

Implications of classroom tests to evaluate the English Language subject in the decision of students to drop out of a licenciatura in languages

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RESUMEN

Este artículo da cuenta de los desarrollos de un estudio realizado en un período de tiempo aproximado de siete meses académicos, entre el 2009-1¹ y el 2010-2, con cuatro asistentes de investigación próximos a terminar su Carrera. El propósito de estos estudiantes era escribir su monografía con base en su participación en el Proyecto. Se realizaron dos estudios exploratorios, uno acerca de los desertores en la Licenciatura, y otro acerca de la influencia que los tests para evaluar el inglés pueden tener en la decisión de los estudiantes para abandonar sus estudios. Este último se llevó a cabo por medio de una encuesta aplicada a cerca de la mitad del total de trescientos estudiantes matriculados en los primeros cuatro semestres de la Licenciatura en el semestre 2010-1. Aunque el diseño y aplicación de esta encuesta se optaron como una alternativa ante la imposibilidad de desarrollar los objetivos originalmente definidos en el proyecto, por razones que se explican en este informe, los resultados son útiles e interesantes: mediante la formulación de preguntas sencillas a los encuestados acerca de las clases y de los tests de inglés se obtuvo información relevante para fundamentar la revisión de las metodologías que se están usando para la enseñanza y evaluación del inglés. Esta información da cuenta, además, de aspectos económicos de los estudiantes.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Evaluación, deserción, test, cohorte, aptitud, actitud

ABSTRACT

This article reports the progress of a study made in one and a half academic semesters, between 2009-2 and 2010-1, with four research assistants who were about to complete their Licenciatura. The purpose of their participation in the Project was for them to give an account of their work in their dissertation. Two exploratory studies were

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This piece of research is part of the research project Implementation of a permanent evaluation system aimed at improving the teaching-learning process of the English language and reduce drop-outs rates in the Licenciatura en Educación Básica con énfasis en Humanidades e Idiomas de la Universidad Libre. Main researcher: Gladys Forero Bohórquez. This Project is being financed by the Faculty of Education of the Universidad Libre in Bogotá.

¹ Number after dash in years stands for first or second second semester of year accordingly.

carried out, one about drop-outs in the Licenciatura, and another about the influence that English tests may have in the making of the decision of students to abandon their studies. The latter was accomplished by means of a survey administered to roughly half the students enrolled (there was a total of 300) in the first to fourth academic semesters of the Licenciatura, during the semester 2010-. Though this survey was designed and applied alternatively to the original objectives of this piece of research, for reasons described below, the results, now under analysis, are useful. Through asking the students simple questions about both English classes and English tests, suitable information for the revision of methodologies currently used for the teaching and evaluation of the English language was uncovered. Besides academic data, information gathered with the survey also includes valuable economic facts.

KEY WORDS

Evaluation, dropping-out, test, cohort, aptitude, attitude.

1. CONTEXTUALIZATION

The present study is an ongoing project, taking place in the Licenciatura Programme in Educación Básica con énfasis en Humanidades e idiomas of the Faculty of Education of the Universidad Libre in Bogotá. This Licenciatura Programme seeks accreditation from the CNA (Consejo nacional de Acreditación for its acronym in Spanish). As this article is being written, the Licenciatura Programme has undertaken an improvement plan in most areas, e.g., as far as the teaching-learning of the English Language is concerned; now English teachers count on the support of native assistants for both clases and students tutorials. In addition, we teachers have been given an English language proficiency exam.

At present, the Licenciatura has also joined the so called 'Strenghtening Programme' led by the Ministry of Education, aimed at carrying out actions such as giving exams to English teachers both on Pedagogy and subject matter, and also providing the Licenciatura Programme with an insight on the syllabus with which teacher trainees are being taught, remarking the importance of using it as a key for course development.

