

ENGLISH ACCESS MICROSCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Evaluation Report

December 2016

Prepared by General Dynamics Information Technology (GDIT)

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ENGLISH ACCESS MICROSCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM EVALUATION REPORT

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Washington, DC

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To download a full copy of this report and its executive summary, visit
<http://eca.state.gov/impact/evaluation-eca>

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Executive Summary

PROGRAM AND EVALUATION OVERVIEW

English language programming overseas is a critical tool used by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) to achieve important foreign policy priorities. ECA's English Access Microscholarship Program (Access) provides a foundation of English language skills and exposure to U.S. culture and democratic values to academically promising 13- to 20-year-olds from economically disadvantaged backgrounds through two years of afterschool classes, intensive sessions, and enhancement activities. In 2013, ECA's Evaluation Division contracted General Dynamics Information Technology (GDIT) to conduct an evaluation of Access in order to understand (1) how the program helps U.S. Missions around the world meet foreign policy goals and (2) the program's impact on participants.

The findings of the evaluation were analyzed in relation to the goals of the Access program and U.S. foreign policy priorities. These included: (1) providing expanded educational and economic opportunity to underprivileged youth and fostering their skills as emerging leaders; (2) contributing to increased understanding of the United States and productive U.S. engagement with foreign societies; and (3) supporting the development of civil society, including through participants' community service.

Using a mixed-method evaluation design, data was collected in two stages:

- **April 2014–April 2015:** On-site fieldwork in Cambodia, Israel, Malaysia, Morocco, Palestinian Territories, Peru, and Senegal. Each visit included a face-to-face survey of Access participants from the FY 2008 and FY 2009 cohorts; one to four focus groups with former participants from the same cohorts; and semi-structured interviews with Access teachers and program administrators, as well as with U.S. Embassy¹ and Consulate staff knowledgeable about the program.
- **May–June 2015:** Telephone interviews with U.S. Embassy staff in Brazil, Burkina Faso, Burma, Guatemala, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Russia, South Africa, Tajikistan, and Ukraine.

In total, the evaluation collected data from 361 former Access participants, 32 teachers, 25 administrators, and 52 U.S. Embassy and Consulate personnel in 17 countries and territories representing all six of the U.S. Department of State's geographic regions.

HOW DOES ACCESS EMPOWER UNDERPRIVILEGED YOUTH AND FOSTER THE SKILLS OF EMERGING LEADERS?

English Skills

- **English skills gained during Access.** The majority of survey respondents reported dramatic improvement in all four key English skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. For example, only 12% felt capable of speaking English before the program; afterwards 75% reported they were capable or very capable. Indeed, focus group participants described their English ability transforming from minimal understanding to highly communicative.

Participants' Capability to Perform Activities in English Post-Program	
Activity	Percentage
Read a storybook, novel, or newspaper	85%
Understand song lyrics, movies, or TV	84%
Access websites, social media, or blogs	81%
Write an essay or cover letter/application	80%
Engage in conversation with different kinds of people	80%
Make presentation in class or at work	77%
Percentage of survey respondents who feel "very capable" or "moderately capable." n = 255–256	

¹ Note: For the purpose of this report, Embassies are interchangeably referred to as "Post," referring to the U.S. State Department's overseas operations at U.S. Embassies

- **Use of English post-program.**

- Nearly all the participants surveyed (95 percent) consider the English skills they gained in Access “very valuable” or “moderately valuable” for their daily lives.
- Nine in ten (93 percent) of respondents have continued to use the language after completing the program, most commonly in their academic life (75 percent).
- Focus group participants in all seven fieldwork countries mentioned using English to **consume entertainment media**, whether listening to U.S. music or watching television and movies.
- Participants from all seven fieldwork countries reported benefitting from the English immersion classroom environment, where they had no choice but to communicate only in English.

Academic and Employability Skills. Access teachers, administrators, and former participants reported that in addition to English, participants often gain other key skills that contribute to their academic success and future employability, most notably: **critical thinking and learning skills, technology skills, and self-confidence and communication skills.**

Transforming Academic Skills

“The students’ whole life is changed [by Access]. Some have gone to study English at the university, others have had their grades improved, and some have had the opportunity to study in the United States.” – Administrator, Morocco

Critical Thinking and Learning Skills. Teachers and administrators, in particular, emphasized that participants gained critical thinking and learning skills. Survey respondents from every country stated that the Access Program improved their academic success in English and other subjects in high school and beyond.

- **Time Management.** Students learned how to better manage their time and to develop more rigorous study habits in order to meet their Access commitment on top of their regular schoolwork. Several interviewees in Senegal and Israel identified these skills as one of the greatest benefits of Access. Former participants in both Senegal and Cambodia agreed that the program enhanced their study skills and time management skills.

Educational opportunities and outcomes.

- Nearly all survey respondents (96 percent) reported that Access participation had improved their grades in high school.
- The majority of respondents reported that Access had led them to apply to different universities (54 percent) and/or to complete a higher degree (58 percent).

Professional opportunities and outcomes. Among survey respondents who are currently working, 61 percent reported that Access had changed the job opportunities available to them. Former participants noted that English provides an advantage with employers and the potential for higher salaries.

- **Professional life.** Two-thirds (66 percent) of survey respondents who were working at the time of the study reported using English in their professional life. Focus group participants in several countries explained that they had jobs where they interacted with foreigners, such as hotels or companies with international customers or business partners.

Multiplier Effects: Strengthening English teaching.

- **Teachers' professional outcomes.** Teachers reported benefiting from U.S. Embassy-sponsored Access training; opportunities to attend regional Access training programs; learning new teaching methods; opportunities to attend U.S. professional exchange programs; leadership and professional development. They also reported increased motivation to pursue advanced degrees.
- **Impacts on schools and education.**
 - Interviewees reported that teachers *used the new teaching methods* they had learned from Access in their regular teaching jobs at public and private schools, and often shared these methods with other teachers.
 - In Peru and Israel, the ministries of education had shown interest in possibly replicating Access teaching methods nationwide.

Multiplier Effect

"We devote a lot of resources for development of Access teachers ... [who] become available for building up the teaching capacity of a community. ... The multiplier effect of that is massive." - U.S. Embassy staff, Cambodia

U.S. Embassy Perspectives: Engaging and empowering underprivileged youth and emerging leaders. U.S. Embassy staff interviewed reported that by enhancing the skills and opportunities of participants, Access supports multiple foreign policy goals, including engaging youth and emerging leaders, and fostering educational and economic opportunities.

HOW DOES ACCESS CONTRIBUTE TO PRODUCTIVE U.S. ENGAGEMENT WITH FOREIGN SOCIETIES?

According to U.S. Embassy and Consulate staff interviewed, Access contributes to productive engagement between the United States and foreign countries in several ways.

Fostering U.S. Embassy relationships with diverse communities.

- **Engaging diverse communities.** U.S. Embassy and Consulate staff cited Access as valuable for engaging diverse *communities* in various geographical locations.
- **Building contacts and relationships.** Several U.S. Embassy interviewees described Access as a way for U.S. Embassies to develop contacts in communities—such as schools, teachers, alumni, and local officials—for outreach programs, visits and other engagement with the U.S. Embassy.
- A few U.S. Embassy interviewees said that Access helps their Mission engage key *disenfranchised groups*, including ethnic and religious minorities (Burma) and indigenous communities (Guatemala).

Strengthening U.S. Embassy relationships with host country government entities. U.S. Embassy staff interviewed reported that Access has helped develop or strengthen relationships with government entities in 11 countries.

- According to interviewees, Access has fostered U.S. Embassy relationships with *ministries of education* in several countries where there is desire to collaborate on English language learning.
- In some cases, interviewees reported that Access has facilitated relationships with *local governments*, largely due to the trust that is built over time by the U.S. Embassy's commitment to maintaining an Access program in a locality as well as local officials' appreciation for the opportunities provided to local youth by the United States via Access.

Access alumni participation in U.S. exchanges and leadership programs. Five percent of survey respondents reported having participated in some kind of “exchange program with the United States” (to include both virtual and in-person exchanges, U.S. government and non U.S. government sponsored) since Access. This is a significant outcome, given the demographic backgrounds and limited financial resources of the Access alumni and the highly competitive nature of the exchange programs themselves.

- Interviewees and focus groups reported *Access alumni participation* in the Youth Exchange & Study Program (YES), Youth Ambassadors Program, South East Asia Youth Leadership Program (SEAYLP), and the Cambodia Youth Leadership Program.
- U.S. Embassy staff in several countries described *collaborating with Access providers to actively recruit Access alumni for exchange programs*. In Cambodia and Peru, U.S. Embassy staff coordinated a group of Access alumni to attend a specific exchange program together.
- *U.S. Embassy staff in many countries consider it a success when even a few students from an Access cohort are selected for an exchange program*. For example, a U.S. Embassy staff member in Pakistan said that every year, some Access students win slots in the YES program: “That, to me, is an enormous victory.”

Access alumni contact with U.S. Embassy and/or U.S. Department of State. Very few of the Access alumni at the time of the survey had maintained contact with the U.S. Embassy or U.S. Department of State since the program.

- Although it was unclear how many had regular access to the internet, less than a third reported following the U.S. Embassy or U.S. Department of State on social media (29 percent) or websites (20 percent), and 12 percent receive emails from the U.S. Embassy.
- Focus group participants, U.S. Embassy and Consulate staff, teachers, and administrators commonly mentioned Facebook groups as a way that Access alumni keep in touch both with U.S. Embassies and with each other.
- Some alumni stay involved with the program by visiting new Access classes, volunteering at intensive sessions, helping teachers, and/or participating in Access community service activities.

HOW DOES ACCESS CONTRIBUTE TO SUPPORTING CIVIL SOCIETY?

Civic engagement during Access Program. Most of the U.S. Embassy and Consulate staff interviewed agreed that Access plants seeds for long-term civil society–building by teaching disadvantaged youth about civic engagement and involving them in community service activities. In many countries, interviewees and former participants pointed out that “community service” was a new concept in their culture.

- Former participants, teachers, and administrators around the world emphasized that Access classes teach English but also “*values*” and *civic engagement*.
- **Community service activities:** Most commonly, survey respondents mentioned the following: environmental activities; volunteering with children; charity and donations to the needy; neighborhood and community improvement; visiting orphanages, nursing homes, and hospitals; and school clean-up or beautification.
- In some locations, such as Cambodia and Morocco, Access providers or teachers collaborate with local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for community service activities that expose students to the role and programs of non-governmental civil society organizations.

Post-program civic engagement.

- As a result of Access, more than three-quarters of survey respondents reported that they are more aware of issues in their community (77 percent); are more committed to making changes in their community (78 percent) and have encouraged friends or peers to help the community (88 percent).
- Overall, 59 percent of survey respondents reported volunteering in their schools and/or communities since Access, most commonly helping their communities, helping the needy, volunteering with children, and/or teaching English.
- In total, 22 percent of survey respondents, as well as some focus group participants, reported starting a new organization, group, or program since Access.

Building the capacity of partner organizations and NGOs. One of the expectations of U.S. Embassies is that Access will help to strengthen the capacity of local program providers, which are often NGOs. Indeed, U.S. Embassy staff in Burma, Kazakhstan, Morocco, Tajikistan, and Togo have trained NGO Access partners in program management skills, including budgeting, record keeping, and reporting to funders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthen the technology component of the program. Currently, the technology component of the program varies widely by location and often is determined by the discretion and resources available to individual teachers. Thus, the evaluation team recommends systematizing the technology piece of the Access curriculum to ensure that all teachers receive the necessary training and that all classrooms have the equipment needed, to the extent possible within each country's infrastructure.

Provide more comprehensive, systematized teacher training. Teacher training has proven highly effective for the success of Access. Nonetheless, interviewees in Israel, Malaysia, the Palestinian Territories, and Senegal—including administrators, teachers, and U.S. Embassy and Consulate personnel—believe that the program would benefit from more regular teacher training. English language training is particularly needed for non-native speakers who have not spent time abroad. Technology could also be incorporated into teacher training.

