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Factors affecting English scores at national high school exam of sophomores at Thu Dau Mot University: Empirical evidence from GLS method

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ABSTRACT

English, undeniably is now playing an extremely important role in many fields, particularly in cultural promotion and economic development of the country. Although the government has implemented several reforms to enhance the quality of nationwide English teaching and learning, the results, particularly shown through the national high school exams, are far below expectation. Therefore, as an effort to better the students' score in the exam, this paper aimed at investigating factors, mostly those relating to students, affecting their scores at the national high school exams. To achieve that goal, data will be collected from 250 sophomores of Thu Dau Mot University through questionnaires. These students are chosen to get more reliable results because the latest NHE in 2021 was held amidst the coronavirus outbreak with lots of its unavoidable impacts. The generalized least squares (GLS) method is then used with eight independent variables and the dependent variable is the English score of these students in the National high school exam. Based on the findings, some recommendations are then made.

Keywords: *English scores, National high school exam, factors, GLS model*

1. Introduction

Enhancing the teaching and learning of English to supply citizens with good commands of the language has always been critically considered by the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) due to the distinctive place of English in country's

economic and future development. Most efforts, particularly those in teaching training, material development, admittedly, have not brought up many effects as the country has been consecutively named in the group of low-proficiency category in the EF English Proficiency Index (Vietnam's English proficiency, 2020) and the number of students getting average score under 5 in English in the National High School Exams (NHE) has consecutively accounted for over 50 percent in the last over years (MoET, 2020). In particular, NHE, does reflect the quality of national education due to its important nature and influence on the career of students in over the country. The scores play a very important role in offering them an admission to their favored universities and colleges where they will be educated into the best quality graduates thence become great leaders and manpower for the country.

The average score in English, according to MoET report, was still the lowest of three obligatory tests (Math, English and Literature) in NHE over the years although numerous of efforts have been made, at a high cost. Elements like policy, curriculum, course books have always been the main issues of debate throughout the years.

Therefore, as a contribution to efficaciously better the quality of English education, the paper, at its limited scale, finds it extremely necessary to get a more thorough insight by investigating the factors mostly relating to students that affect their English scores at the NHE. However, as the latest NHE in 2021 was held amidst the coronavirus outbreak with lots of its unavoidable impacts, in order to get more reliable results, the participants chosen in the research will be second-year students at Thu Dau Mot students who were candidates in the NHE held in 2020. With the primary aim to study student-relating factors affecting their English scores at NHE, the paper is expected to help not only better the NHE English scores of the candidates in coming exams but also make students more confident and aware of strategies in learning English. For this aim, the following research questions are addressed in the study:

Question 1: What student-relating factors affect the English scores in the National high school examination of sophomores at Thu Dau Mot University?

Question 2: To what extent do these factors affect their English scores in the National high school examination?

2. Literature review

Factors affecting students' academic achievement have always been a focus of many schools, scholars and writers in sociology, psychology and educational sciences. Noticeably, in studying students' scores in most outstanding exams namely TOEIC, IELTS, TOEFL, national university entrance exams in different countries, factors relating to students receive lots of emphasis.

Marganingsih and Makmun (2020) in a study on the factors affecting students' TOEIC scores found that gender, the time spent in outside reading, English study, and opera are

influencing variables with significant impact. Meanwhile, in the same field, Kung (2015) using multivariate regression analysis concluded interest, motivation, confidence, self-esteem, and attitude are the noticeable factors. Santana & Eccius-Wellmann (2018) studied of the gender differences in test anxiety between males and females taking an TOEIC test at a Mexican university. The author used linear regression analysis with the dependent variable is TOEIC score. Results show that women's scores were significantly lower than men's, and that gender is an important factor in TOEIC score.

Muttaqin and Chuang (2022) examined the effects of gender, prior education, socioeconomic status, English proficiency, and study load on TOEFL scores at a state university in Indonesia. The data of 201 students were obtained. The author revealed that female students outperformed their male counterparts based on the overall grade point average, the student's secondary education major, the number of semesters, and the number of courses that affect the dependent variable.

Nguyen and Chung (2014) conducted a study for determining the factors that impact IELTS scores. The results showed that working part-time jobs, self-study, and the students' entry levels, could better predict their English proficiency than the others. Meanwhile, learning strategies, in general, were not a strong predictor.

