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Artículos científicos

Dominio del idioma inglés en estudiantes de nuevo ingreso universitario: información para la toma de decisiones

***English language knowledge dominion on first year university students:
Information for decision making***

***Proficiência na língua inglesa em novos estudantes universitários:
informações para a tomada de decisão***

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Resumen

El dominio de una lengua extranjera, específicamente el idioma inglés en América Latina, es una necesidad para todo profesional debido al proceso de globalización. Este fenómeno ha sido el principal motivo por el cual dicha lengua ha adquirido importancia a nivel mundial. Por tanto, el objetivo de la presente investigación fue caracterizar el dominio de conocimientos del idioma inglés en estudiantes de nuevo ingreso de la Facultad de Ciencias de la Salud de una universidad pública en el sureste de México, lo cual permitirá la toma de decisiones en cuanto a la actualización del currículo de los programas educativos. Para ello, se desarrolló un estudio con enfoque cuantitativo; la muestra fue de tipo no probabilístico, y se consideró a la población total de estudiantes de nuevo ingreso de la facultad (generación 2020). El instrumento para la recolección de los datos fue diseñado por el cuerpo académico adjunto al centro de idiomas de la institución y organizado en tres secciones *I: Auditiva; II: Lectura, y III: Uso del vocabulario y gramática*. La evaluación diagnóstica del idioma inglés versión en línea se llevó a cabo en el mes de julio de 2020 y el análisis de datos se realizó durante el mes de agosto de 2020. Los resultados fueron procesados con el paquete estadístico SPSS, versión 25.0, para Windows. Se realizó un análisis descriptivo. El estudio estuvo conformado por una población de 602 estudiantes de nuevo ingreso de seis programas educativos de la facultad, de los cuales $n = 424$ (70.43 %) corresponden al género femenino y $n = 178$ (29.57 %) al masculino. Los resultados demuestran que 77.41 % se encuentra en un nivel preliminar *Básico*. De hecho, el programa donde se evidencia el mejor desempeño es Psicología, mientras que el más bajo se encuentra en Educación Física. En síntesis, los niveles de logro alcanzados por los estudiantes están por debajo de la media nacional, lo que significa que aún requieren más tiempo de capacitación. Además, se deben identificar las deficiencias y dificultades en el aprendizaje del idioma inglés en los niveles académicos anteriores. Por ello, es posible concluir que la universidad debe actualizar su currículo y sus orientaciones pedagógicas para mejorar el dominio del idioma inglés y con ello la calidad de la educación profesional.

Palabras clave: dominio del conocimiento, estudiantes universitarios, idioma inglés.

Abstract

Learning a foreign language specifically the English language, for Latin America countries is a must for every professional, due to the globalization phenomenon, this is the main reason why the English language has acquired a major role on a global scale. The main goal of the following research is to characterize the knowledge domain of the English language in first year students of the Health sciences faculty at a public university in southeast Mexico, as a guide to decision making and to actualize education programs curriculum. A quantitative research was employed, with a non-probabilistic sampling, to carry out this research, the entire first year student population for the 2020 generation for the health sciences faculty was taken into consideration. Data was gathered using a diagnosis test designed by the language center academy. It was divided in three sections I: Listening, II: Reading, III: Vocabulary and Grammar. The electronic version of the test was applied in July 2020, data gathered was analyzed on the month of August 2020. Results were processed with the statistics package SPSS 25.0 for Windows. A descriptive analysis was employed. Studied population accounted for 602 first year students belonging to 6 different educative programs of the health sciences school, of which $n=424$ (70.43%) were female and $n=178$ (29.57%) were male. Overall, 77.41% of the students had a knowledge dominion of the English language corresponding to the lower "Basic" level, being the students of the psychology major, the ones who did better on the test only on the lower "Basic" level, while Physical education students had the lowest performance. Knowledge dominion of the English language shown by these students is below the national average, this implies that they need more study time, it is also needed to identify deficiencies and issues in the English learning process during previous educational levels. It is possible to say that the university has an urgent call to actualize its curriculum and pedagogic orientations to improve the knowledge dominion of the English language and thus improve professional education quality.

Keywords: knowledge dominion; university students, english language.