Formalize structure for Access alumni network and programming. All stakeholders—former participants, U.S. Embassy staff, administrators, and teachers—saw the need for more consistent alumni follow-up. Specifically, the evaluation team recommends (1) providing guidance for U.S. Embassies on how to integrate alumni activities into the Access Program; (2) designating a percentage of annual Access funding for alumni activities; and (3) increasing communication among Access coordinators in different countries.

Facilitate more U.S. exchanges for Access alumni. Given that one of the U.S. Government's goals for Access is to have participants potentially feed into ECA exchange programs, it seems that U.S. Embassies could do more to strengthen the link between Access and other target programs, such as YES. For example, ensure that Access participants finish the program in time to participate in YES before graduating from high school, and ensure that Access participants in eligible countries are informed about the YES Program and application process

Strengthen the community service component. Given that the community service component varied widely among Access programs across and within countries, the evaluation team offers the following recommendations: (1) provide U.S. Embassies and providers with clear guidance regarding ECA's expectations for community service; (2) consider linking Access classes with NGOs for community

service work; and/or (3) look for ways to involve local communities in Access community service activities.

Note: The U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, Office of English Language Programs, continues to incorporate best practices and lessons learned into the English Access Microscholarship Program. Since the evaluation was commissioned, several program changes occurred.

- In 2012 teacher training became a formal part of the Access program and since its inception over 70 in-country trainings have occurred worldwide.
- In 2014, the program broadened its reach to include not only teacher training and English language scholarships but also alumni programming, which allows posts to maintain contact with Access alumni and helps U.S. embassies address their strategic English language plans.
- In order to strengthen the community service component of the Access program, an exchange program was conducted in October/November 2016 for 25 Access teachers at Bowling Green State University, focusing on service learning and how to incorporate community service into the Access curriculum. The exchange has yielded a number of best practices that will be shared with Access teachers worldwide.
- Since the evaluation, technology training has become a significant component of the Access program, as is feasible in each country.
- Because of the technology training and the more widespread use of social media, alumni engagement through social media has expanded dramatically in recent years. The Access Program's Facebook page currently has over 30,000 likes, and there are multiple country-specific Facebook and other social media sites.
- The Access Program continues to expand to remote locations, and recruitment plans continue to focus on marginalized, economically disadvantaged students in over 80 countries around the world.

Introduction: Program and Evaluation Overview

English language programming overseas is a critical tool used by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) to achieve important foreign policy priorities. One such program is ECA's English Access Microscholarship Program (Access), which provides a foundation of English language skills and exposure to U.S. culture and democratic values to academically promising 13- to 20-year-olds from economically disadvantaged backgrounds through two years of afterschool classes, intensive sessions, and enhancement activities. Access gives participants English and other skills that may lead to better jobs, educational prospects, and the ability to apply for scholarships to study or to participate in U.S. exchanges.² In 2013, ECA's Evaluation Division contracted General Dynamics Information Technology (GDIT) to conduct an evaluation of Access in order to understand (1) how the program helps U.S. Missions around the world meet foreign policy goals and (2) the program's impact on participants.

The findings of the evaluation were analyzed in relation to the goals of the Access program and U.S. foreign policy priorities. These included: (1) providing expanded educational and economic opportunity to underprivileged youth and fostering their skills as emerging leaders; (2) contributing to increased understanding of the United States and productive U.S. engagement with foreign societies; and (3) supporting civil society, including through community service.

Data collection strategy. Using a mixed-method evaluation design, data was collected in two stages:

- **April 2014–April 2015:** On-site fieldwork in Cambodia, Israel, Malaysia, Morocco, Palestinian Territories, Peru, and Senegal.
- **May–June 2015:** Telephone interviews with U.S. Embassy staff in Brazil, Burkina Faso, Burma, Guatemala, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Russia, South Africa, Tajikistan, and Ukraine.

English Access Microscholarship Program at a Glance

History and Scale

- Started in Africa, East Asia and the Pacific, South and Central Asia, and Europe and Eurasia
- Now in 80+ countries
- About 15,000 scholarships per year
- Over 100,000+ past participants

Program Components

Two-year program covering:

- English language skills
- U.S. culture and democratic values
- Leadership and confidence building
- Community service and civic engagement
- Technology skills

Activities (length varies from country to country)

- English immersion classes about 5 hours/week
- Enhancement activities (field trips, guest speakers)
- Intensive session (approximately 3-7 days but it could be longer)

Program Participants

- 13-20 years old
- 50% female and 50% male
- Committed students who demonstrate potential from underserved communities

² <http://exchanges.state.gov/non-us/program/english-access-microscholarship-program> Accessed August 2016.

Each fieldwork visit included a face-to-face survey of Access participants from the FY 2008 and FY 2009 cohorts; one to four focus groups with former participants from the same cohorts; and semi-structured interviews with Access teachers and program administrators, as well as U.S. Embassy and Consulate staff knowledgeable about the program.³ In total, the evaluation collected data from 361 former Access participants, 32 teachers, 25 administrators, and 52 U.S. Embassy and Consulate personnel in 17 countries and territories representing all of the U.S. Department of State's regions.⁴

Profile of Survey and Focus Group Participants

Gender

- 53% Female
- 47% Male

Age

- 92% between 18-21 years
- 8% over 21
- 1% under 18

Education (highest attainment)

- 72% university (partial or completed)
- 5% trade/technical school (partial or completed)
- 14% completed secondary school
- 9% partial secondary school

n=361 (256 survey respondents + 105 focus group participants). All percentages rounded.

Activities of Focus Group Participants *(at time of study between 2014 and 2015)*

- 72% in university
- 17% working
- 10% in secondary school
- 10% looking for job
- 4% in trade/technical school

³ For the Palestinian Territories: Due to U.S. security restrictions, the evaluation team did not visit Gaza. Thus, only one focus group was held in the West Bank. Interviews with Gaza program administrators and a teacher were conducted via digital video; the face-to-face survey was divided evenly among West Bank and Gaza respondents, with Gaza interviews conducted by the local research firm's team in Gaza.

⁴ A complete description of the evaluation methodology, including the report's appendices are available upon request.

I. How Does Access Empower Underprivileged Youth and Foster the Skills of Emerging Leaders?

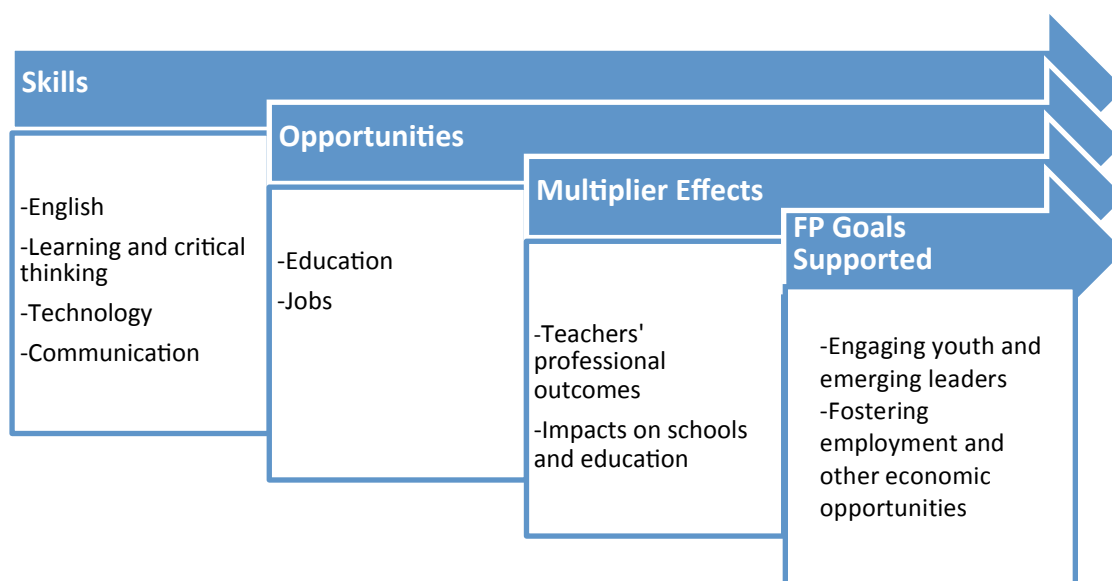
The Access Program is designed to provide English and other skills, as well as new opportunities, to underprivileged youth around the world.

The majority of Access participants, teachers, and administrators responding to this evaluation concurred that the program provides youth participants with a suite of skills—English, learning and critical thinking, technology, self-confidence, and communication—that gives them “access” to educational and employment opportunities they would not otherwise have.

Furthermore, as will be discussed in Section C (Multiplier Effect: Strengthening English Teaching), U.S. Embassy staff, administrators, and teachers reported that Access has had the indirect outcome of strengthening English teachers’ skills and professional opportunities, which can have a ripple effect on English teaching in local schools and the wider educational community.

Finally, as will be discussed in Section D (U.S. Embassy Perspectives: Engaging and Empowering Underprivileged Youth and Emerging Leaders), U.S. Embassy staff across regions reported that by enhancing the skills and opportunities of participants, Access supports multiple foreign policy goals, including engaging youth and emerging leaders and fostering employment and other educational and economic opportunities.

Figure 1. Access Skills and Opportunities Support Multiplier Effects and Foreign Policy Goals



A. Enhancing Participants’ English, Academic, and Employability Skills

By far the greatest impact of the program cited by participants is improved English skills.⁵ In addition, participants often gain other key skills that contribute to their academic success and future employability, including critical thinking and learning skills, technology skills, and self-confidence and communication skills.

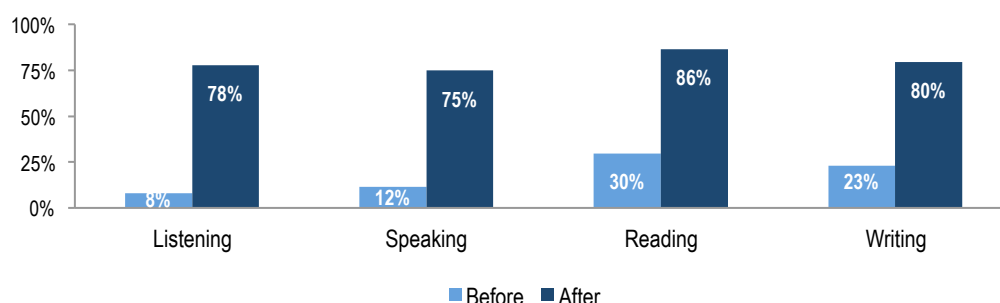
⁵ Based on coding of open-ended responses to the survey question, “What is the single greatest impact that the Access Program has had on your life?”

1. English Skills

With few exceptions, participants in all the fieldwork countries gained advanced English skills during Access, which they have been able to use in many ways after the program.

English skills gained during program. The majority of survey respondents reported improvement in all four key English skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—after the 2-year program.

Figure 2. Participants' English Capability Before and After Access



Percentages of survey respondents reporting "capable" or "very capable."
n = 256

Indeed, focus group participants described their **English ability transforming from minimal understanding to highly communicative**. They emphasized that the Access teaching method contributed substantially to helping them learn the language and gain confidence in speaking it:

- English immersion:** Participants from all seven fieldwork countries reported benefitting from the English immersion classroom environment, where they had no choice but to communicate only in English.
- Discussion-based format:** Focus group participants frequently mentioned the informal, discussion-based class format, in which students were encouraged to ask questions and take a more active role in learning than they are accustomed to at government schools.
- Dynamic, interactive activities:** Many participants described Access classes as "fun"—especially compared to English classes at school—because of games, group activities, and role plays, among other exercises, which helped motivate them to learn the language.

Transforming Participants' English Skills

The first time they made us listen to a conversation [in English from an audio recording], it sounded like Japanese to me. ... However, by the end of the program, I could understand what was being said.

—Female participant, Senegal

At the beginning, we could not speak English in front of people, but now, thank God, we can speak English in front of anyone.

—Male participant, Morocco

Access Students Experience English Immersion

We breathed English everywhere; we thought in English everywhere.

