

English for Special Purposes at the Universidad de las Américas-Puebla

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English is offered through the Department of Languages at the Universidad de las Américas-Puebla (UDLA-P). Within this department there are three separate divisions of English: Administrative, Technical and University. The Administrative Division serves the School of Business and Economics. This Division utilizes an oral focus more than the other divisions. Technical English serves the School of Engineering and focuses on reading skills. University English serves the School of Social Sciences and Humanities and places equal emphasis on all four areas: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Even though the approach is different in each of the divisions, the general proficiency aimed for is hoped to be more or less equal upon completion of four semesters of language study. A study was set up to determine if this objective was being met.

Method

Subjects

Six sections of Administrative English and eight sections each of Technical and University English were tested for a total of 273 students (64 in Administrative English, 109 in Technical English, and 100 in University English.)

By gender, 86 were females (45 in Administrative, 16 in Technical and 25 in University English); 187 were males (19 in Administrative, 93 in Technical and 75 in University English.)

Instrument

After an investigation into standardized measures of proficiency, the Michigan Test (1972) was chosen because it was appropriate for the type of information desired and also because a version of the test was available. An additional advantage of the Michigan Test is that it correlates highly with the TOEFL (.881), which many students at the UDLA-P need to study abroad. Thus the Michigan Test can be used as an

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indicator of how students might do on the TOEFL.

The Michigan Test consists of two parts: English Language Proficiency (Form D was used) and Aural Comprehension (Form 1 was used.) The English Language Proficiency Test consists of 100 items of English grammatical usage, vocabulary and reading comprehension to be administered in a 75-minute period. The Test of Aural Comprehension is designed to estimate a student's ability to comprehend basic English structures orally presented. It is not a direct test of ability to make proper discrimination in the English sound system but, rather assumes that phonetic discrimination is basic to comprehension of natural utterances. The test consists of 90 items. The duration of the test is 23 minutes.

Procedure

During the fall semester, two class periods of fifty minutes each were reserved for the administration of the test during the last month of the semester. Because the time required for the English Language Proficiency test was more than a class period, this portion of the test was administered in two parts by collecting the test booklets and answer sheets the first day and redistributing them the following day, allowing students to continue where they had left off.

Results

A summary of the results of the test are shown in Table 1 and include both the actual and the equated scores. Scores of the English Language Proficiency tests are broken down into the subcomponents of grammar, vocabulary and reading comprehension. Table 2 shows scores by gender.

	Aural Comprehension		English Language Proficiency				
	Aural	Equated	Gram.	Voc.	Reading	Total	Equated
Administrative English	54.34	67.06	16.42	15.83	8.70	40.95	56.00
Technical English	53.62	66.13	17.42	15.90	7.88	41.19	56.19
University English	45.51	53.17	17.52	16.01	8.95	42.48	54.96

Table 1. Michigan Test. Scores of UDLA-P Students by Division

Aural Comprehension

English Language Proficiency

		Aural	Equated	Gram.	Voc.	Read.	Total	Equated
Administrative English	Females	54.84	67.50	16.64	15.50	9.36	41.50	56.50
	Males	53.74	63.11	16.16	16.58	7.21	39.95	55.74
Technical English	Females	45.00	59.06	15.38	14.63	6.25	36.25	46.38
	Males	54.94	67.21	17.73	16.10	8.13	41.95	54.85
University English	Females	45.72	57.93	17.12	15.76	8.63	41.51	53.89
	Males	44.88	54.88	18.72	16.76	9.92	45.40	58.16

Table 2. Michigan Test. Scores of UDLA-P Students by Division and Gender

In general, looking at the equated scores, all three divisions' scores were quite close: 670.6, 66.13, and 53.17 on the Aural Comprehension and 56.00, 56.19, and 54.96 in the English Language Proficiency (ranges of 13.89 and 1.23 respectively).

Aural Comprehension

On the Test of Aural Comprehension, the division of Administrative English, which focuses more heavily on oral/aural activities than the other two divisions, scored the highest. Surprisingly, the Technical English Division also scored equally well, even though the focus in this division is almost entirely on reading. The University English group score was slightly lower than the other groups on this test.

By gender, females in the Administrative and University divisions scored slightly higher than the males. The reverse was true for Technical English.

English Language Proficiency

The University English group obtained the highest means in all three subcategories of the Test of English Language Proficiency. The Administrative English group means were the lowest in the subcategories of grammar and vocabulary. Strangely enough, the Technical Division scores were lowest of the three groups in the category of reading comprehension, even though this division focuses almost entirely on reading. Overall, the means of the total scores showed a difference of only 1.23, with University English at the top and Administrative English at the bottom.

By gender, males scored higher in every subcategory in both the Technical and University English divisions. In the Administrative Division, females scored higher in the subcategories of grammar and reading comprehension.

Discussion

The closeness of the mean scores of the three divisions would indicate that the difference in approach and focus do not have a significant effect on overall aural comprehension of English language proficiency at the end of four semesters of instruction in English language. Each division is obtaining similar results. It would appear that each division is meeting both the goals and objectives within the division, as well as the general Language Department criteria for proficiency.

Coordination both within and between the English divisions of the Language Department is successfully maintaining a balanced, quality program of English language instruction.

As mentioned earlier, many students of the UDLA-P go on to study abroad. Those who go to the United States are usually required to take the TOEFL exam. As indicated by the Michigan Test developers, the test correlates highly with the TOEFL. Based on this fact and the scores obtained on the Michigan Test, the mean scores of UDLA-P students on the TOEFL could be estimated to fall in a range of from 350 to 400 after completing the fourth semester of English in the Language Department's program of instruction.

A replication of this study should be done to see if these results remain constant. It would also be worthwhile to monitor TOEFL scores of those students who take that test after completing the Language Department program of instruction to verify the estimates projected from this study.



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