Resumo

O domínio de uma língua estrangeira, especificamente a língua inglesa na América Latina, é uma necessidade para todo profissional devido ao processo de globalização. Esse fenômeno tem sido o principal motivo pelo qual esse idioma adquiriu importância mundial. Portanto, o objetivo desta pesquisa foi caracterizar o domínio da língua inglesa em novos alunos da Faculdade de Ciências da Saúde de uma universidade pública do sudeste do México, o que permitirá a tomada de decisão quanto à atualização do currículo dos programas educacionais. Para isso, foi desenvolvido um estudo com abordagem quantitativa; A amostra foi não probabilística, e foi considerada a população total de novos alunos do corpo docente (geração 2020). O instrumento de coleta de dados foi elaborado pelo corpo acadêmico vinculado ao Centro de Línguas da instituição e organizado em três seções I: Audição; II: Leitura e III: Uso de vocabulário e gramática. A versão online da avaliação diagnóstica da língua inglesa foi realizada em julho de 2020 e a análise dos dados realizada em agosto de 2020. Os resultados foram processados com o pacote estatístico SPSS, versão 25.0, para Windows. Foi feita uma análise descritiva. O estudo constituiu-se de uma população de 602 novos alunos de seis programas de ensino da faculdade, dos quais $n = 424$ (70,43%) correspondem ao gênero feminino em $n = 178$ (29,57%) ao gênero masculino. Os resultados mostram que 77,41% estão no nível básico preliminar. Na verdade, o programa onde se evidencia o melhor desempenho é a Psicologia, enquanto o pior é a Educação Física. Em suma, os níveis de aproveitamento alcançados pelos alunos estão abaixo da média nacional, o que significa que ainda requerem mais tempo de formação. Além disso, devem ser identificadas deficiências e dificuldades no aprendizado da língua inglesa em níveis acadêmicos anteriores. Portanto, é possível concluir que a universidade deve atualizar seu currículo e suas diretrizes pedagógicas para aprimorar o domínio da língua inglesa e com ela a qualidade da formação profissional.

Palavras-chave: domínio do conhecimento, estudantes universitários, língua inglesa.

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Introduction

In the 21st century, the use of a single language is insufficient to respond correctly to the demands imposed by a world like today, where different types of expressions and thoughts coexist (Burgos and López, 2010; León-Jiménez et al. , 2018). In fact, the use of a foreign language, particularly the English language, has gone from being a privilege to a necessity in the different productive sectors due to the globalization process (Uribe, 2012). This phenomenon has been the main reason why this language has acquired importance worldwide to the point of being considered as a universal language of business (Chávez-Zambrano, Saltos-Vivas and Saltos-Dueñas, 2017; Oñate, 2016).

Faced with the professional and personal demands that this globalized world demands, universities must pay special attention to the training of bilingual professionals so that they are able to be up-to-date regarding the advances in their science (Spain, 2010) and to integrate effectively and efficiency in the labor field, which is impacted by the evident opening of markets and the technological development of products (Spain, 2010; León-Jiménez et al., 2018). In addition, it is essential to become aware of the learning of the English language because in any area it is written, spoken and read in that language. Therefore, it is not risky to affirm that its dominance increases the probabilities of employability, mobility and competitiveness, aspects that have become essential objectives to achieve the insertion of Mexico in the world economy (Oñate, 2017; Tapia, 2018).

In this context, the relationship of the English language with study programs at universities is perceived as part of the new concerns and demands of internationalization; However, this link must be incorporated as one more element of the comprehensive training of the student and contemplated from the curricular and pedagogical planning (Martínez-Salas, 2019). In other words, learning the English language cannot be subordinated to market demands, but must be part of the training intentions imposed by the university itself. (Chávez-Zambrano *et al.*, 2017; España 2010).

In this sense, the command of the English language and the management of technological resources constitute one of the most obvious demands of the labor market, which is why it is a necessary complement to promote comprehensive training and educational quality in a globalized world (Carranza, Islas and Maciel, 2018; Spain, 2010).

Now, learning a second language in an academic environment is a process that is planned and executed in an institutional framework in order to develop students' linguistic

competence (Oñate, 2016). This learning proposes that the metabolization of said language is based on the same principles that govern mastery of the mother tongue, even when the complete grammar of the second language is not achieved through non-linguistic factors (Tapia, 2018; Rueda and Wilburn, 2014). The difference is that the first language is acquired through immersion in a native environment, while the foreign language is developed in a controlled environment in the classroom, where errors commonly occur at those points where the mother tongue and the foreigners are different (Oñate, 2016). The objective is for students to achieve competencies equivalent to international standards to be prepared for future changes in the education and employability systems (León-Jiménez et al., 2018).