—Female participant, Peru

Nonetheless, while they appreciated how much their English had improved, some participants, especially in Morocco and Malaysia, felt that they did not gain as much proficiency as they would have liked.⁶ For example, some Moroccan participants found it difficult to converse in English. Likewise, in Kelantan, Malaysia (a relatively remote area), some participants felt that they still were not proficient after completing Access. One participant explained, “I speak broken English.” As such, a common suggestion from participants is to extend Access to three years to allow for participants to truly gain greater levels of proficiency.

Use of English post-program. Nearly all the participants surveyed (95 percent) consider the English skills they gained in Access valuable for their daily lives.⁷ Indeed, more than nine in ten participants (93 percent) have continued to use the language, most commonly in their academic life (75 percent).

- **Academic life (university).** Focus group participants in all seven fieldwork countries who are now at university have found English very useful for their studies, most commonly for the following purposes:
 - *Reading and research.* Participants in multiple disciplines use English to read both required and supplemental course texts and to conduct research.
 - *Listening to lectures.* In several countries, participants reported that many professors lecture in English, so their advanced English skills allow them to easily follow lectures and converse with professors.
- **Professional life.** Two-thirds (66 percent) of survey respondents who are currently working reported using English in their professional life. Focus group participants in several countries explained that they have jobs where they interact with foreigners, such as hotels or companies with international customers or business partners.
- **Social life.** Nearly half of the survey respondents said they continue to use English in their social life (48 percent), most commonly speaking English with foreigners, including both friends and tourists.

Former Participants Continue to Use English

Academic Life: *At university, all the textbooks, including the websites, are in English. So English is so important for us.*

—Male participant, Cambodia

Professional Life: *The program influenced my ability to speak English to an extent that I now use English more than any other language at work.*

—Male participant, Israel

Social Life: *[I use English] a lot in social relations, because after [Access], I began to meet people from the US, from Germany. I have a lot of friends from those places.*

—Female participant, Peru

Home Life: *I am connected to the internet most of the time, and I read a lot in English to learn more. Whenever I search for something, all the results I get are in English.*

—Male participant, Morocco

⁶ Participants' level of proficiency after finishing the program depends greatly on their starting level. Those who start at a basic level typically finish at a proficient but not fluent level. Those who start at intermediate typically finish with advanced proficiency.

⁷ Combined figure for “very valuable” (62 percent) and “moderately valuable” (33 percent).

- **Home life.** Forty-five percent of survey respondents reported using English at home. This percentage is significant given that these are underserved students in non-English speaking countries. This topic came up frequently in focus groups;
 - Focus group participants in all seven fieldwork countries mentioned using English to **consume entertainment media**, whether listening to U.S. music or watching television and movies.
 - Some use English to **browse the Internet or to read books**. For example, former participants in Morocco and the West Bank mentioned that they now prefer English websites over Arabic ones.

Table 1-1. Participants' Ability to Perform Activities in English Post-Program

Activity	Percentage
Read a storybook, novel, or newspaper	85%
Understand song lyrics, movies, or TV	84%
Access websites, social media, or blogs	81%
Write an essay or cover letter/application	80%
Engage in conversation with different kinds of people	80%
Make presentation in class or at work	77%
<i>Percentage of survey respondents who feel "very capable" or "moderately capable." n = 255–256</i>	

Indeed, more than 80 percent of survey respondents now feel moderately or very capable of performing these activities in English, as shown in Table 1-1.

2. Academic and Employability Skills

In addition to English, Access participants often gain other key skills that contribute to their academic success and future employability.

Critical thinking and learning skills. Teachers and administrators, in particular, emphasized that participants gain critical thinking and learning skills. Survey respondents from every country stated that the Access Program improved their academic success in English and other subjects in high school and beyond. As mentioned earlier, Access uses a student-centered teaching model through which students learn to take an active role in their own learning. Furthermore, the program requires a significant time commitment from participants, about 5 hours or more of class time per week plus homework. Students learn how to better manage their time and to develop more rigorous study habits in order to meet their Access commitment on top of their regular schoolwork. In fact, several interviewees in Senegal and Israel identified these skills as one of the greatest benefits of Access. Former participants in both Senegal and Cambodia agreed that the program enhanced their study skills and time management skills.

Participants Gain Learning Skills

They learn how to learn. They are the masters of their own learning.

—Access Teacher, Senegal

Students adopt the same way of studying, the same way we do in English, so they learned the higher order skills. The skills transfer to other classes. I hear the difference.

—Access Teacher, Israel

The things I learned in the program were very useful to me, and my grades got better.

—Male participant (visually impaired), Morocco

Technology Skills. Access providers are encouraged, but not required, to incorporate the use of computer technology into the program to provide, at a minimum, basic computer skills and, in some cases, to strengthen participants' technology skills to compete in the 21st century job market. The technology component differed widely by location—not just by country, but within countries. For example, while computers are regularly used in some Access locations (e.g. major cities and/or private language institutes), other Access venues do not have any computers at all. Following are some of the common models of how providers in the fieldwork countries use computers with Access classes:

- **Regular class activities in on-site computer lab** at the Access facility (e.g., English language institute or university).
- Teachers take Access classes to a nearby **Internet café**.
- Computers not used during Access classes, but participants are able to **occasionally use computers in the library or computer lab** of the Access facility on their own time.

In areas where participants have limited access to technology in school or at home, exposure to technology in Access emerged as a major benefit of Access. **Overall, 62 percent of survey respondents reported gaining new computer or technology skills**; this figure was especially high in Cambodia, Peru, Malaysia, and the Palestinian Territories (two-thirds or more). For example, in Peru, U.S. Embassy staff identified exposure to technology as one of the U.S. Embassy’s key goals for Access, citing this as “crucial” to students’ professional development. On the other hand, technology was a less prevalent component of the program in Senegal, where many locations have no reliable electricity, let alone computers.

Among participants who reported exposure to technology (survey respondents and focus group participants), the most common learning areas mentioned were as follows:

1. **Internet searching.** Former participants reported learning to browse, search, and use the Internet for research. An administrator in Temara, Morocco, cited Internet use as “central to the program” there.
2. **Microsoft Office** programs, especially Word and PowerPoint. In interviews and focus groups, many former participants, teachers, and administrators mentioned that students had learned to use PowerPoint to prepare oral presentations that they presented to the class. For example, focus group participants in Peru reported becoming “experts” or “masters” at PowerPoint.
3. **English language learning programs**, either on CDs or online. In Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, for instance, teachers and focus group participants mentioned that every one to two weeks, Access classes would spend an entire class period in the provider’s computer lab using interactive English language software.

Participants Gain Technology Skills

We started to use the computer, to use PowerPoint, to access various programs, and to search for information on the Internet.

–Female participant, Peru

I learned to use an audio program to help me improve my listening skills. ... I learned also how to use a translation program.

Female participant, Gaza

Nonetheless, some interviewees pointed out that Access does not provide much guidance as to what kind of technology skills participants are expected to learn and how those skills should be taught. ECA might consider better defining and integrating the technology component of the program. (See Ch. V, Recommendations.)

Self-confidence and communication skills. A major outcome of Access for participants is gaining self-confidence and communication skills. Without prompting, almost one-third of survey respondents named increased self-confidence/leadership ability as

Participants Gain Confidence to Speak with Superiors

I had a presentation in front of the deputy American Ambassador. There were a lot of people from Access Morocco. I was scared, but ... after I succeeded easily with this public speech, I became very confident of myself and knew my value.

–Male participant, Morocco

the greatest benefit of Access.⁸ In addition, many former participants reported gaining public speaking skills:

- Nine in ten respondents (91 percent) reported that Access had **increased their ability to express their thoughts and feelings** to a great or some extent.
- More than three-quarters (77 percent) of respondents felt very or moderately **capable of making a presentation** in class or at work.
- Through interaction with U.S. Embassy officials and other foreign visitors during Access, focus group participants reported **gaining confidence to speak with adults**, even those in senior positions.

B. Access Leads to Educational and Career Opportunities

Many former participants and interviewees cited improved opportunities—such as university degrees, studying abroad, and new career paths—as one of the greatest benefits of the program. Furthermore, some respondents specifically credited the Access certificate—which the U.S. Embassy or Consulate confers to participants to certify their completion of the program—for helping participants with university or job applications.

1. Educational Opportunities and Outcomes

Several former participants, as well as teachers, administrators, and U.S. Embassy staff, reported that Access gives students an academic boost that often leads to a chain of educational results and opportunities, starting with greater success in high school, then university acceptance or the chance to study abroad. An administrator in Morocco explained, “The students’ whole life is changed [by Access]. Some have gone to study English at the university, others have had their grades improved, and some have had the opportunity to study in the United States.”

Participants achieve greater academic success in high school. Access participants are typically still in high school when they finish the program, so the most immediate educational impact of their experience is greater academic success at high school. Indeed, nearly all survey respondents (96 percent) reported that Access participation had improved their grades at school (Table 1-2). This

Access Makes College Attendance Possible

When I started college, I had to pass two exams. I saw how Access had given me the ability to pass an oral exam in English.

—Female participant, Israel

I needed to pass the English test; otherwise I wouldn't get a full scholarship. ... The university called and told me that I got a full scholarship. That's my success with the contribution from [Access].

—Female participant, Cambodia

Access Motivates Youth to Pursue Higher Education

I was determined to live as an educated person. ... Because of what I got from the program, I got a degree, and that led me to what I've determined to do [get an MA and become a teacher].

—Male participant, Cambodia

Table 1-2. Participants' Academic Outcomes Resulting from Access

Outcome	Percentage
Improved grades at school	96%
Changed academic opportunities available	64%
Influenced or changed choice of field of study	62%
Completed higher degree or more years of schooling	58%
Applied to/attended different schools/universities	54%
Applied for/received scholarships or financial aid	36%
<i>n</i> = 256	

⁸ In the coding of open-ended responses, self-confidence and leadership abilities were grouped together.

improvement was especially critical in some underserved areas of Morocco and Senegal, where, according to interviewees, high school graduation rates are low among non-Access students. For example, all the focus group participants in Thies, Senegal, reported that they improved their grades in all subjects and became top students thanks to enhanced study skills, time management skills, and encouragement from Access teachers.

Greater likelihood to attend and graduate from university. The evaluation revealed that in many locations, Access can make the difference between going to university and not going. Indeed, the majority of survey respondents reported that Access had led them to apply to different universities and/or to complete a higher degree (Table 1-2). Furthermore, administrators, teachers, and U.S. Embassy staff across the globe stressed that nearly all Access participants go on to university. Focus group participants and interviewees offered various reasons for this outcome:

- **English proficiency required for university acceptance.** In Israel and Cambodia, evaluation respondents explained that students have to pass an English exam in order to be accepted to university. A teacher in Israel explained that in his country, English is “the main obstacle” that prevents Israeli Arab students from getting into universities.⁹
- **Greater confidence or motivation to apply to/attend university.** Many former participants reported that Access gave them the confidence or motivation to pursue a university degree, which they might not have considered before.
- **Scholarships.** For some poor students, attending university would be impossible without a scholarship. Access provided them the skills to help receive a scholarship so they could go to university.

Furthermore, Access opened the opportunity for higher education to several disadvantaged groups:

- **Students from poor communities where college is unimaginable.** For example, a former participant in Senegal said he was “the first person to attend university from [his] village.” In Guatemala, a U.S. Embassy official said the fact that Access participants go on to university and even advanced degrees “should be considered a major success, because these kids were not born into families where they were ever going to go to college.”
- **Girls.** Girls from poor or conservative communities (such as Cambodia, Morocco, Senegal, the Bedouin community in Israel, conservative provinces in Malaysia) are traditionally not expected to go to college.

Participants' Grades Improve Thanks to Access

Since participating in the Access Program, I started to get the best grades in school. The things I learned in the program were very useful to me at school, and my grades got better.

—Male participant (visually impaired), Morocco

After the exams, Access students were always ranked first in all the classes.