In a study about Chinese students' National College Entrance Exam (Gaokao), regression analysis showed that gender, class rank in high school, academic track, parental educational level, living in the urban areas, and private tutoring were statistically significant factors on students' Gaokao performance. The study indicated that students with longer private tutoring participation time had lower Gaokao score. (Li, 2016)

In sum, the factors affecting students' English scores have been widely studied in Vietnam and many other countries around the world. However, the results of these studies are not entirely the same, due to the fact that independent variables are used differently in the model. Especially, the previous studies mainly considered the impact of qualitative variables like motivation, and psychology that impacted English scores. So, they used the Exploratory Factor Analysis method before making the linear regressions. In addition, the number of quantitative research is limited, and the authors did not solve problems related to the rejected assumption of the method. To fulfill the gap in science, in this study, the quantitative and qualitative variables are regressed with the General Least Square method to find out the factors affecting the English scores of second-year students at Thu Dau Mot University in the NHE held in 2020.

3. Methodology of study

Research Model

The model of this study is based on the work of Kung (2015). In the study of Kung (2015), the author investigated the determinants of TOEIC test scores by looking at seven

independent variables, including Gender, English study time, outside reading, interest in soap opera, hours in soap opera, interest in movies, hours in movies. In this study:

- The gender (Gen) variable is used to represent for the gender of learner.
- The amount of time for studying English every week (TFE), the amount of time for self-study English outside of class every week (TSE), the amount of time for studying English subject of students from the day they started school to graduating high school (Year) were used to represent the study time factor of learners.
- The amount of time for leisure with English programs (TLE) was used to replace some variables in the study of Kung (2015) to represent relaxing habits with foreign channels factor, including outside reading, interest in soap opera, hours in soap opera, interest in movies, hours in movies variables.

In addition, this research added more variables which show the factors on previous study:

- The average English scores of the student in the 12 grade (ASE) is used to represent the prior educational experience factor.
- whether students attended English private tutoring or not in grade 10, 11, 12 (CIEm): the variable represents the Course load factor.
- The location of the student’s high school (Loca): the variable shows The area of the student’s high school factor.

The explanations of dependent and independent variables along with their proxies are specified in Table 1.

TABLE 1: Explanation of Dependent and Independent Variables

Factor	Variable	Description
Dependent		
English scores	ESN	English scores of students in the National high school exams
Independent		
Gender	Gen	The dummy variable shows the gender of the participant, Gender = 0 if the sex is male, and Gender = 1 if the sex is female
Prior educational experience	ASE	The average English scores of the student in the 12 grade
The area of student’s high school	Loca	The dummy variable shows the location of the student’s high school. Loca = 0 if the location is countryside, and Loca = 1 if the location is city
Course load	CIEm	The dummy variable shows whether students attended English private tutoring or not in grade m, where m = 10, 11, 12, CIEm = 0 if students did not attend English private tutoring in grade m, CIEm = 1 if students attended English private tutoring in grade m.
Study time	TFE	The amount of time for studying English in every week (hours)
Study time	TSE	The amount of time for self-study English outside of class every week (hours)
Study time	Year	The amount of time for studying English subject of students from they went to school to graduating high school (years)
Relaxing habit with foreign channels	TLE	The amount of time for leisure with English programs every week (hours)

The baseline model can be written as follows:

$$ESN_i = \alpha_0 + \beta_1 * Gen_i + \beta_2 * TFE_i + \beta_3 * TSE_i + \beta_4 * TRE_i + \beta_5 * CIE_{10i} + \beta_6 * CIE_{11i} + \beta_7 * CIE_{12i} + \beta_8 * ASE_i + \beta_9 * Year_i + \beta_{10} * Loca_i + U_i \quad (1)$$

Where:

α_0 = the intercept of the regression equation.

β_k = coefficients of independent variables (where $k=1, 2, 3, \dots, 10$).

U_i = error term of equation (1).

The Explanation of dependent and independent variables is listed in Table 1.