In order to adequately evaluate the development of this competence in new university applicants, it is necessary to apply a diagnostic test not to condition their admission, but to determine at what level of English language learning they should start at the university. This exploratory process is essential because it allows regulatory bodies to assess the importance of an educational program in terms of the employment of its graduates (Universidad Autónoma del Carmen [Unacar], 2017).

For this reason, the objective of this research was to describe the mastery of knowledge in the English language of new students from the Faculty of Health Sciences of a public university in the southeast of Mexico in order to undertake actions that allow update the curriculum of the educational programs of said faculty.

In this institution, it has been identified that the highest level of educational lag occurs in the courses that contribute to generic competences, especially in communication and social relations (CRS), where the ability to communicate and relate both in Spanish and in Spanish is addressed. a second language. This generic competence is included in all educational programs of the institution and is made up of four curricular levels and two compulsory non-curricular remedial courses.

Materials and methods

The focus of the present investigation was quantitative, with an exploratory and descriptive scope and a cross-sectional experimental design. The study population was selected in a non-probabilistic way, for which all first cycle students of the 2020 generation of the educational programs of the Faculty of Health Sciences of a Mexican university were included. The English Language Diagnostic Assessment, online version, was carried out

from July 6 to 10, 2020, and the data analysis was performed during the month of August 2020.

The cases of students who did not support the online evaluation in time and form of the aforementioned period were excluded, even when they were later accepted in the educational programs.

The consultation of the database that was used was provided by the coordination of the institution's language center, the administrative unit responsible for generating, safeguarding and guarding the information on the results achieved for each subject.

The instrument used was designed by the academic body attached to the institution's language center, and was applied online due to the situation generated by the pandemic. Specifically, the instrument was made up of three sections:

- Section I: Listening comprehension. It was made up of 20 questions, each with four answer options.
- Section II: Reading. It consisted of 20 questions, each with four response options.
- Section III: Use vocabulary and grammar. This was prepared with 120 items, each with four response options. This last section was divided into six blocks of 20 questions each. The objective was to evaluate the knowledge of each level taught, either in a compulsory curricular way or as content of non-curricular remedial courses. The first block of reagents (1 to 20) focused on the contents of the remedial course Leveling A; the second block (from 21 to 40) in the contents of the remedial course Leveling B, and so on.

Table 1 indicates the contents assessed in each block within the institution under study.

Tabla 1. Correlación entre los reactivos del examen diagnóstico

Bloque	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
Reactivo del ... al ...	1-20	21-40	41-60	61-80	81-100	101-120
Curso que representa en la institución	Nivelación A	Nivelación B	Inglés I	Inglés II	Inglés III	Inglés IV

Fuente: Unacar (2017)

The reagents of the instrument belong to the contents of the different general English courses offered by the study institution. This allows obtaining a diagnostic reference for each of the admission applicants and the content that they must prove during their transit through the institution.

This instrument has two defined objectives: first, to measure the knowledge of the English language at the time of entering the university. This information allows you to compare the level of knowledge of the student when he entered the university with the level of knowledge at the end of his English courses. It is necessary to mention that this diagnostic evaluation does not play any role in the admission of the university. Second, depending on the score obtained, the student has the opportunity to accredit the leveling A and level B courses, as well as the right to take the accreditation exams of the following four levels, according to the achievement of the minimum satisfactory score for each level. (table 2).

Tabla 2. Puntaje mínimo para acreditación de niveles de inglés

Bloque	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
Reactivo del ... al ...	1-20	21-40	41-60	61-80	81-100	101-120
Número mínimo de reactivos correctos en cada bloque para acreditación	16	16	14	14	14	14

Fuente: Unacar (2017)

Regarding the listening and reading section, if the student has obtained 15 correct answers in one of the first two groups of 20 grammatical questions, and 13 in the case of the next four groups of 20 grammar questions, it is determined that the student is fit for the next level.

As can be seen in Table 2, the number of correct answers required for the accreditation of leveling courses A and B is higher than the score required in the four subsequent levels to be channeled to accreditation exams. The purpose of the foregoing is to guarantee that the student has the minimum necessary knowledge in these two basic levels of the English language, since these levels do not pass through accreditation exams, and the diagnostic instrument is the method used to accredit these basic competencies, which gives the applicant the opportunity to start their English studies directly in the curricular courses.