—Female participant, Senegal

Access Makes University Possible for Disadvantaged Groups

Girls: *There is one girl who came from a very poor family background but made it to study medicine at the university. It was a dramatic change for the girl; we could not have imagined it, partly because of the Access Program.*

—Administrator, Morocco

Visually impaired students: *it is... [partially] thanks to Access that I decided to major in English literature. My proof is that the [Access] certificate I received from the center helped me enroll at the college.*

—Male participant (visually impaired), Morocco

Israeli Arabs: *The only way for them to be in university is just because of Access. ... The number of students [from my area in the South] who go to university is rising.*

—Teacher, Israel

⁹ In Israel, the Access Program primarily, but not exclusively, tries to reach disadvantaged or disenfranchised Arabs and Bedouins.

Access administrators mentioned instances of female participants overcoming societal boundaries to pursue degrees.

- **Visually impaired students in Morocco.** One Access program in Morocco taught visually impaired students. According to an administrator and teacher who worked with this group, Access is an important opportunity for them, because they usually do not receive the same opportunities as sighted students. One visually impaired participant recounted that through Access, he had gained the confidence and the English ability to enroll in the English department at university. At first, the department refused to accept him because he could not take the written exam, but he persisted and showed his Access certificate to the department chair and finally succeeded in gaining admittance.

Changed field of study. As shown in Table 1-2 above, 62 percent of survey respondents said that Access influenced or changed their field of study, whether in secondary school or university. Focus group participants commonly mentioned that Access inspired them to study English. That said, survey participants reported studying in a wide range of disciplines: English (27), business (27), engineering (25), sciences (16), computers (14), mathematics (12), medicine (10), education (8), law (6), and a variety of other fields such as art, communication, philosophy, and tourism. In addition, Access participants in Senegal and Malaysia mentioned gaining confidence from Access to change majors, including to sciences and fine arts. Access also influenced many participants' choice of career, as will be discussed under Professional Opportunities and Outcomes below.

Access Influences Participants' Field of Study

I was in a scientific branch, but when I joined Access, it was a turning point. I started to fully understand the texts and become able to communicate in this language [and decided to pursue English].

–Female participant, Morocco

Access Motivates Students to Study Abroad

[Access] broadened our horizons and made us want to get a scholarship and travel abroad, unlike before.

–Male participant, West Bank

International education. Many former participants reported that they were inspired by Access to seek opportunities to go abroad, especially to the United States, for university study. For example, focus group participants in the West Bank explained that learning about programs and scholarships for study abroad during Access had increased their interest.

MULTIPLIER EFFECT: EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES FOR PARTICIPANTS' FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES.

Not only did Access profoundly change participants' educational paths, but in some cases participants' experiences influenced family and community members' educational choices or beliefs.

Communities place higher value on education. Focus group participants in Cambodia and Peru reported that after seeing their academic success during and after Access, their families and communities began to place a higher value on education. In Cambodia, two participants from rural communities where many families did not believe in the need for children to finish school reported that people began to change their attitude. Likewise, U.S. Embassy staff in Malaysia noted that parents become more supportive of their children's education as a result of Access. In Lima, Peru, participants reported that their experience "broke barriers" for their community, opening people to the idea that they could go to university.

Peru: Friends and family pursue English and university studies. In Lima, focus group participants reported that as a result of sharing their Access experience and enthusiasm for English, classmates and family members became inspired to study English and even go on to university.

2. Professional Opportunities and Outcomes

As with education, former participants, teachers, administrators, and U.S. Embassy staff alike stressed that Access and the English skills it provides have a major impact on participants' professional opportunities and choices, including access to higher-paying jobs.

Access and English open doors to better job opportunities. As shown in Table 1-3, nearly half (45 percent) of all survey respondents reported that Access had changed the job opportunities available to them. The figure is significantly higher among those who are currently working (61 percent). In fact, several interviewees cited job and/or economic opportunities as the greatest benefit of Access.

Outcome	All respondents	Working Respondents	Not working	Difference
Influenced choice of career	63%	80%	59%	21%*
New support network that will assist in career	54%	66%	53%	13%
Changed professional/job opportunities available	45%	61%	43%	18%*
Applied to or received new/different jobs	27%	57%	21%	36%*
Sample size	n = 256	n = 44	n = 212	*p < 0.05

*Statistically significant.

Indeed, interviewees and focus group participants emphasized the importance of English in the job market and the opportunities English skills bring:

- **Advantage with employers.** Focus group participants in Morocco and Malaysia recounted gaining an advantage with employers—including the Moroccan security forces and the Kuala Lumpur International Airport—because of their Access certificate and English skills.
- **Potential for higher salaries.** Focus group participants in several countries said that they expect to be able to earn higher salaries due to their English skills.
- **English teacher training in Guatemala.** The U.S. Embassy is working with the Government of Guatemala on a pilot program to train Access alumni to become English teachers, thereby both providing a new job opportunity and using their skills to serve a need in their country.

English Opens Doors to Job Opportunities

Importance of English in job market: *[English] is very important in Cambodia. [If] you speak English, you can get a good job here. It increases opportunities.*

—Teacher, Cambodia

Advantage with employers: *When a friend of mine and I applied to join [the Royal Gendarmerie Security Corps], they told us we had the advantage of English. We were called to undergo a selective examination without an interview because we had a certificate from Access. It helps a lot. It opens doors for you.*

—Female participant, Morocco

Potential for higher salaries: *If you speak only French, you will be paid 8,000 dirhams, but if you speak English too, you go up to 20,000.*

—Male participant, Morocco

Access influences choice of career. Among survey respondents, the most common professional outcome of Access is influence on participants' choice of career: 63 percent overall and 80 percent of those working at the time of the study. Former participants explained that, in many cases, Access was the first time that they were encouraged to discuss and start thinking about possible career paths, and often were introduced to careers that they would not have considered previously.

Access leads to new jobs. More than half (57 percent) of survey respondents who were working at the time of the study reported that Access had led them to apply for or to receive a new job.¹⁰

- **NGOs and public service:** Interviewees mentioned that some participants have been inspired by Access to pursue service-oriented careers. For example, an administrator in Cambodia mentioned a former participant who became “program coordinator” for the provincial government, and U.S. Embassy staff in Kazakhstan mentioned that some participants now work at NGOs. Indeed, a focus group participant in Cambodia reported that she was able to attain a 1-year volunteer position with a national NGO thanks to the technology skills, leadership skills, and community service experience she had gained during Access.
- **Business ventures:** A few former participants have started new ventures as a result of Access.
 - After graduating high school, a focus group participant in Cambodia opened “a small school” to teach English to children for 1 year.
 - According to the U.S. Embassy staff in Pakistan, one participant gained the confidence from Access to start a successful business manufacturing and selling mosquito nets at local markets, which several former participants now run together.
 - A U.S. Embassy official formerly posted in Morocco shared that one participant from the country’s first Access cohort had started his own business as well as an NGO to help kids in the Casablanca area.

Access Influences Choice of Career

Before Access, the only career option I was thinking of was to join the army ... because I couldn't see myself getting an office job, but afterwards, I thought, 'Why not?' I also want to try other jobs.

—Male participant, Malaysia

[Access] allowed me to make up my mind and want to become a businesswoman who works in an office or a bank.

—Female participant, Senegal

Access Inspires Participants to Serve Others

I see many of them working for NGOs. Many work to go back to their community to support their community. ... The program made a big contribution to them.

—Administrator, Cambodia

They [former Access students] are good people now. They are helping their communities. We have Access students who are doctors, physiotherapists, lawyers, [and] teachers. And without the Access Program, these students would not be doing what they are doing.

—Teacher, Israel

¹⁰ As above, the survey did not collect data on the types of jobs obtained, so the examples come from anecdotal information.

C. Multiplier Effect: Strengthening English Teaching

U.S. Embassy staff, administrators, and teachers reported that Access not only benefits participants' English skills, but also strengthens English teachers' skills and professional opportunities, which can have a ripple effect on English teaching in local schools and the wider educational community..

1. Teachers' Professional Outcomes

Not only do participants gain career opportunities from Access, but teachers also reported significant professional development opportunities resulting from the program. As a teacher in Senegal explained, "People think the program is for students, but we can say that it is also for teachers, because as a teacher I learn from the Access Program." In fact, in both Israel and the Palestinian Territories, interviewees (one administrator and one U.S. Embassy official) cited teachers' development as one of the greatest benefits of Access. The program benefited teachers in various ways:

- Access training.** The Access Program may include a teacher training program that takes place at least once every one or two years; in some countries, additional mentoring or training may occur during the year. Training may cover English language teaching methods, as well as the Access curriculum, including U.S. culture and values, self-confidence and leadership skills, and civic engagement. Furthermore, teachers greatly appreciated the opportunity to exchange ideas with fellow teachers from around the country and develop a professional network. An administrator in the West Bank said that the training has been "transformative" for participating teachers: "They say things like, 'I felt like I was a teacher before, but now I really feel like a teacher.'" While teachers and administrators emphasized the value of these trainings, some also felt the need for more, especially in countries where the training is less robust. (See Ch. V, Recommendations.)
- Opportunity to attend regional trainings.** Some teachers also have had the opportunity to attend regional Access trainings. For example, a teacher in Morocco attended a "retreat" for Access teachers from Morocco, Algeria, and Egypt, and several interviewees in Israel and the Palestinian Territories mentioned attending a regional Access conference in Jordan.
- New teaching methods.** Teachers greatly appreciated the new, often innovative teaching methods that they learned at these trainings, which help them to think outside the box on how to teach English both in their Access classes and non-Access classes. The training was especially important in countries where public school classes are large and traditional teaching methods do not involve interaction with students. For example, a U.S. Embassy official in Malaysia explained that the country's educational system is "rote," whereas Access trains teachers in more creative,

Access Enhances Teachers' Careers

[The program administrators] follow us through the period of time that we are teaching. ... We don't miss, and we don't want to miss [the Access trainings] because there is a lot of learning.

—Teacher, Israel

Access changes not only students, but also teachers here. Access is totally different; it's what makes the program interesting.

—Teacher, Senegal

One teacher, a new teacher, at the beginning he was not the right person, but ... he is now brilliant. He learned a lot from the Access Program. These are things we can say as success stories among teachers.

—Administrator, Senegal

We created a community of teachers. ... We created this echelon of teaching professionals.

—Administrator, Israel

[One teacher in the Bedouin sector] got a scholarship to Oxford and studied for a year. Then she had a baby. Now she says when her child gets older, she will do a PhD.

—Administrator, Israel

less formalistic methods of teaching. Teachers from Israel and Senegal emphasized that the Access style of teaching is itself a form of teaching democracy. That is, traditional classroom models are teacher-centered, with the teacher in command up front and students passively listening in their seats. However, Access classrooms are a model of student-centered learning, where students take responsibility for classroom learning and actively engage in complex discussions and express opinions as equals with their teachers and peers.

- ***U.S. exchange opportunities.*** Typically U.S. Embassies send at least one or two Access teachers per year, depending on funding, to the United States for short professional exchanges (usually 2-4 weeks) such as the International Visitors Leadership Program. Teachers reported multiple benefits from these programs, including gaining new pedagogical knowledge, meeting people from other countries, English immersion, and experiencing U.S. culture first-hand.
- ***Leadership development and professional advancement.*** In some countries, such as Morocco and Israel, talented Access teachers are given opportunities to advance into leadership positions within the Access Program, for example, to become teacher trainers or school or regional Access coordinators.
- ***Pursuing advanced degrees.*** According to interviewees, Access teachers are more likely than other local teachers to pursue advanced degrees for two reasons: (1) exposure to Access teaching methods increases their motivation to learn more, and (2) they receive encouragement and assistance from program administrators and U.S. Embassy personnel.

Furthermore, administrators and U.S. Embassy and Consulate personnel consider teacher development critical for multiplying the effect of Access to reach other teachers as well as the larger community. A U.S. Embassy official in Cambodia explained, “We devote a lot of resources for development of Access teachers ... [who] become available for building up the teaching capacity of a community. ... The multiplier effect of that is massive.”