Research Hypothesis

The Table 2 gives the hypothesizes of this study and their expected effect as explained above

TABLE 2: The hypothesizes of this study

No.	Symbol	Null Hypothesizes	Expected Effect
H1:	Gen	There exist no relationship between gender and English score of students in the National high school exam (ESN).	Positive
H2:	TFE	There exist no relationship between The amount of time for studying English in every week and ESN	Positive
H3	TSE	There exist no relationship between The amount of time for self-study English outside of class every week and ESN	Positive
H4	TLE	There exist no relationship between the amount of time for leisure with English programs every week and ESN	Positive
H5	CIE_m	There exist no relationship between attending English private tutoring in grade m and ESN ($m = 10, 11, 12$)	Positive
H6	ASE	There exist no relationship between the average English score(s) of the student in the 12 grade and ESN	Positive
H7	Year	There exists no relationship between the amount of time for studying English subject of students from they went to school to graduating high school and ESN	Positive
H8	Loca	There exists no relationship between the location of the student's high school and ESN	Positive

Data

In obtaining the data, the necessary information was gathered from primary data such as a survey. A questionnaire was designed and distributed to second-year students at Thu Dau Mot University, Binh Duong province. There were 250 students who took part in this survey. However, nine students were excluded from the sample because of missing data. They were from diverse fields of study: Finance and banking, Accounting; Engineering, languages, education, Law, Pedagogy, and others.

Methodology

According to Marill (2004), Multiple linear regression (MLR) is a statistical technique that uses several explanatory variables to predict the outcome of a response variable. In

essence, the algorithm in the OLS method helps to define the parameters of the line, and this method can find out the best-fitting line, which means the sum of the squares of the vertical distance from each data point on the line which finds out by MLR is smallest (Brown, 2009). Therefore, OLS method is used after the verification process of descriptive statistics, and correlation matrix for variables. The next, multicollinearity of independent variable, normal distribution, and heteroskedasticity of residuals were tested. Finally, the generalized least squares (GLS) was used to correct defects and draw conclusions. The steps of this research are described in Figure 2.

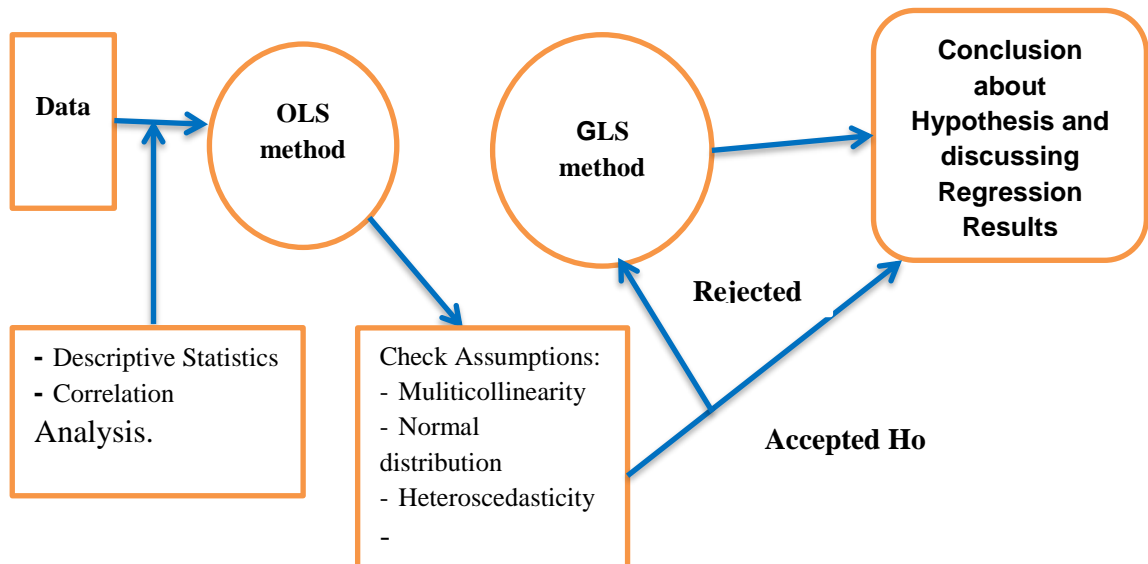


Figure 2. The process of research

4. Result

Descriptive Statistics

Based on actual class survey data, we obtain 241 effective observations. These observations are randomly selected from classes to avoid data selection bias. Summary statistics of quantitative variables, qualitative variables, and correlation matrix are presented in Table2, Table 3, and Table 4 respectively.