The investigation adhered to recognized ethical standards. In the first stage, the objectives were explained in detail and written informed consent was requested. The information obtained was used exclusively for this study without affecting the student in any way. The project was coordinated by the disciplinary group Nutrition, Education and Administration, with the support of teachers from the language center and from the degrees in Psychology and Education.

The results were processed with the SPSS statistical package (version 25.0) for Windows. A descriptive analysis was carried out calculating absolute and relative frequencies, measures of central tendency (mean and median) and dispersion.

Results

The study consisted of a population of $N = 602$ new students from six educational programs of the Faculty of Health Sciences of a university in southeast Mexico (table 3), of which $n = 424$ (70.43%) correspond to the female gender and $n = 178$ (29.57%) to the male gender.

Tabla 3. Distribución de la población por programa educativo

Programa educativo: licenciatura en...							
	Educación Física y Deporte	Enfermería	Nutrición	Psicología	Fisioterapia	Medicina	Total
n	23	99	54	73	72	281	602
%	3.82	16.45	8.97	12.13	11.96	46.68	100

Fuente: Elaboración propia

Table 4 shows the level of proficiency in the English language. In general, 77.41% of the students who entered in the year 2020 are categorized in the preliminary Basic level, that is, in non-curricular remedial courses of the English language within the educational programs of the faculty, which means that they still require more time training.

Tabla 4. Distribución del nivel de dominio del idioma inglés

Universidad	MCER	CENNI	n	%
Nivelación A	A1	Básico 1	399	66.28
Nivelación B	A1+	Básico 2	67	11.13
Inglés I	A2-	Pre-intermedio 1	64	10.63
Presentar examen de acreditación de Inglés I-4			72	11.96
Total			602	100

Fuente: Elaboración propia

Table 5 shows the level of English language proficiency by educational program at the faculty. In this sense, it can be indicated that in Psychology almost 60% of new students have a command of the English language at the Basic level, although this situation is more prevalent in other educational programs; a sample is Nursing and Physical Education and Sports, where there are more cases at that level.

Tabla 5. Nivel de dominio del idioma inglés por programa educativo

Programa educativo	Básico				Pre-intermedio		Presentar examen de acreditación	
	Nivelación A		Nivelación B		Inglés I			
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Licenciatura en Educación Física y Deportes (LEFYD)	20	86.96	2	8.70	1	4.35	0	0.00
Licenciatura en Enfermería (LE)	80	80.81	11	11.11	4	4.04	4	4.04
Licenciatura en Fisioterapia (LF)	47	65.28	8	11.11	11	15.28	6	8.33
Licenciatura en Medicina (LM)	170	60.50	33	11.74	32	11.39	46	16.37
Licenciatura en Nutrición (LN)	40	74.07	5	9.26	5	9.26	4	7.41
Licenciatura en Psicología (LP)	42	57.53	8	10.96	11	15.07	12	16.44

Fuente: Elaboración propia

Table 6 shows the score obtained by each section of the diagnostic instrument and by educational program of the study institution.

Tabla 6. Puntaje promedio obtenido por sección

Áreas del examen diagnóstico	General		LEFYD		LE		LF		LM		LN		LP		
	□	DE	□	DE	□	DE	□	DE	□	DE	□	DE	□	DE	
SECCIONES	I: Auditiva	9.57	4.60	7.00	2.45	8.19	3.75	9.10	4.57	10.39	4.64	8.91	4.26	10.05	5.38
	II: Lectura	8.87	4.63	6.09	3.74	7.15	4.02	8.50	4.21	9.67	4.65	8.13	4.78	9.88	4.77
	III: Uso vocabulario y gramática (I)	11.39	4.35	8.48	2.77	10.03	4.07	10.88	4.67	12.28	4.14	10.15	4.39	12.12	4.44
	III: Uso vocabulario y gramática (II)	10.56	4.04	7.39	3.01	9.33	3.36	10.18	4.14	11.43	3.91	9.26	3.70	11.22	4.52
	III: Uso vocabulario y gramática (III)	8.79	4.17	5.91	2.39	7.26	3.52	8.81	3.84	9.50	4.24	8.46	4.06	9.23	4.60
	III: Uso vocabulario y gramática (IV)	8.46	3.79	5.52	2.78	6.84	3.39	8.22	3.23	9.28	3.78	8.11	3.76	8.95	3.98
	III: Uso vocabulario y gramática (V)	7.44	3.60	4.43	2.86	6.39	3.05	7.35	3.30	8.01	3.68	7.24	3.10	7.85	3.98
	III: Uso vocabulario y gramática (VI)	7.62	3.74	5.74	1.98	6.52	2.75	7.35	3.45	8.21	3.91	7.11	3.61	8.11	4.33
Total del curso	72.70	27.84	50.57	16.47	61.72	58.12	70.38	25.99	78.78	27.65	67.37	27.11	77.41	31.47	