2. Impacts on Schools and Education

Teachers, administrators, and U.S. Embassy staff in several countries mentioned that **teachers use the new teaching methods they have learned from Access in their regular teaching jobs at public and private schools**—particularly the communicative method, which involves students more actively in class discussions. Furthermore, interviewees reported that Access teachers often share these new methods with other teachers, thus spreading the influence of Access techniques to other classes and in some cases even to other schools. For example, in Senegal and the Palestinian Territories, interviewees reported that Access teachers provide formal training to their public school colleagues. A U.S. Embassy official in Cambodia believes that through peer-to-peer training, Access helps to “build up the teaching capacity of a community.”

- In Peru and Israel, **the ministries of education have shown interest in possibly replicating Access teaching methods nationwide:**

Impacts of Access on Public Schools

We have pedagogical seminars with teachers, and I try to provide them with my experience in Access, and they find it excellent. That is why I saw that Access has an indirect impact on our teaching in public schools.

—Teacher, Senegal

We were pioneers: a school magazine in English written by students?! Other [non-Access] schools started requesting magazines. This is Access. ... These are things nobody has ever done, and we were able to do it through Access.

—Administrator, Israel

- **Peru:** The Ministry of Education (MOE) had contacted the U.S. Embassy to learn more about Access and to explore opportunities for partnerships. According to U.S. Embassy staff, the MOE was considering replicating the Access format in public schools.
- **Israel:** According to administrators, the MOE noticed the academic success of Access students, who are primarily Arab Israelis, and had contacted the provider to find out how Access methods might be used to bring beginner students to a higher level. At the time of the interview (January 2015), the administrators reported that they were scheduled to give a presentation to all education inspectors in the country in the near future.

D. U.S. Embassy Perspectives: Engaging and Empowering Underprivileged Youth and Emerging Leaders

U.S. Embassy staff reported that by enhancing the skills and opportunities of participants, Access supports several foreign policy goals.

- **Engaging youth audiences.** U.S. Embassy staff around the world concurred that Access is important if not critical in helping them reach youth audiences. For example, officials in Kazakhstan and Burma pointed out that Access is the only U.S. Embassy program in those countries that engages the critical under-20 age group. Interviewees in Russia and Pakistan specified that the program provides a platform for U.S. Embassy officials and visitors to meet and interact with teenagers.
- **Engaging with emerging leaders.** U.S. Embassy staff in many countries believe that Access is an investment in future leaders. In fact, in Senegal, providers identified leadership potential as one of the criteria for selecting participants. U.S. Embassy interviewees identified two ways in which the program's empowerment of emerging leaders contributes to U.S. Embassy goals: 1) fostering an ethos of inclusivity and tolerance; 2) building U.S. Embassy relationships with diverse communities.

U.S. Embassy staff in 11 of the 17 countries/territories interviewed reported that Access helps U.S. Embassies support their goals for fostering economic opportunities.

- **Employment.** Interviewees in Morocco, the Palestinian Territories, Senegal, and South Africa specifically identified increasing employment opportunities as a key U.S. Embassy goal.
- **Social inclusion and mobility for impoverished youth**—in other words, a way out of the cycle of poverty—was identified as a major priority for and result of Access by U.S. Embassy staff in Peru, Guatemala, and Cambodia.
- **Economic opportunities for ethnic minorities.** In Burma, the interviewee stressed that Access helps the U.S. Embassy in its efforts to provide equal access to education and jobs for all ethnic and religious minorities in the country.

Access Helps U.S. Embassies Foster Economic Opportunities

The need to train young people to take up gainful employment/jobs is very important. This is probably where the Access Program becomes crucial.

—U.S. Embassy staff, Morocco

There are religious minorities, ethnic minorities, and a lot of development and growth happening right now as this country opens up. And we want to make sure everyone can be included in that, so giving them access to the same opportunities for education and work is very important to us. ... We have found the Access Program to be a great tool for that.

—U.S. Embassy staff, Burma

II. How Does Access Contribute to Productive U.S. Engagement with Foreign Societies?

According to U.S. Embassy and Consulate staff interviewed, Access contributes to productive engagement between the United States and foreign countries in several ways:

- Building relationships with diverse communities;
- Strengthening relationships with some host country government entities;
- Increasing and diversifying the pool of potential participants for U.S. exchanges;
- Increasing the participation of underserved youth (Access alumni) in U.S. exchange and leadership programs; and
- Facilitating ongoing Access alumni contact with U.S. Embassies.

As will be discussed in Section A (Fostering U.S. Embassy Relationships with Diverse Communities), Access supports the foreign policy goal of building relationships with underserved audiences. Furthermore, as will be discussed in Section C (Participant Outcomes: Ongoing Engagement with the United States), Access facilitates alumni participation in other exchange programs, thus sustaining engagement.

A. Fostering U.S. Embassy Relationships with Diverse Communities

As Access is a two year program that has been ongoing in many locations for 10 years or more, it provides the opportunity for developing deep, long-lasting relationships both with participants and their schools and communities. Furthermore, the Access Program model also fosters local community involvement:

- The program is run by **local partner organizations** that serve as a link between the U.S. Embassy and Consulate and the community and may already have deep ties in the community.
- Access classes are often held at **public schools**,¹¹ which has two effects: (1) school officials, and often local government officials, support the program; and (2) school staff, parents, and non-Access students are aware of the program.
- Access implementers often partner with **local NGOs** for community service projects.
- Because program participants are secondary school students, **parents** typically have some level of involvement, at least with enrollment. For example, in some countries, prospective parents attend an Access orientation and/or meet with program administrators to demonstrate financial eligibility.

U.S. Embassy staff around the globe agreed that Access helps U.S. Embassies to reach and develop relationships with local communities

Developing contacts and relationships.

- **Communities.** Several interviewees described Access as a way to reach communities through ongoing contact with schools, teachers,

Reaching Communities

I cannot tell you enough how important this program is. Every time the Ambassador goes out of the capital, his first question is, "Do we have Access there?" ... This is a very high-visibility, and I would say, high-importance program for the Embassy.

—U.S. Embassy staff, Guatemala

¹¹ In some locations, such as Peru and the West Bank, classes are held at the provider's facilities or other locations.

students, and parents for two years. Over time, these relationships can broaden and deepen through alumni and contacts with local officials, such as mayors. For example, U.S. Embassy staff in Israel noted that having Access in schools creates a broader connection to communities: “now we have a real relationship.” Likewise, in Tajikistan, the U.S. Embassy interviewee explained that Access has enabled the U.S. Embassy to reach communities where there was little U.S. Embassy programming and a lot of labor migration; now, she reports, staff have heard from local partners that there is greater interest in doing more with the U.S. Embassy. U.S. Embassy staff in many countries reported that the program has allowed U.S. Embassies to develop contacts who may welcome visits by U.S. Embassy officials or other American representatives to a community.

Fostering a positive image of the United States.

Interviewees in several countries emphasized that Access is a way for U.S. Embassies to demonstrate U.S. commitment to the country and to “walk the talk” of democratic values and equal opportunities. For example, an U.S. Embassy official in Malaysia explained that Access “shows U.S. Government commitment, credibility, [and] follow-through” to Malaysians. In Brazil, the U.S. Embassy staff described Access as the Embassy’s “top calling card” because Brazilian counterparts are impressed when they learn that the U.S. Embassy has provided scholarships for more than 1,700 students to complete the 2-year program. (In other regions, such as the Middle East, the numbers are much higher.)

Fostering a Positive Image of the United States

We talk about equal opportunity [as a value], and Access allows us to walk that talk: to actually offer equal opportunity to educational enrichment.

—U.S. Embassy staff, Israel

B. Strengthening U.S. Embassies’ Relationships with Host Country Governments

U.S. Embassy staff reported that Access has helped U.S. Embassies develop or strengthen relationships with the national government—primarily through the Ministry of Education (MOE)—and/or local governments in 11 countries (Table 2-1).

Access facilitates relationships with host country governments.

Interviewees explained that Access and other English language programs are particularly useful for helping U.S. Embassies maintain a connection with host country governments. For example, one U.S. Embassy official explained that while other U.S. Embassy sections have difficulties working with the host government, her office has no trouble at all: “Everyone wants English and wants what we have.”

Developing Contacts

We have contacts. When we have something we want to do in a far-flung place, we have resources.

—U.S. Embassy staff, Cambodia

Host country governments collaborate on Access. In cases where Access helps fulfill the host country’s need for English language programs, some host governments, including Guatemala, Nepal and Brazil, actively collaborate with U.S. Embassies on the program.

- **Guatemala:** As mentioned earlier, at the time of the study, the U.S. Embassy was running a pilot program with the MOE for a third year of English training post-Access; a fourth year was being developed. According to the U.S. Embassy interviewee at the time of the study, the minister was to be signing a Memorandum of Understanding to allow graduates of the 4-year program to become certified teachers.
- **Nepal:** According to a U.S. Embassy official, the MOE of Nepal has assigned a national representative for Access, whose job is to show MOE support for the program at all major Access events around the country and to encourage local administrators to support the program.

- **Brazil:** The U.S. Embassy collaborates with Brazilian “secretaries of education” on the selection of Access sites and students.

Host country governments seek English language assistance from U.S. Embassies. U.S. Embassy staff in several countries, including Burkina Faso, Ukraine, and Brazil, mentioned that national governments have sought U.S. Embassies’ assistance with English language learning generally, not just through Access.

- **Burkina Faso:** The U.S. Embassy interviewee noted that because the U.S. Embassy is known for its English language programs—both Access and English classes for private citizens—the MOE has sought the Embassy’s help with English teaching methods and teacher training. She explained that this collaboration has helped further government-to-government relationship-building: (1) it has helped the U.S. Ambassador conduct talks with the MOE, and (2) Burkina Faso’s minister of education has met with the U.S. Department of State in Washington.
- **Ukraine:** According to the U.S. Embassy staff, at the time of the study, there was a unique opportunity for engagement with the national government on English language programming because President Poroshenko has declared 2016 “the year of the English language in Ukraine.”¹² A U.S. Embassy official noted that since Poroshenko’s announcement on June 4, 2015, Ukrainian Members of Parliament had been meeting with U.S. Embassy staff about English, and U.S. Embassy staff have responded by informing them about English language programs, including Access.
- **Brazil:** The U.S. Embassy staff said that the Brazilian Government had acknowledged challenges regarding English language training and has sought U.S. Embassy assistance. The U.S. Embassy has responded by setting up training programs throughout the country both with the MOE and with the national organizations responsible for secondary and university-level education.

Access facilitates relationships with local governments. In some cases, U.S. Embassy interviewees reported that Access has facilitated relationships with local governments.

- **Burma:** U.S. Embassy staff reported significant improvement in local government relations vis-à-vis Access since the program first began in the country in 2008: “Starting since 2011-12, governments started to be aware of our program; but these days government officials [attend] opening ceremonies. ... They allow [Access] to happen, which is a big step.”
- A U.S. Embassy official explained that in **Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan**, Access has fostered relationships with local officials, as in the following example from Kyrgyzstan: “In a small town, the mayor and governor’s representative came to the Access Program opening ceremony, and they recognized the U.S. Embassy several times in their speech.”

	Local Gov.	MOE	National Gov.
Brazil		☐	
Burkina Faso		☐	☐
Guatemala	☐	☐	
Malaysia		☐	
Nepal*		☐	
South Africa		☐	☐
Ukraine		Potential	Potential
Burma	☐		
Kazakhstan	☐		
Kyrgyzstan*	☐		
Tajikistan	☐		

Source: Interviews with U.S. Embassy personnel
 *Although no U.S. Embassy personnel in these countries were interviewed, other U.S. Embassy staff were knowledgeable about Access programs there.

¹² <http://www.kyivpost.com/content/ukraine/poroshenko-says-2016-to-be-year-of-english-language-in-ukraine-knowledge-of-english-to-be-required-in-public-service-390285.html>

- In **Guatemala**, according to the U.S. Embassy interviewee at the time of the study, Access has the support of the national government and regularly fosters positive relationships with municipal governments around the country, noting that “mayors of towns love Access.” For example, the wife a former President of Guatemala who was Mayor at the time of the evaluation—invited U.S. Embassy staff to their city to speak about Access.