TABLE 2. Descriptive Statistics of quantitative Variables

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
ESN	241	6.297925	1.787607	1.5	8.2
TFE	241	8.136929	4.791695	1	26
TSE	241	3.981328	3.282	0	17
TLE	241	4.244813	3.663193	0	15
ASE	241	7.019212	1.081935	4.5	8.8
Year	241	10.11618	1.958685	7	13

TABLE 3. Descriptive Statistics of qualitative Variables

Gen	CIE10			CIE11			CIE12			Loca		
	No	Yes	Total	No	Yes	Total	No	Yes	Total	City	Ctryside	Total
Female	130	55	185	125	60	185	83	102	185	106	79	185
Male	40	16	56	43	13	56	34	22	56	42	14	56
Total	170	71	241	168	73	241	117	124	241	148	93	241

Correlation above 0.8 between independent variables indicates the existence of the problem of multicollinearity (Guajarati, 2004). From the correlation coefficients presented in the table 3, there is no serious multicollinearity among the variables. The amount of time for studying English in every week of the sample are strongly associated (0.73) with their time for self-study English outside of class every week and moderately correlated with the rest of the independent variables. Therefore, OLS regression is done with ESN as the dependent variable.

TABLE 4. Correlation matrix for dependent and independent variables

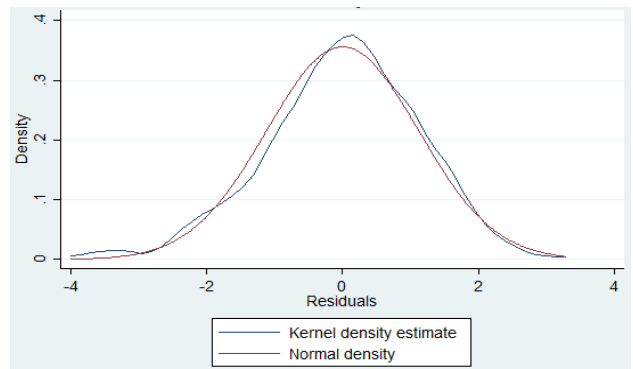
ESN	Gen	TFE	TSE	TLE	CIE10	CIE11	CIE12	ASE	Year	Loca	
ESN	1.00										
Gen	-0.20	1.00									
TFE	0.45	-0.02	1.00								
TSE	0.57	-0.04	0.73	1.00							
TLE	0.45	-0.15	0.39	0.42	1.00						
CIE10	0.05	0.01	0.13	0.13	0.02	1.00					
CIE11	0.05	0.08	0.16	0.18	0.01	0.82	1.00				
CIE12	0.14	0.13	0.21	0.27	-0.01	0.37	0.51	1.00			
ASE	0.68	-0.14	0.39	0.42	0.34	0.06	0.06	0.17	1.00		
Year	0.09	0.14	0.15	0.12	0.11	-0.01	0.06	-0.01	0.06	1.00	
Loca	0.30	-0.15	0.19	0.25	0.17	0.01	0.05	0.01	0.17	0.11	1.00

Ecometric results

The author tests the assumption of the regression model (OLS). Firstly, the existence of the problem of multicollinearity was tested using the variance inflation factor (VIF). According to Guajarati (2004), VIF above 10 shows the existence of multicollinearity. As can be seen from the Table 5 that presented the VIF of the variables, none of them is above 10. This shows that there is no problem of multicollinearity in this analysis.

Variable	VIF	1/VIF
CIE11	3.80	0.263017
TSE	3.67	0.272174
TFE	3.34	0.299602
CIE10	3.22	0.310653
CIE12	1.51	0.662263
TLE	1.33	0.749700
ASE	1.33	0.754323
Gen	1.12	0.889646
Loca	1.12	0.891736
Year	1.09	0.920570
Mean VIF	2.15	

Secondly, for normal distribution, A kernel density plot produces a kind of histogram for the residuals, the option normal overlays a normal distribution to compare. In this study, the Kernel density estimate and normal density seem the same (figure 3). This is strong evidence to show the residuals of this



model are very close to a normal distribution. **Figure 3.** Kernel density estimate

The other assumption of the model was about heteroscedasticity. the Breusch-Pagan test is used to find out the heteroscedasticity. The null hypothesis is that residuals are homoskedastic. In this study, at 99% significant, we reject the null and conclude that residuals are not homogeneous (Table 5). Because the residuals display a heteroscedasticity, we use a GLS model to overcome this problem. Regression

results using the GLS model are shown in Table 7.