Fuente: Elaboración propia

Discussion

Although most of the publications on the command of the English language as a second language are oriented to the business and economic world, some research directed to the professional context can be mentioned, as is the case of the health area (Burgos and López, 2010; Spain, 2010; León-Jiménez et al., 2018; Soarín, 2003; Uribe, 2012). In this sense, the present study focused mainly on describing the mastery of English language skills through a diagnostic evaluation applied to new students from the Faculty of Health Sciences of a public university in southeastern Mexico. This made it possible to collect vital information for decision-making regarding the updating of the curriculum of the educational programs of the aforementioned faculty, with which it is expected to establish curricular policies and pedagogical guidance that promote the integration of the English language in the generation of learning, because in this way professional training and job placement opportunities can be increased.

Specifically, the results of the applied English diagnostic test indicate that, on average, 77.41% of new college students are within the preliminary level (Levels A and B), which means that they need more training time.

These results are relatively superior to those reported by León-Jiménez et al. (2018), who presented the following percentages in these faculties: medicine (61.1%), engineering (60.0%), law (64.9%), humanities (81.8%) and business sciences (81.4%), while the percentages obtained by Ibáñez (2008) are more similar to those detailed in the present investigation, since said author found a preliminary level of 70% of new students.

On the other hand, when comparing the results between the educational programs of the institution of study, it is observed that the following order in a scale from higher to lower domain: 1) Bachelor's Degree in Psychology, 2) Bachelor's Degree in Physiotherapy, 3) Bachelor's Degree in Medicine, 4) Bachelor's Degree in Nutrition, 5) Bachelor's Degree in Nursing, and 6) Bachelor's Degree in Physical Education and Sports.

This low general command of the English language requires a greater financial investment from the university, since in order to standardize students in that language, the institution must offer a greater number of courses, which translates into more classrooms and teachers.

However, it should also be noted that in the present work certain uncontrolled variables could have altered to some extent the data collected, such as the lack of time

proposed to solve the test, the current health situation generated by covid-19, the little interest about the subject on the part of the students and the lack of previous studies or practice (León-Jiménez et al., 2018). Likewise, it should be considered that the diagnosis was developed online, which could have required the students knowledge with which they were not familiar to use the platform, as well as connection problems, etc.

Even so, from the first cycle of all careers, work should be done on the teaching of that language, which can be promoted in two ways: the first, by having teachers whose mother tongue is English, since in this way it is possible to optimize everything related to vocabulary, writing, reading, grammar and dialogue. The second, offering teachers whose mother tongue is not English methodologies that arouse the interest of students. (Buitrago y Herrera, 2016).

Conclusions

The results achieved by new students in the diagnostic test of English language proficiency show that these students are below the standards required by the Ministry of Public Education of Mexico. This phenomenon is worrying when it is considered that students must consult academic documents in English as part of the reference material within the learning units during the four years that the study programs contemplate.

For this reason, the university must try to update the curriculum and the pedagogical orientation to promote the development of communication skills that allow mastery of the English language. In fact, beyond a curricular inclusion, there must be interdisciplinary relevance and linkage of English as an essential part of the comprehensiveness of knowledge imposed by globalization, since in this way the onslaught of globalization and the information age can be faced in order to achieve the development required.

Future lines of research

The origin of the difficulties that university students have to master the English language as a second language must be identified. Likewise, it is necessary to deepen the perception of students and teachers regarding the teaching of that language, as well as the impact of the curriculum and the factors that affect its mastery.

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Investigación	Ángel Esteban Torres-Zapata
Recursos	José Rafael Villanueva-Echavarría
Curación de datos	Teresa del Jesús Brito-Cruz
Escritura - Preparación del borrador original	Ángel Esteban Torres-Zapata
Escritura - Revisión y edición	Teresa del Jesús Brito-Cruz
Visualización	José Rafael Villanueva-Echavarría
Supervisión	Ángel Esteban Torres-Zapata
Administración de Proyectos	Ángel Esteban Torres-Zapata
Adquisición de fondos	José Rafael Villanueva-Echavarría