At present, however, the selection process of students enrolling in the Licenciatura is inadequate because it does not allow the teachers to infer the necessary attitude and aptitude of candidates to engage in the Programme. This turns out to be a major cause for many students not to show an earnest interest in their studying, and therefore, one of the major hindrances for them to succeed in their studies, for us teachers to meet our teaching goals, and most surely, as a chief principle for the students to drop out. In this respect, the Colombian Ministry of Education (MEN) (2006:4) states: "programmes with rigorous selection processes, that demand high ICFES rates, present low dropout percentages." And, Morin, cited by Vélez *et al* (2004:178) contends: "it doesn't seem unforeseen that drop-out rates are lower in countries with more selective systems, than in those with more open-ended ones."

However, first semester teachers are now alleging that their students have lately been arriving with a higher English level,encouraging the Department to require teachers to start with the "elementary" instead of the "beginners" book of the series currently in use.

The Faculty supports research. The investigation progress to be reported in this paper is being carried out thanks to this collaboration.

2. INTRODUCTION

The idea of this investigation arose from two facts: firstly, the implementation of achievement exams cooperatively designed by teachers to test the English language, in an effort of the administration of the Programme to upgrade the teaching learning process of the English language; the high drop-out rate in the Licenciatura, found in an exploratory study completed within one of the sub-projects of this Project, and also the fact that no other study on students' abandonment had taken place in this Licenciatura, at least domestically.

The aim of the Project is to relate a sample of test formats of achievement tests, also known as classroom tests, of the ones designed and administered by the teaching staff during the second semester of 2009, the so called "minimals" (contents at all skill level) that teachers must cover during the semester, and the course syllabuses. It is hoped that the correlation of this material in the

light of available literature from the Communicative Approach on design and appropriacy of questions, and on the Common European Framework (CEF) postulates will disclose factors that may influence drop-out rates in the Licenciatura.

In order to operationalize the work, and given the fact that this Project is being worked out with a *Semillero* consisting of thirteen students, the Project was divided into four sub-projects, namely, "Justification of the inclusion of the Listening, Reading, Writing, and Speaking skills as well as grammar and vocabulary in a classroom test of English as a foreign language, and appropriate number of questions per skill," (b) "Syllabi and classroom tests", (c) "Types of questions in a communicative classroom test," (4) "Implications of classroom tests to evaluate the English language subject in the decisión of students to drop out of the Licenciatura Programme".

Based on the fact that the four students who had been assigned the latter sub-project, had to finish their studies in seven months, we aimed at working out their sub-project first, and report its results as the earliest developments of this research initiative.

3. JUSTIFICATION

The importance and necessity of this study are evident in: firstly, with the urgent need of bringing into view the drop-out rate of different *cohorts of the Licenciatura*, and even more so, the reasons for these drop outs to have abandoned their studies. All this, as part of the institutional self-evaluation that the Licenciatura must undertake to know the degree of efficacy of its curriculum. Arango (in MEN p.10) argues: "...we have proved that controlling student withdrawal has a greater impact than creating new slots".

It is also important for the University to determine the destiny of those who abandon their studies, especially considering of the fact that "student drop-outs can engage the future of a country in the medium and long term, since the accumulation of scientific and economic knowledge is one of the facts that determine the socioeconomic development of a nation." Schultz, 1961; Nelson y Phelps, 1966; Romer, 1990; Benhabib y Spiegel, 1994; Temple, 1999 y Krueger y Lindahl, 2000, cited by Castaño *et al* (2008:257).

Furthermore, the study of the relevance of classroom tests being used to evaluate the progress made by students in their knowledge of the English language, is justified by its washback effects, that is, by the connections with the way this language is taught and how students learn it. As Shohami (1998:96), asserts, "the tests are a powerful tool in deciding what and how to teach." The insight expected to result from this research on classroom tests will aid reflection regarding the teaching methodologies being used, and the search for appropriate new ones.

This search is the beginning of the qualification of the teaching-learning process, and also a decisive factor for the continuity of students in the Licenciatura, as it is expected that better teaching methods enhance the possibilities of academic success, and weaken the proclivity to drop out for factors related to education quality. In this respect, the "Spadies"² claims: "According to statistics ... a 45% of student withdrawal from university occurs for academic reasons".