TABLE 6: Breusch-Pagan / Cook-Weisberg test for heteroskedasticity
 Ho: Constant variance
 Variables: fitted values of ESN
 chi2(1) = 4.64

The overall regression is statistically significant with p-value of F-test = 0.000. The coefficient of multiple determinations (0.61) also supports this result, which suggests that 61% of the variations of ESN are explained by the changes in the independent variables.

Table 7: Generalized Least Square Estimates

	Number of obs	= 241
	F(10, 230)	= 51.87
	Prob > F	= 0.0000
	R-squared	= 0.6068

	ESN	Coef.	Robust Std. Err.	t	P> t
	Gen	-.3289188	.1934198	-1.70	0.090
	TFE	-.0514541	.0262145	-1.96	0.051
	TSE	.2072062	.0434234	4.77	0.000
	TLE	.071239	.0237258	3.00	0.003
	CIE10	.1945038	.3557705	0.55	0.585
	CIE11	-.3216904	.3679876	-0.87	0.383
	CIE12	.0846335	.1788442	0.47	0.637
	ASE	.8034151	.0786615	10.21	0.000
	Year	.0219267	.0444982	0.49	0.623
	Loca	.4144213	.1700445	2.44	0.016
	_cons	-.27732	.6692666	-0.41	0.679

Table 7 shows that having six factors significantly affect to English scores of students in the National high school exam with 95%, 99%, and 99% confidence level respectively. While reviewing the results, the researcher comes to take a decision on the study hypothesis as it appears in the Table 2.

TABLE 8. The Hypotheses Summary for GLS Models

No.	Null Hypothesizes	Expected Effect	Coef	Result
H1:	H ₀ : There exist no relationship between gender and English score of students in the National high school exam (ESN).	Positive	-0.329*	Rejected
H2:	H ₀ : There exist no relationship between The amount of time for studying English in every week and ESN	Positive	-0.0515*	Rejected
H3	H ₀ : There exist no relationship between The amount of time for self-study English outside of class every week and ESN	Positive	0.207***	Rejected
H4	H ₀ : There exist no relationship between the amount of time for leisure with English programs every week and ESN	Positive	0.0712***	Rejected
H5	H ₀ : There exist no relationship between attending English courses in the evening in grade m and ESN (m = 10, 11, 12)	Positive	0.195 -0.322 0.0846	Accepted
H6	H ₀ : There exist no relationship between the average English score(s) of the student in the 12 grade and ESN	Positive	0.803***	Rejected
H7	H ₀ : There exists no relationship between the amount of time for studying English subject of students from they went to school to graduating high school and ESN	Positive	0.0219	Accepted
H8	H ₀ : There exists no relationship between the location of the student's high school and ESN	Positive	0.414**	Rejected

Standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

5. Discussion and suggestions

The overall objective of this study was to examine the effects student-relating factors on the English scores of sophomores of Thu Dau Mot University of the NHE in 2020. It was found that factors relating students themselves significantly affect their English scores. For instance, the gender, the amount of time for studying English, self-study English outside of class, for leisure with English programs influence English scores. The other factors also were significantly related to their English ability like the average English scores of the students in the grade 12, and the locations of the high schools of the students with a minimum of 95% confidence level.

Among the explanatory variables, the average English score of the student in the 12 grade was found to have the largest impact on the changes of English scores in NHE. This impact was significant at 1 percent. This factor has a significant positive (0.8) effect on English ability. The result suggests that one unit increase in the average English score of the student in the 12 grade raises ESN by 0.8 scores. The positive effect agrees with the expectation of the paper. This result is the same as Nguyen & Chung (2014), Li (2016),

Muttaqin & Chuang (2022). This is could be due to the level of knowledge in grade 12 being the same level in the NHE. This supports that teachers need to improve the teaching quality in high schools.

As expected, time for self-study English outside of class, and time for leisure with English programs every week impact positively ESN at 1% significance. The coefficient of 0.31 and 0.07 means that 1 hour per week in time for self-study English outside of class, and time for leisure with English programs increase leads to 0.2, and 0.07 score respectively increase in ESN. The results are similar to Nguyen & Chung (2014), Kung (2015), Marganingsih & Makmun (2020) who argued that the positive relationship between outside reading and hours of watching opera affect English test scores significantly. The results suggest that students can improve their English scores in the National high school exam if they spend more time on self-study, and relaxing with the English program.