C. Participant Outcomes: Ongoing Engagement with United States

Although the numbers are small, all fieldwork countries reported that some Access alumni have gone on to participate in U.S. exchange programs or local U.S. Embassy-sponsored activities. Furthermore, both U.S. Embassies and alumni expressed a desire for ongoing contact after the two year program. Some U.S. Embassies and/or Access providers have made concerted efforts to maintain contact with alumni, for example, by inviting them to assist at Access intensive sessions or to visit Access classes. Nonetheless, more alumni follow-up was the most common program recommendation from survey respondents, as well as a key recommendation from U.S. Embassy staff, Access administrators, and teachers. (See Chapter V, Recommendations.)

1. Access Alumni Participation in U.S. Exchanges and Leadership Programs

Five percent of survey respondents reported having participated in some kind of “exchange program with the United States” (to include both virtual and in-person exchanges, U.S. government sponsored and non U.S. government sponsored) since Access. This is a significant outcome, given the demographic backgrounds and limited financial resources of the Access alumni and the highly competitive nature of the exchange programs themselves.

Former participants (in both the survey and focus groups), as well as teachers, administrators, and U.S. Embassy/Consulate staff mentioned specific examples of Access alumni participation in ECA exchange programs and/or regional leadership programs.

Furthermore, U.S. Embassy staff in several countries described collaborating with Access providers to actively recruit Access alumni for other programs. For example, a U.S. Consulate interviewee who covers the Palestinian Territories reported that her office is “in constant coordination” with the provider to recruit students for ECA exchanges such as the Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange & Study Program (YES) and Study of the U.S. Institutes (SUSI) programs. Likewise, U.S. Embassy staff in Cambodia reported that the Embassy recruits Access alumni for the South East Asia Youth Leadership Program (SEAYLP)

Increasing and Diversifying Pool of Potential U.S. Program Participants

Access provides a network of students to participate in other U.S. Embassy cultural, sports, exchange, and English language programs. ... If there are 300 YES applicants, 50 are likely to be Access Program alumni.

—U.S. Embassy staff, Morocco

[Access] helps us to recruit people from underprivileged communities for our exchange programs.

—U.S. Embassy staff, Cambodia

What Access does for us is it gives us a different base of students for other ECA programs.

—U.S. Embassy staff, Kazakhstan

Access Participants Benefit from U.S. Exchange Programs

The trip [Youth Ambassadors] was more than anything to learn about the culture of the United States, as well as to learn how to create a community service project.

—Female participant, Peru

[After Access.] I still wanted to apply for other scholarships, such as a leadership program, a 2-month exchange program. ... I won an exchange program [SEAYLP] for 25 days. And I wish to apply for a Fulbright scholarship next time.

—Male participant, Cambodia

and the Cambodia Youth Leadership Program. In some cases, (such as Cambodia and Peru), U.S. Embassy staff reported coordinating a group of Access alumni to attend a specific exchange program together.

Evaluation respondents reported Access alumni participation in the following programs:

- **YES Program.** One focus group participant in **Morocco** went to Texas with the YES Program, and program administrators anecdotally mentioned a few other Moroccan alumni who had participated. Focus group participants in **Malaysia** had three friends who participated in YES; in **Gaza**, a program administrator and teacher told of one alumnus who participated; and according to teachers, four alumni from **Senegal** participated in 2012.
- **Youth Ambassadors:** A group of five Access alumni from **Cusco, Peru**, attended the program together (as reported by both former participants and the Cusco program administrator). Their experience led them to initiate a community service project involving Access students. (See Section III.B, Post-Program Civic Engagement.)
- **Asian Youth Leadership Programs.** In both **Cambodia and Malaysia**, several Access participants and alumni have participated in Asia-specific youth leadership exchange programs. In particular, U.S. Embassy staff in Cambodia make a strong effort to regularly send Access participants to the United States. One U.S. Embassy interviewee reported that the U.S. Embassy tries to send a group of Access students from one province to **SEAYLP**,¹³ so they can do joint community service projects when they return. The U.S. Embassy already sent a group of six Access alumni from **Cambodia**; one focus group participant attested that she had benefitted from participating in this exchange in 2012. Likewise, a teacher in **Malaysia** recounted having accompanied a group of Access participants on SEAYLP. In addition, U.S. Embassy staff in **Burma** anecdotally reported that Access alumni have gone on SEAYLP.

In addition, U.S. Embassy staff in **Cambodia** reported at the time of the study that seven Access alumni have gone on the **Cambodia Youth Leadership Program (CYLP)**: “The level of English and level of education they have ... is perfectly fit with the CYLP. ... So [the Access alumni] got picked to go on this program.” Finally, one survey respondent in Cambodia reported participating in the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI), and U.S. Embassy staff in **Malaysia** anecdotally mentioned that one alumnus had attended an YSEALI town hall (most likely a regional workshop).¹⁴

U.S. Embassy staff in many countries indicated that they consider even a few exchange participants per Access cohort to be a success. For example, a U.S. Embassy official in Pakistan said that every year, some Access students win YES slots: “That, to me, is an enormous victory.”

Access alumni who go on a U.S. exchange such as YES often are invited to visit Access classes when they return, as a way to spark the interest of current Access students to apply for such programs and thus continue the cycle of productive engagement with the United States.

U.S. Embassy Staff Consider Exchange Participation a Success

We aren't going to get 40 students every time who speak well enough that they can [qualify for exchange programs], but if we're getting 4 or 5 from each site that are qualifying for these opportunities—that's pretty successful.

— U.S. Embassy staff, Burma

¹³ A 3-week U.S. exchange program for groups of secondary school students, between the ages of 15 and 17, accompanied by an adult teacher or mentor, hosted at Northern Illinois University.

¹⁴ A 5-week U.S. exchange program for youths from the Association of Southeast Asian Nation (ASEAN) countries between the ages of 18 and 25.

Indeed, focus group participants in several countries who had not yet participated in an exchange expressed interest in possibly applying for one in the future, and some had applied but were not accepted. Overall, it seems that there are more Access participants interested in going to the United States than there are slots on exchange programs. Thus, a common suggestion from both former participants and teachers is for Access to provide opportunities for more participants to visit the United States. (See Chapter V, Recommendations.)

2. Access Alumni Contact with U.S. Embassy and/or U.S. Department of State

Although former participants around the world were deeply grateful to the U.S. Embassy and U.S. Government for the Access Program—and many focus group participants mentioned U.S. Embassy visits as one of the highlights of their experience—not that many have maintained contact with the U.S. Embassy or U.S. Department of State since the program.

Social media, websites, and email. Overall, less than a third of survey respondents follow the U.S. Embassy or U.S. Department of State on social media (29 percent) or websites (20 percent), and 12 percent receive emails from the U.S. Embassy. Online contact was particularly low in Senegal, where only 5 percent of respondents reported following social media or websites—likely due to limited electricity and internet access—and particularly high in Cambodia, where more than half of respondents follow the U.S. Embassy or U.S. Department of State on both social media (64 percent) and websites (58 percent).

Focus group participants, U.S. Embassy and Consulate staff, teachers, and administrators commonly mentioned **Facebook groups** as a way that Access alumni keep in touch both with U.S. Embassies and with each other. In Peru, Cambodia, Morocco, and the Palestinian Territories, interviewees reported that national Access Facebook groups have been created by U.S. Embassy staff or providers. In addition, in some places (such as Morocco), teachers or alumni have created local Facebook groups for participants in specific classes or cities on an ad-hoc basis. U.S. Embassy staff in Cambodia and Guatemala, as well as administrators and teachers in Morocco, explained that they use these Facebook groups to communicate with and/or to keep up with alumni. For example, the U.S. Embassy interviewee in Guatemala reported daily contact with Access alumni via social media: “They have a hunger to keep engaging with us, and they pay attention to what we say, and we talk to them every day.”

Table 2-2. Participant Contact with U.S. Embassy/DOS after Access

Contact method	%
Following social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)	29%
Checking U.S. Embassy or DOS website	20%
Receiving emails	12%
Have been involved in an U.S. Embassy-sponsored program	8%
<i>n = 256, Mean results stratified by country.</i>	

Ongoing alumni engagement with Access. Teachers and administrators widely reported that they try to keep alumni involved in Access by inviting them to visit classes, volunteer at Access intensive sessions, help teachers, and participate or lead community service activities with current students. Indeed, many former participants mentioned volunteering with Access when asked about their post-program volunteering experience. (See Sec. III.B, Post-Program Civic Engagement.)

However, U.S. Embassy interviewees also widely reported that they have no mechanism in place for keeping in touch with alumni and identified this as one of the biggest challenges with Access. Furthermore, interviewees in many countries lamented the lack of a formal system for tracking alumni, which they saw as a lost opportunity. Thus, more follow-up and programming for alumni emerged as a common request for improving Access. (See Chapter V, Recommendations.)

III. How Does Access Contribute to Supporting Civil Society?

According to an ECA official, one of the goals of ECA’s English Language programs, including Access, is to create a “model of citizenship” for communities overseas—such as youth, girls, and economically disadvantaged populations—“that might otherwise not be active in the debates within their countries.” Most of the U. S. Embassy and Consulate staff interviewed agreed that Access plants seeds for long-term civil society-building by teaching disadvantaged youth about civic engagement and involving them in community service activities.

After the program, a total of 59 percent of former participants reported that they continued to participate in community service, and 22 percent reported starting a new organization or program in their school or community. These numbers are especially significant, in that such activities are not a tradition or practice in many of these countries. In addition, U.S. Embassy staff in a few countries noted that Access also supports civil society by helping to build the capacity of local organizations.

Figure 3. Access Civic Engagement Helps Posts Support Civil Society



A. Civic Engagement during Access Program

Access students learn about civic engagement in the classroom and through “enhancement” activities, including visits with public officials and hands-on community service activities.

1. Learning about Civic Engagement and Values

Around the world, former participants, teachers, and administrators emphasized that Access classes do not just teach English but also “values” and civic engagement. Focus group participants, primarily in Morocco and Cambodia, reported learning about these issues in class discussions. In fact, one participant in Morocco said, “All our discussions involved values and ethics.” Indeed, teachers and administrators in Israel, Senegal, and Peru identified ethics, values, and citizenship as core elements of the Access curriculum. For example, teachers in Israel and Senegal said that they engage students in discussions about the future of their country and what students can do to contribute to their society.

In addition, focus group participants in Tiznit, Morocco, learned about civic engagement by visiting municipal and provincial government agencies. One former participant explained, “I understood through these events that they want us to know what’s going on, especially because we were young. We saw the officials, like the governor and the mayor.”

2. Community Service Activities

As shown in Figure 4, just over half (54 percent) of all survey respondents reported participating in community service activities during Access, although there was great variation among countries. As reported by respondents, community service participation was very high (at least 75 percent) in Cambodia, Malaysia, and the Palestinian Territories.

Teaching Values

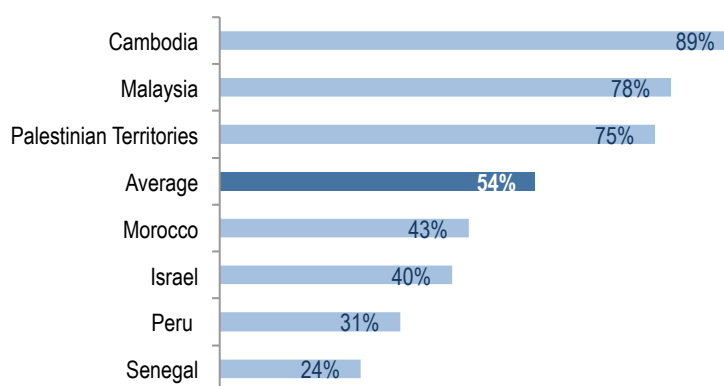
The content of the classes are focused on promoting good citizens.

—Teacher, Peru

We ask them to think about things they are not satisfied with in their community, in their country, in the world—if they had the power, what would they change?

—Teacher, Senegal

Figure 4. Participation in Community Service Activities during Access, 2008-2011
n=254



Not only was there wide variation among countries, but also within countries. For example, in Peru, fieldwork interviews and observations revealed that the community service component is much more strongly emphasized in Cusco than in Lima.