4. STUDENT WITHDRAWAL

Tinto, cited by Rivera (2005) and by Maya Guerra (2008:20), asserts that the study of drop-outs must be defined in the light of the context in which it happens, because it varies according to the individual, programme, institution, region and educational system. Correspondingly, for the purpose of this study, student withdrawal has been delimited as the voluntary permanent abandonment of a university study programme by a student.

Causes for student withdrawal: On the authority of the MEN research has shown that the origins of student withdrawal are equally diverse and constantly variable. As maintained by different studies on university drop-outs, both intrinsic and extrinsic factors determine it. "Intrinsic factors are personal, for example, those having to do with motivation for the programme, life project, attitudes and aptitudes towards the programme, satisfaction of expectancies (Vanegas *et al*, 2008:53), etc.

² Systema para la prevención y el análisis de la deserción en las instituciones de educación superior, for its acronym in Spanish. It is an informatic tool of the MEN to monitor drop-outs rates in Colombian higher education.

Conversely, extrinsic factors, are those not- strictly dependant on the student, such as economic conditions, teaching methodology, university environment, family pressures, and even the social situation of the country, etc. (Yepes et al, 2007:37).

In general, the reviewed studies categorize the most common reasons for the students to drop out as socioeconomic, academic, individual, and institutional (Castaño, Elkin et al, 2008: 256; Vélez et al, 2004:185, 187, 188; Yepes FL, et al, 2007:37; Vélez, Amparo et al 2004; UPN, 1984:2; Maya G., 2008: 29, entre otros). Some of these factors frequently overlap.

Accordingly, economic reasons may be associated to family issues, depending on the degree of budgetary reliance that the student has on his family to pay tuition fees, or individual income, but ultimately, economic reasons may also be linked to loan facilities offered by the university.

Academic reasons, on the other hand, may include:

- a. Previous knowledge, or that acquired both in primary and secondary school, and the score in the ICFES³ exam. As the Spadies asserts, the lower the mark in the ICFES, the higher the risk for the student to drop out; and Lopera (2007: 21), "with respect to student's background, the only variable that seems to be meaningful is the ICFES score, which suggests that the better the result, the lower the risk of abandonment." Poor background knowledge may be the cause for study abandonment. On the report of Latiesa, 1998), cited by Vélez (p. 179), the most common reason for dropping out is low academic achievement by students who are not prepared enough to face university studies...".
- b. Professional orientation: "a poor academic performance of the students is associated with an inadequate or inexistent professional orientation" (MEN p. 9), growing into another cause for withdrawal.
- c. Quality of the study Programme. According to Paramo et al, 1999, in Maya Guerra (2008:29), among the factors related to drop out of university are "rigid curricular programmes...

with reduced times, and unrelated teaching topics, irrelevant to professional development".

- d. Motivation it triggers in the student. Of course, this motivation will be aided by an appropriate choice of major, aptitude and attitude towards learning, and interests of the student as an individual.
- e. Institutional, or those akin to the administrative organization of the university, and the ability of both administration and teachers to commit the students to the programme. This degree of commitment is largely dependent on the extent to which the student is accepted as an active member of the group by both teachers and peers. Tinto (1993:2), talking about this topic, affirms: "... the process of student persistence is, in many cases, quite similar to the process of becoming a member of a community. Student persistence, in fact, student development in general, depends on the academic and social integration in the academic and social communities of the university."

• TYPES OF WITHDRAWAL

When attempting to classify students' withdrawal conforming to number of semesters completed in a study Programme, the greatest rate is found in *early withdrawal*. In this respect, the study done by the MEN (p. 4) through the CEDE⁴, states: "the majority of the students drop out during the first semesters of the Programme," and "(Tinto, 1989:9, cited by Lopera, 2007:9). "Highest drop-out rates take place during the first four semesters of university studies" (UPN, p. 2). This result is seen in the majority of educational institutions, as the fact that early semesters represent the transition periods of the individual. Among the factors determining this type of abandonment, the literature mainly remarks lack of adaptation to the university environment, academic demands, and wrong expectancies about the academic programme

5. EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

It is well understood that linguists make a clear distinction between evaluation and assessment. For

³ Instituto Colombiano para el Fomento de la Educación Superior, for its acronym in Spanish.

