIOS DE EVALUACIÓN PARA EL DESARROLLO DE COMPETENCIAS

Example: This course will implement both formal and informal assessment types. Formal assessment types include sample TOEFL tests, reading speed tests, quizzes, and partial exams. While informal types might include, student participation records, reflections, contributions and so forth.

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Online practice

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