While all the survey respondents participated in Access between 2008 and 2011, most teachers and administrators interviewed are still involved in the program, and their comments often reflected post-2011 Access activities. Thus, in some cases, as in Cusco, Peru, survey figures are low, but interviewees reported that community service is now a strong program component. Similarly, providers in Israel explained that community service was not a requirement during the early years of Access, but has been integrated over time and has been an official part of the Access “teaching plan” since FY 2011.

In Cambodia, Israel, and the Palestinian Territories, evaluation respondents reported that **Access students sometimes choose or initiate community service activities**. For example, in Israel, one teacher explained that each year, students are given the opportunity to choose the activity they want to pursue: “I don’t decide; they decide, and we go with it,” and in Gaza a teacher reported that students are responsible for choosing a project, making contacts, and planning the activities.

Types of community service activities: Former participants, teachers, and administrators reported doing a wide variety of community service activities in Access. The activities most commonly mentioned by survey respondents are the following:

- **Environmental activities**, including trash pick-up, recycling, tree planting, and river and beach clean-ups.
- **Volunteer with children**. Many former participants reported volunteering at elementary schools, afterschool programs, or intensive sessions, as well as tutoring children in English and other subjects. For example, in the West Bank, focus group participants recounted that they had led a summer camp for refugee children: “[We] played with them, taking them off the teachers’ hands for a while ... helped the children, gave them gifts, showed them sympathy.”
- **Charity and donations to the needy**. This was the most common service activity mentioned by survey respondents in Peru, where focus group participants and teachers recalled collecting clothes for the poor. Charity also emerged as an important activity in the West Bank, where focus group participants shared that their families had joined them in bringing “aid” to the homes of poor families, and a teacher reported that Access students annually organize a charity soccer game, the proceeds of which are donated to an orphanage.
- **Neighborhood and community improvement**. Former participants in Malaysia, Morocco, Palestinian Territories, and Senegal reported doing community improvement activities as part of their Access community service, most commonly cleaning community buildings or public areas such as mosques (Malaysia) and historic sites (Morocco).
- **Visiting orphanages, nursing homes, and hospitals**. Former participants and/or teachers and administrators in all seven fieldwork countries/territories reported instances of Access students visiting orphans, the elderly, and the sick. Among former participants, such activities were mentioned most frequently in the Palestinian Territories, where some focus group participants recounted bringing gifts to a hospital children’s ward and others were impressed by visiting a center for the disabled. In addition, teachers and administrators in other countries recounted very moving experiences of Access students visiting orphanages. For example, a teacher in Casablanca, Morocco, said that an Access group had spent a day at a home for street children, where they brought book donations and danced with the children: “Some students left crying. They didn’t know such kids exist.” Likewise, in Ziguinchor, Senegal, an administrator shared the following anecdote:

Ziguinchor..., so many kids lost their parents. The [Access] kids decided to go visit those children and bring whatever they have: a pair of shoes, a shirt. ... So those 14- to 15-year-olds, bringing them to a point where they think like that was moving.

- **School clean-up or beautification**. Former participants, teachers, and administrators—primarily in Israel, Morocco, Palestinian Territories, and Senegal—also mentioned cleaning, painting, or beautifying their schools (i.e., planting trees and gardens) as an Access service activity. In Morocco, for example, interviewees explained that they generally do in-school community service projects because it is difficult to arrange the logistics to take the students off school grounds.

In addition, interviewees in Cusco, Peru, mentioned **other community service initiatives** performed by Access students in later cohorts.

Exposure to NGOs. In some locations, Access providers or teachers collaborate with local NGOs for community service activities in order to expose students to NGO activities. For example, in Battambang, Cambodia, the Access Program is run by an NGO that also works on health and human rights issues. According to U.S. Embassy staff, when the NGO does public health awareness events, they involve Access students: “They have the Access students design an activity, do a role play with the audience.”

(Focus group participants in Battambang confirmed that they had done such skits for public audiences.) Likewise, an administrator in Morocco also said that Access teachers work with local NGOs on community service.

MULTIPLIER EFFECT: SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS INFLUENCED BY ACCESS COMMUNITY SERVICE ACTIVITIES.

As with U.S. cultural events, Access community service activities at schools sometimes involve the broader school community. For example, Palestinian focus group participants mentioned that when they cleaned and painted a school in a refugee camp, “students from the camp came too.” Similarly, interviewees and focus group participants reported that community members sometimes got involved when they saw Access students doing service activities in public, such as neighborhood clean-ups.

B. Post-Program Civic Engagement

The majority of survey respondents reported that as a result of Access, they had become more committed to volunteering and community service. In fact, many former participants started new programs and/or took on leadership roles in existing organizations.

1. Greater Civic Awareness and Commitment to Community Service

Table 3-1. Civic Engagement Resulting from Access	
As a result of Access, former participants ...	Percentage
Are more aware of issues affecting community*	77%
Are more committed to making changes in local community*	78%
Do more volunteer/community service activities.	78%
Encourage friends/peers to do something to help the community.	88%
<i>n = 254-256, mean results stratified by country.</i>	
<i>*Percentages represent combined “agree” and “strongly agree” responses.</i>	

Survey results and focus group discussions revealed that Access influenced many participants to develop greater civic awareness (77 percent) and commitment to volunteering (78 percent). Focus group participants revealed that their new commitment to volunteering stemmed from both their positive community service experiences and from the Access scholarship itself, which made them want to give to others.

In addition, nearly 9 in 10 survey respondents (88 percent) said that they have encouraged others to help the community. For example, a focus group participant in Cambodia who volunteered in a rural

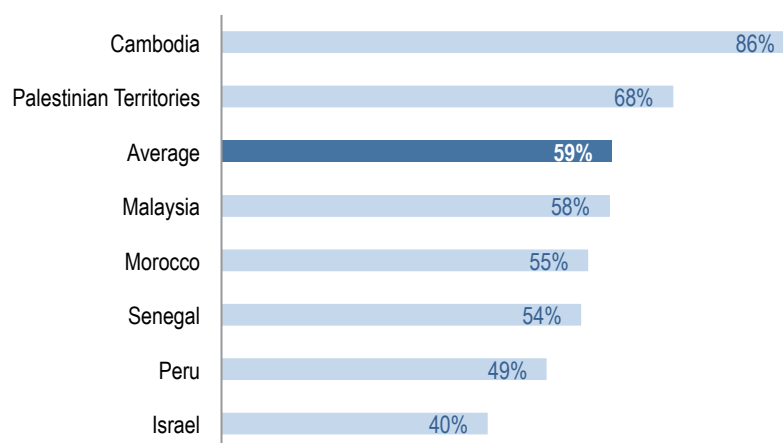
area after Access reported that he had “taught the people in the community and made them understand the issues that exist within their own community so they could help themselves.”

2. Post-Program Volunteering

Overall, 59 percent of survey respondents reported volunteering in their schools and/or communities since Access. This figure is higher than the percentage of respondents who reported participating in Access organized community service activities during their Access program (54 percent). Furthermore, the percentages for post-program volunteering are much higher in some countries, such as Peru and Senegal, than those for community service during Access. In other words, *even when lower numbers of participants experienced community service during Access, they were still more likely to volunteer after the program.* As mentioned above, this may be partly due to the fact that the opportunity to participate in the Access Program for free, in and of itself, inspired some participants to want to help others.

Overall, as shown in Figure 5, the percentage of post-program volunteering varied across the countries.

Figure 5. Participants' Volunteering Post-Access
n=256



Among those who have volunteered since Access, the following activities were most commonly mentioned by survey respondents:

- **Helping the community.** Former participants, especially in Cambodia, described activities such as volunteering with neighborhood associations and community clean-ups.
- **Helping the needy.** Many former participants, especially in Peru, reported collecting donations or fundraising for the needy or donating blood for the sick. In addition, in both Cambodia and the Palestinian Territories, survey respondents reported having conducted fundraising efforts to help poor students with college tuition. Furthermore, a few former participants in Gaza reported having helped those in need, such as collecting donations, visiting the sick in hospitals, and providing first aid.
- **Volunteering with children.** Former participants often tutored children in their neighborhoods or volunteered at schools.
- **Teaching English.** Focus group participants in all seven fieldwork countries/territories reported using their new English skills to teach English to others on a volunteer basis, including neighborhood children,

Palestinian Participants Help the Needy

I and a group of friends collected donations and offered them to the needy and afflicted people. We went to Al-Wafa' hospital to help and entertain sick people.

—Male participant, Gaza

I volunteered at the Palestinian Red Crescent, where I trained in first aid and on rendering financial or moral assistance in time of disasters.

—Female participant, West Bank

We went to an orphanage school and held a party for the orphans, and we helped the students pay their fees at the university.

—Female participant, West Bank

In addition, 43 percent reported **joining a group**, most commonly neighborhood associations or clubs at their high school or university. A few former participants reported joining national or international organizations, such as the Red Crescent or UNESCO.

Levels of Post-Program Activism. *Cambodia* and the *Palestinian Territories* had the highest figures for community service during Access, post-program volunteering, and joining new groups. Furthermore, Cambodia had the highest figure for starting new organizations (58 percent), and the Palestinian Territories had by far the highest for taking on leadership roles (64 percent, compared to 44 percent or less for all other countries). In both Cambodia and Gaza, administrators believed that community involvement was one of the greatest benefits of Access for participants. For example, an administrator in Cambodia pointed out that many Access alumni chose service-oriented careers as a result of their Access experience: “Many work to go back to their community to support their community. ... The program made a big contribution to [their choice of career].”

According to administrators, post-program volunteering is strong in the Palestinian Territories partly because the provider and teachers stay in touch with alumni and provide them with ongoing volunteer opportunities, such as an English camp for children (in the West Bank), collaborating with YES alumni, and helping their former Access teachers (in Gaza). Indeed, an administrator stated that Access alumni “are leaders in their communities.”

Teachers and administrators in Malaysia at the time of the study reported that their Access programs involve little if any community service—due to time constraints, logistical difficulties and lack of government cooperation. Nonetheless, even if they participated in only one community service activity, Malaysian focus group participants indicated that these activities were memorable and made an impact. *Malaysia* had the second highest figure for both community service during Access (78 percent) and post-Access leadership roles (44 percent). Indeed, survey respondents mentioned taking on leadership roles in a variety of school and community groups. However, only a few respondents (8 percent) reported starting new organizations.

In Israel, 40 percent of survey respondents reported volunteering in some capacity since Access. Administrators and teachers stressed that civic engagement is an important component of the program. Focus group participants agreed and said that they would like to continue doing community service, but some have found it difficult to do so because not many volunteer organizations and opportunities exist for volunteering in the Israeli Arab sector.

3. Former Participants Start New Groups and Programs

In total, 22 percent of survey respondents, as well as some focus group participants, reported starting a new organization, group, or program since Access.

Most commonly, former participants reported **starting a new group at their high school or university**, such as *English clubs or student associations*. In addition, a focus group participant in Cambodia reported creating a *community service club* at his university, through which students taught children in rural villages: “We went to the community to teach children. ... Because that area is isolated, I wanted them to value education, so they could escape from poverty. I spent a month and a half working in a province.”

Former Participants Teach English to Others

I taught children in a remote village. They're all orphans and poor kids who were keen to study but couldn't afford to pay. Because I used to be like them, I wanted to share the knowledge I got with the younger generation.

—Male participant, Cambodia

Former Participants Join National Organizations

[I am the] treasurer and committee member of UNESCO Peer Group.

—Female participant, Malaysia

I am one of the high committee members for the Malaysia Red Crescent Society.

—Male participant, Malaysia

I am an active member of the group U.S. Partners of the Americas.

—Male participant, Peru

Starting programs to help children. Former participants in several countries started programs or groups to help children, primarily by *teaching them English*. According to a teacher and administrator in Morocco, one former participant was inspired by Access to create a particularly successful ongoing program run by Access alumni called the Center for Giving Back to the Community, which offers English tutoring to primary school students. The former participant explained, “I learned English at Access, and I felt I had enough knowledge to share it with my brothers. ... I felt their need for this.” Two other former participants in Morocco reported starting *organizations that provide social services to youth*.