⁴ Centro de estudios sobre Desarrollo Económico de la Universidad de los Andes. This institution was awarded the call of the MEN for someone able to design a tool for monitoring drop-outs rates in the Colombian Higher Education.

the purpose of this study we advocate the definition of evaluation given in the CEF (2001:177), or that "which includes the effectiveness of particular methods or materials, ... learner/teacher satisfaction, teaching effectiveness," and the one of "assessment" as a type of evaluation that deals specifically with the measuring of the mastery of the language: "assessment... is a process of determining and passing judgements on students' learning potential and performance;" (Skilbech, in White, 1988:40), and focuses on measurement of progress made by the students in the learning of the English language.

"**Classroom tests**", also defined by Heaton (1990:171) as "progress tests", are those written by teachers "to find out how well the students have mastered the language areas and skills which have just been taught". "...tests that can provide information about the progress which may be used systematically for remedial work, ... and whose aim is to give feedback both to teachers and students" (Harrison, 1990:6), because they provide teachers with "a positive *washback effect*"; that is, they "promote effective language teaching and learning" (Bailey 1998:2). Tests that are motivating because they allow students to see that they are learning. Tests that encourage the students to perform well in the target language and to gain additional confidence», and that intend "to stimulate learning and to reinforce what has been taught" (Heaton, 1990:171).

6. THE NATURE OF THIS INVESTIGATION

This piece of research is mainly exploratory, because it studies an event hardly studied by anyone in the Licenciatura. "...hardly anything is known about the matter at the outset of the project. So it has to begin with a rather vague impression of what someone should study, and it is also impossible to create a detailed work plan in advance"⁵.

• PROCEDURES

First, the cohorts⁶ 2000-2 to 2004-2, where contrasted with the lists of students who completed their

undergraduate studies (Table 1). In light of the findings, which account for a very high rate of drop-outs, we then aimed at studying the scripts of a sample of these drop-outs, and comparing it with a sample of the drop-outs that we would be able to get out of a specifically designed phone survey. Unfortunately, the Secretaría Académica did not provide either the scripts of these students or their contact details in time for the assistants to use them for their investigation.

This fact forced the redirection of the original objectives. Hence, a survey was given to students of first through fourth semesters in both the morning and night schedules, in an effort to unveil possible reasons for these students to give up their studies in the Licenciatura, based on the literature review on university drop-outs done for this study.

• SURVEY OBJECTIVES

Cohen *et al* (1990:132) maintain that "surveys meet the data at a particular point in time. Aiming at "... describing the nature of the prevailing conditions..."

Accordingly, the aim of this survey was to explore motives related to (a) attitudes, aptitudes, and motivation towards teaching/learning the English language, and towards the Licenciatura Programme, and the way learning progress is measured; (b) attitudes towards tests in general, (c) students' economic condition, (d) degree of academic success, (e) peer integration, and (f) profesional orientation. Its goal was to gather information intended to encourage the Administration to study the degree of satisfaction that the students are getting out of the Licenciatura Programme, and if necessary, designing strategies to dramatically decrease the number of students who elect to abandon the Programme. In the end, as Vélez *et al* (2004:189) states, "it will always be more costly recovering the drop-outs than investing in keeping the ones enrolled".

• SURVEY DESIGN

The survey was designed, validated, piloted, and administered by the assistants to the selected students. It consisted of open-ended, closed, and structured questions.

• TARGET SURVEY POPULATION

The survey was designed for the three hundred students enrolled in the first through

⁵ http://www.marketresearchworld.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=798, consulted June 15, 2010, at 3 p.m.

⁶ Number of students who enrolled in the Licenciatura Programme in given periods of time.