However, the result shows that time for studying English every week was found to be negatively associated with the score. The results suggest that when this ratio increases by 1 hour, the score is down by 0.05 mark. This result was significant at 10 percent. The results differ with two factors related to the time mentioned above, and the research of Kung (2015), the author supports the positive relationship between study time and English test scores. This result provides evidence that students who spend a lot of time studying English have a negative effect, the reasons are the pressure of taking the test, or another situation, students attend English courses in the evening as a movement and do not concentrate on learning with bad study attitude.

The location of high school is another determinant of English scores in the National high school exam. It impacted English scores positively as expected, the coefficient of location is 0.4 and was found significant at 1% level. It means the score of students in the city is higher than in the countryside at 0.4 marks. This finding is consistent with Li (2016), and indicates that the learning English quality of students in the city is better than in the countryside. The reason may be that the experience teaching, facilities, and teaching method of teachers in cities are better than in rural areas. It is a good condition to help students to understand the knowledge more easily. In addition, the role of English is emphasized, especially in cities, which helps students identify motivation and attitudes to study better than students in rural areas.

Not as expected, gender impacted the English scores of students in the NHE negatively. Females, in general, obtain lower English test scores than males by 0.3 marks at 10% significance level. This result is opposite with Kung (2015), Marganingsih & Makmun (2020), Muttaqin & Chuang (2022) as the author indicated that females obtain higher English test scores than males due to their carefulness in reading and answering. However, this result is supported by the findings of Santana & Eccius-Wellmann (2018). According to this study, when women and men take part in an exam, they face anxiety problems like worry, avoidance, and Physiological Response (Test Anxiety). Because the

Test Anxiety ration of women was significantly higher than the men's, thus, they get significantly lower on the English exam. To minimize this problem, schools should establish English clubs and encourage students, especially females join them. This solution helps students become more confident and remove the feeling of anxiety and nervousness when facing English.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings revealed that gender, the amount of time for studying English, self-study English outside of class, leisure with English programs every week, the average English score of the student in the 12 grade, and the location's high school of the student are the major significant determinants of their English scores at NHE. The results also confirmed that an increase in time for self-study English outside of class, and time for leisure with English programs leads to higher English scores, the gender also impacts English ability. This suggests that to improve students' English scores in the NHE, teachers should convey the knowledge by using new teaching methods like watching films, music, presentations, open more English-speaking clubs. In addition, it is highly advisable that students spend more time self-study English outside the classrooms, entertain themselves with English programs, as well as join English-speaking clubs to get more confidence and success in their English learning.

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QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENTS

(Title: Factors affecting English scores at National high school exam of sophomores at Thu Dau Mot University: Empirical evidence from GLS method)

This survey questionnaire is designed for our study namely: “Factors affecting English scores at National high school exam of sophomores at Thu Dau Mot University: Empirical evidence from GLS method”. The aims of the study are to examine factors that affect English scores in the National high school exam of second year students at Thu Dau Mot University. All your personal information as well as the data collected will be kept confidential and not be used for other purposes. Your assistance in completing the following questions is greatly appreciated. Please put a tick in the box (☐) beside the option(s) you choose.

PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Name:
2. Phone number:
3. Faculty:
4. When did you take part in the National high school exam?
 2019 2020 2021 2022

If your answer is “2020”, please continue to answer the questions below, otherwise, you can stop answering this questionnaire.

PART II: AFFECTING FACTORS

No	Question	Your answer
1	How many scores did you get in English at the National high school exam? scores
2	Your gender	<input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female
3	Did you attend English private tutoring? (you can choose one or more options)	<input type="checkbox"/> I didn't attend English private tutoring in high school period <input type="checkbox"/> I attended English private tutoring in 10 grade <input type="checkbox"/> I attended English private tutoring in 11 grade <input type="checkbox"/> I attended English private tutoring in 12 grade
4	How many hours did you spend learning English in a week?hour(s)/week
5	How long had you learned English till the time you attended the National high school exam?years
6	What was your English average score when you were in grade 12? scores
7	Where is your high school located?	<input type="checkbox"/> City <input type="checkbox"/> countryside
8	How many hours did you spend on self-studying English outside of class?hour(s)/week
9	How many hours did you spend on leisure with English programs (movies, music, radio, ...)?hour(s)/week

Thank you so much for your cooperation!