In addition, a group of former Access participants in Cusco, Peru, after participating in the Youth Ambassadors program in the United States, created a *literacy program* for children in a small community near Cusco. This program involved building a mobile library and holding reading workshops for children and parents.

Starting community organizations or programs. Former participants in several countries reported starting a community organization or initiative after Access, sometimes in collaboration with other Access alumni.

- **Senegal:** A group of former participants created an Access alumni association dedicated to volunteer work, which successfully advocated for a new mosque to be built in the neighborhood.
- **Morocco:** A survey respondent reported playing “a major role in the foundation of a social work association.”
- **Pakistan:** According to a U.S. Embassy official, an Access participant started an initiative to teach illiterate school janitorial staff to read and write in their local language, and other Access students also participated.

C. Building the Capacity of Partner Organizations and NGOs

One of the expectations of U.S. Embassies is that Access will help to strengthen the capacity of program providers. In many cases, the providers are NGOs. Indeed, U.S. Embassy staff reported that the U.S. Embassies in Burma, Kazakhstan, Morocco, Tajikistan, and Togo have strengthened the capacity of provider organizations through Access. Interviewees most commonly reported training NGO partners in program management skills needed for administering Access, including budgeting, record keeping, and reporting:

- **Tajikistan:** U.S. Embassy staff train small NGOs to manage grants, including accounting and reporting.
- **Togo:** According to a U.S. Embassy official in Burkina Faso, Peace Corps Volunteers in Togo helped to train the local Access provider in a rural area about budgeting and recordkeeping.
- **Burma:** U.S. Embassy staff train Access providers in program management skills, including budgeting, information gathering, reporting, and grants management.

Interviewees in Morocco and Kazakhstan emphasized that such capacity-building is critical for developing civil society. For example, the U.S. Embassy interviewee in Kazakhstan noted that Access helps to develop NGOs that the U.S. Embassy can partner with for local programming.

IV. Conclusions

This evaluation revealed that the Access Program has had a significant impact on the lives of youth from underserved sectors, in terms of developing their English skills, improving their academic performance, increasing their educational and professional opportunities, and fostering their civic awareness and engagement with their communities. Furthermore, teachers reported that Access has strengthened their pedagogical skills and professional opportunities, which in turn has had a ripple effect on English teaching in local schools and the wider educational community..

U.S. Embassy and Consulate staff consider Access a very useful program for helping Posts meet both overall U.S. foreign policy goals and country-specific public diplomacy goals:

- **Engaging youth audiences.** U.S. Embassy staff around the globe concurred that Access is important if not critical in helping them reach the under-20 age group.
- **Engaging with emerging leaders.** U.S. Embassy staff in many countries believe that Access is an investment in future leaders. In particular, they noted that Access fosters an attitude of inclusivity and tolerance, as well as plants the seeds for more openness toward the United States among the next generation of leaders.
- **Fostering economic opportunities.** U.S. Embassy staff in 11 of the 17 countries/territories interviewed reported that Access helps U.S. Embassies support their goals for fostering economic opportunities, including the following:
 - *Increased employment opportunities* (Morocco, Palestinian Territories, Senegal, South Africa)
 - *Social inclusion and mobility for impoverished youth* (Cambodia, Guatemala, Peru)
 - *Economic opportunities for ethnic minorities* (Burma)
- **Building relationships with communities and host country government entities.** U.S. Embassy and Consulate staff cited Access as valuable for engaging local *communities*, as well as *underserved groups*. In addition, U.S. Embassy staff reported that Access has helped U.S. Embassies *develop or strengthen relationships with government entities*—most commonly ministries of education or local governments—in 11 countries surveyed.
- **Facilitating Access alumni participation in U.S. exchange programs and ongoing contact with U.S. Embassies.** Five percent of survey respondents reported having participated in some kind of “exchange program with the United States” since Access. This is a significant outcome, given the demographic backgrounds and limited financial resources of the Access alumni and the highly competitive nature of the exchange programs.

Supporting civil society. Most of the U.S. Embassy and Consulate staff interviewed agreed that Access plants seeds for long-term civil society—building by teaching disadvantaged youth about civic engagement and involving them in community service activities. In addition, interviewees at several U.S. Embassies reported through Access, they had strengthened the capacity of NGO partner organizations by training them in program management skills. Nonetheless, as will be discussed in Section V, the program’s NGO link could be further strengthened.

V. Recommendations

Various recommendations emerged from administrators, teachers, U.S. Embassy staff, former participants, and direct observations by the evaluation team for how Access could further enhance opportunities for underprivileged youth, contribute to productive U.S. engagement with foreign societies, and support civil society.

Strengthen the technology component. Both teachers and former participants recommended strengthening the Access Program’s technology component. Given that technology skills are critical in the 21st century marketplace, stronger technology skills could enhance participants’ job and economic opportunities. As discussed earlier, the technology component of the program varies widely by location and often is determined by the discretion and resources available to individual teachers. Thus, the evaluation team recommends systematizing the technology piece of the Access curriculum, to ensure that all teachers receive the necessary training and that all classrooms have the equipment needed, to the extent possible within the country’s infrastructure (i.e., available electricity and Internet access).

Provide more comprehensive, systematized teacher training. Teacher training has proven highly effective for the success of Access. Nonetheless, interviewees in Israel, Malaysia, the Palestinian Territories, and Senegal—including administrators, teachers, and U.S. Embassy and Consulate personnel—believe that the program would benefit from more regular teacher training. English language training is particularly needed for non-native speakers who have not spent time abroad. For example, in Malaysia, an administrator pointed out that teachers outside of major cities do not have much communicative ability, and this was evident from direct observations during the site visit. In the West Bank, a program administrator pointed out that only seven of 30 Access teachers have completed the intensive training required to attain a Professional Certificate in English Language Teaching (PCEL¹⁵): “We’re doing [training], but I wish it could be more systematized, more consistent.” Furthermore, teacher training could encompass technology training.

Formalize structure for Access alumni network and programming. While some countries already have taken the initiative to establish alumni contact and activities, U.S. Embassy staff, administrators, and teachers in nearly all fieldwork countries saw the need for a means of alumni follow-up, including contact databases, Facebook groups or websites, alumni associations, newsletters, or reunions. Likewise, more alumni follow-up was the most common recommendation from survey respondents, aside from expanding the program. Thus, the evaluation team offers several recommendations for strengthening alumni engagement:

- ***Provide guidance for U.S. Embassies on how to integrate alumni activities into the Access Program.*** For example, establish clear guidelines for whether Access alumni should register for the ECA alumni database or whether Posts/providers should maintain their own databases; if so, provide a template.
- ***Consider designating additional Access funding for alumni activities*** in order to allow U.S. Embassy staff to dedicate time to this.
- ***Increase communication among Access coordinators (both U.S. Embassy staff and providers) in different countries*** in order to cross-fertilize ideas and replicate successful models. At a minimum, create an online forum or newsletter for sharing ideas and experiences. If possible, hold occasional in-person regional or cross-regional conferences for Access coordinators; or, if funds are limited, such a forum could be conducted virtually, perhaps on an annual basis.

¹⁵ PCEL^T is an internationally recognized TESOL certificate delivered through a 120-hour training program through, the Access provider in the Palestinian Territories.

Facilitate more U.S. exchanges for Access alumni. Former participants, as well as teachers, who have gone on U.S. exchange programs, found the experience very valuable. As noted earlier, focus group participants in several countries expressed interest in going to the United States, but available slots in YES and other exchange programs are limited. Some mentioned other barriers to participating in exchange programs, such as difficulties with the application process. It seems that U.S. Embassies could try to do more to strengthen the link between Access and other target programs, such as YES. Specific suggestions include:

- **Create a stronger connection between Access and target programs, such as YES, university programs, and youth leadership programs.** For example, because YES is only open to high school students, there is a very narrow time frame between completing Access and applying for YES, so it is critical for students to have the information and know how to apply. This connection has been successful in some locations, such as the West Bank and Peru. As noted above, communication among Access coordinators globally would make it possible for U.S. Embassies with success stories to share their experience so that other U.S. Embassies could replicate the model.
- **Ensure that Access participants finish the program in time to participate in YES.** In other words, participants should complete Access in their sophomore or junior years, so they have the option to apply to attend YES during their junior or senior year.

Strengthen community service component. Interviews and survey data revealed that the community service component varied widely among Access programs across and within countries. The evaluation team recommends strengthening this component across the board, especially in countries where it is weaker, such as Malaysia, Peru, and Senegal. Furthermore, in the West Bank, where every Access group organizes approximately one volunteer event per year, a senior Access teacher noted, “I think the kids want more opportunities for volunteerism in this program.” ECA may consider several ways of strengthening the community service component:

- **Provide U.S. Embassies and providers with clear guidance regarding ECA’s expectations for community service.** If this is a program requirement, establish a mechanism for ensuring that all providers are including it, perhaps by requiring that Posts report on community service activities in their periodic reports to ECA and/or by providing guidance for how often community service should be performed (such as annually or monthly). In addition, fieldwork revealed that in many countries, the concept of “community service” is understood differently than the U.S. definition. It is important that both providers and teachers be trained in the concept and application of community service, including specific examples of the types of activities that can be done in different contexts, such as those described below.
- **Consider linking Access classes with NGOs for community service work.** As noted earlier, in Cambodia there is a successful model for engaging Access students in NGO activities, and both former participants and interviewees reported that Access alumni often pursue NGO or public service positions later on. ECA might consider replicating this model elsewhere, where feasible.
- **Look for ways to involve communities in Access community service activities.** In some places, Access programs have successfully involved local communities in their service activities. For example, in Cambodia, as mentioned earlier, Access students developed educational skits about HIV/AIDS patients, which they performed for community members, and in Senegal, a teacher reported that whenever students perform a service activity in the community, they are required to explain why they are doing it:

For example ... we go in front of the shop; there is a lot of dirt. We clean it and make people think about the action of these kids. ‘Why are they doing this? Who are you? Are you doing this for the town hall?’ ‘No, it’s for Access class,’ we explain. [They say,] ‘Let me help you.’

Access programs in other countries could use similar strategies or come up with other locally appropriate ways to directly engage communities in community service.

Conduct more outreach within the neediest populations. Given that a key goal of U.S. Embassies for Access is to gain access to underserved communities, consider ways to do even more outreach. Evaluation respondents offered the following examples:

- **Senegal: Expand program to remote areas.** In Senegal, a U.S. Embassy official and an administrator noted that Access does not yet have programs in the most remote communities, far from major cities, where the most disadvantaged populations live. Although this could be logistically complicated because of lack of transportation—one administrator said students would have to be transported “on donkey backs”—Access was successfully implemented in a rural area of Cambodia by providing students with bicycles to get to and from the program facility.
- **Morocco: Recruit more students from poor communities.** An administrator in the small city of Tiznit noted the importance of reaching out to the poorest segments of his community to recruit Access applicants.

I believe we need to reach out to ... the poor who don't have computers, and those kids get shocked when they join university. There should be better outreach to the local community.

Note: The U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, Office of English Language Programs, continues to incorporate best practices and lessons learned into the English Access Microscholarship Program. Since the evaluation was commissioned, several program changes occurred.

- In 2012 teacher training became a formal part of the Access program and since its inception over 70 in-country trainings have occurred worldwide.
- In 2014, the program broadened its reach to include not only teacher training and English language scholarships but also alumni programming, which allows posts to maintain contact with Access alumni and helps U.S. embassies address their strategic English language plans.
- In order to strengthen the community service component of the Access program, an exchange program was conducted in October/November 2016 for 25 Access teachers at Bowling Green State University, focusing on service learning and how to incorporate community service into the Access curriculum. The exchange has yielded a number of best practices that will be shared with Access teachers worldwide.
- Since the evaluation, technology training has become a significant component of the Access program, as is feasible in each country.
- Because of the technology training and the more widespread use of social media, alumni engagement through social media has expanded dramatically in recent years. The Access Program's Facebook page currently has over 30,000 likes, and there are multiple country-specific Facebook and other social media sites.
- The Access Program continues to expand to remote locations, and recruitment plans continue to focus on marginalized, economically disadvantaged students in over 80 countries around the world.