TABLE 1. Distribution of students by cohort, graduation rate and sex

| Universidad Libre Facultad Ciencias de la Educación Dpto. Humanidades e Idiomas | | Proyecto de Investigación: Implementación de un sistema de evaluación permanente para mejorar el nivel enseñanza-aprendizaje del inglés y reducir la deserción estudiantil Investigadora principal: Gladys Forero Bohórquez | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---------------------------|--|---|---------|-------------------------|--------|------------------------------------|------|---------|------|---|----------------|
| Licenciatura en Educación Básica con énfasis en Humanidades e Idiomas | | Sub-proyecto: Incidencia de los tests para evaluar el inglés en la decisión de los estudiantes para desertar de la Licenciatura en Educación Básica con énfasis en Humanidades e Idiomas de la Facultad de Educación de la Universidad Libre en Bogotá | | | | | | | | | | |
| Bogotá, Octubre 2010 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Distribución de estudiantes por Cohorte, datos de graduación y sexo* | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| No. de Cohortes analizadas | Cohorte por año y período | Ingresaron | Se graduaron | | Sin datos de graduación | | Distribución de graduados por sexo | | | | Auxiliar de investigación que tabuló la información | |
| | | | No. | % | No. | % | Hombres | % | Mujeres | % | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | 2000-1 | 86 | Es posible que los datos encontrados de esta cohorte no sean muy confiables | | | | | | | | | David Bautista |
| 2 | 2000-2 | 56 | 12 | 21.4 % | 44 | 78.5 % | 2 | 3.6 | 10 | 18.0 | | |
| 3 | 2001-1 | 67 | 27 | 40.2 % | 40 | 59.7 % | 6 | 9.0 | 21 | 31.3 | Mauricio Moreno | |
| 4 | 2001-2 | 84 | 31 | 37.0 % | 53 | 63.0 % | 7 | 8.3 | 24 | 28.5 | | |
| 5 | 2002-1 | 133 | 42 | 31.5 % | 91 | 68.4 % | 7 | 5.3 | 35 | 26.3 | Alexis Díaz | |
| 6 | 2002-2 | 83 | 24 | 29.0 % | 59 | 71.1 % | 6 | 7.2 | 17 | 21.6 | | |
| 7 | 2003-1 | 107 | 35 | 32.7 % | 72 | 67.2 % | 8 | 7.5 | 27 | 25.2 | Angélica Moreno*** | |
| 8 | 2003-2 | 89 | 21 | 23.5 % | 68 | 76.4 % | 5 | 5.6 | 16 | 18.0 | | |
| 9 | 2004-1 | 63 | 36 | 57.14 % | 30 | 42.9 % | 7 | 19.5 | 30 | 80.6 | | |
| 10 | 2004-2 | 118 | 15 | 12.7 % | 100 | 87.3 % | 9 | 60 | 6 | 40 | | |

* Trabajo realizado en su totalidad con base en datos suministrados por la Secretaría Académica de la acultad de Educción.

** Margen de error en tabulación de datos realizada por los Asistentes: 5%

*** Reconocimiento especial se hace del espíritu de responsabilidad y colaboración de esta asistente.

fourth semesters of both the morning and night schedules. However, at the time of administration, only one hundred and fifty nine of them were found, according to the research assistants.

7. RESULTS

- **WITHDRAWAL RATES. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS OF WITHDRAWAL IN THE COHORTS STUDIED**

These results are based on the study of ten cohorts, beginning with the first semester of 2000, and ending with the second semester of 2004. The data comes from a comparison between the listed cohort-students, and the records of those who completed their studies.

Due to the fact that no figures could be obtained from the first semester 2000-1, data related only to the other nine semesters is presented in Tables 1 and 2. In Table 1, (i) information ascribed to number of cohorts studied; (ii) semester to which each one of the cohorts corresponds; (iii) number of students that enrolled in the Licenciatura per Cohort; (iv) number of students who completed their major; (v) distribution of students who completed their studies per gender; and, (vi) research assistants who tabulated the data.

Information related to number of drop-outs, and distribution per gender is presented per semester. From this Table it can also be learned that (a) 70.9% of the students who enrolled in the Licenciatura Programme during the four and a half mentioned years, dropped out. (b) the number of males (57)

completing their major was lower than that of females (186) in that period of time.

In Table 2, a yearly summary of the situation presented in Table 1 is offered.

• **SURVEY ANSWERS**

As declared at the beginning of this article, this is an ongoing Project. This is why statistics do not include percentages. Table 3 shows a summary of the results of the survey, as obtained from the number of students surveyed, allocated both per semester, and per schedule. The information included in Table 3 corresponds to categories in the first three cases, and to questions in the rest. In each of the schedules per semester the number of participants is given.

• **APTITUDE TO LEARN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

Most surveyed students say that their aptitude to learn a foreign language is average, but when asked whether they think they chose their major well, they asserted they did.

• **MOTIVATION AS RELATED TO CLASSES AND EVALUATION**

Participants graded the related questions (“English classes motivate you”; “English tests motivate you”,

average, inviting us to look into the reasons why classes are not inspiring, and even more so, why our tests are not stimulating. Reasons could have to do with the candidates’ selection, but could also be linked to the way our classes are given, the kind of tests we are designing, or both.

However, when asked “I’d like this Study Programme better if evaluation was...” (for them to complete it), most students in the Morning Schedule *didn’t complete it*, though answers following the latter from top to bottom, agree on *‘it’s alright’, ...‘easier’,* and a lower number, affirm *...‘more practical’, ...‘more focused on the process’.* In the Night Schedule, the most salient category is that *no answer was given.* This absence of answers outstanding in both schedules might be assumed as an understandable lack of criteria to establish how evaluation should be.

• **DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY OF TESTS**

Participants affirm that neither English tests nor tests of other subjects are difficult. This answer may be linked to reasons other than merely didactic ones. For example, (a) lack of time within the curriculum to teach the English language; (b) lack of class-time because in several occasions both students and teachers are expected to take part in activities not always relevant to the subject

TABLE 2. Distribution of student dropout rate in the cohorts examined for years and distribution of graduates by gender

| Universidad Libre Facultad Ciencias de la Educación Dpto. Humanidades e Idiomas Licenciatura en Educación Básica con énfasis en Humanidades e Idiomas | | Proyecto de Investigación: Implementación de un sistema de evaluación permanente para mejorar el nivel enseñanza-aprendizaje del inglés y reducir la deserción estudiantil Investigadora principal: Gladys Forero Bohórquez Sub-proyecto: Incidencia de los tests para evaluar el inglés en la decisión de los estudiantes para desertar de la Licenciatura en Educación Básica con énfasis en Humanidades e Idiomas de la Facultad de Educación de la Universidad Libre en Bogotá Bogotá, Octubre 2010 | | | | | |
|---|--------------------|--|------------|------------------------------------|------------|---------|------------|
| Distribución de la tasa de deserción estudiantil en las cohortes examinadas por años, y distribución de los estudiantes graduados por sexo | | | | | | | |
| Cohorte | No. de estudiantes | Sin datos de graduación | | Distribución de graduados por sexo | | | |
| | | No. | Porcentaje | Hombres | Porcentaje | Mujeres | Porcentaje |
| Cohorte2000-2 | 56 | 44 | 78,5 % | 2 | 3,6 % | 10 | 18,0 % |
| Año 2001 | 151 | 93 | 61,3 % | 13 | 8,6 % | 45 | 29,8 % |
| Año 2002 | 216 | 150 | 69,7 % | 13 | 6,0 % | 53 | 24,5 % |
| Año 2003 | 196 | 140 | 71,8 % | 13 | 6,6 % | 43 | 21,9 % |
| Año 2004 | 181 | 130 | 73,4 % | 16 | 31,3 % | 35 | 68,7 % |

TABLE 3. Distribution of the range of responses to the survey by semester and stripes

| Categoría | | Franja Mañana 1er. Sem Encuest: 20 | | | | | Franja Noche 1er. Sem Encuest: 13 | | | | | Franja Mañana 2o. Sem Encuest: 22 | | | | | Franja Noche 2o. Sem Encuest: 25 | | | | | Franja Mañana 3er. Sem Encuest: 19 | | | | | Franja Noche 3er. Sem Encuest: 20 | | | | | Franja Mañana 4o. Sem. Encuest: 20 | | | | | Franja Noche 4o. Sem Encuest: 20 | | | | | |
|-----------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|----|---|---|----|-----------------------------------|--------------|---|---|----|-----------------------------------|---|--------------|----|---|----------------------------------|----|----|--------------|---|------------------------------------|----|---|---|--------------|-----------------------------------|----|---|----|---|------------------------------------|----|----|----|---|----------------------------------|--------------|---|----|---|---|
| | | Calificación | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Calificación | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Calificación | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Calificación | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Calificación | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Calificación | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Calificación | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 1 | Aptitud | 14 | 17 | | | | 6 | 9 | | | | 10 | 8 | 9 | 22 | | | | 14 | | | | 14 | | | | 4 | 8 | 5 | 18 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | Motivación | 10 | 9 | | | | 7 | 9 | | | 24 | | | 21 | | | | 11 | 7 | | | | 11 | 7 | | | 8 | 18 | | | | | | | 26 | | | | | | | |
| 3 | Dificultad Pr | 22 | | | | | 2 | 9 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 15 | 6 | | | 19 | | | | | 19 | | | | 16 | 6 | | | | | | 10 | 9 | | 19 | | | | | |
| 3 | Prioridad en la clase a: | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4 | Gramática | 4 | 6 | 4 | 6 | | 4 | 5 | | | 13 | | | 7 | 10 | | | 9 | | | | | 9 | | | 10 | | | | | | | 10 | | | | | 8 | 9 | | | |
| 4 | Prod. Oral | 12 | | | | | 9 | | | | 8 | 8 | | 9 | 6 | | | 7 | | | | | 7 | | | 12 | | | | | | | 8 | 7 | | | | 8 | 6 | | | |
| 5 | Prod escrita | 8 | | | | | 4 | | | | 7 | 6 | 6 | 8 | | | | 6 | | | | | 6 | | | 7 | | | | | | 4 | 5 | 6 | 5 | | | 12 | | | | |
| 6 | La escucha | | | | | 11 | 7 | | | | 6 | 8 | | 6 | 7 | 6 | | 7 | | | | | 7 | | | 11 | | | | | 5 | 4 | 7 | 5 | | | 9 | | | | | |
| 7 | Todas destr. | | | | | | 11 | | | | 11 | | | 11 | | | | 7 | | | | | 7 | | | 12 | | | | | | | 9 | | | | | 11 | | | | |
| 8 | Prioridad en las pruebas a: | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 8 | Gramática | 6 | 6 | 5 | | | 5 | 5 | | | 12 | | | 7 | 7 | | | 7 | 9 | | | | 7 | 9 | | | 9 | | | | | | | 8 | | | | | 8 | 7 | | |
| 9 | Prod. oral | 10 | | | | | 5 | | | | 6 | 8 | | 11 | | | | 7 | 6 | | | | 7 | 6 | | | 8 | | | | | | | 5 | 5 | 4 | 7 | | | 7 | 6 | |
| 10 | Prod. escr. | | | | | | | | 6 | | 9 | 9 | | 10 | | | | 5 | 5 | | | | 5 | 5 | | | 8 | | | | | | | 8 | | | | | | 10 | | |
| 11 | Escucha | | | | | | 8 | | | | 7 | 12 | | 8 | 8 | 6 | | 9 | | | | | 9 | | | 11 | | | | | | | | | 8 | 8 | | | | 6 | 8 | |
| 12 | Todas destr. | | | | | | 6 | 5 | | | 7 | 8 | 7 | 11 | | | | 7 | 6 | | | | 7 | 6 | | | 9 | 7 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 13 | Le va bien | 12 | | | | | 8 | | | | 8 | | | 9 | 9 | | | 8 | | | | | 8 | | | 9 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 14 | Integración | 8 | | | | | 7 | | | | 7 | | | 7 | 9 | | | 5 | 5 | | | | 5 | 5 | | | 6 | | | | | | | 7 | | | | | | 4 | 6 | 6 |

matter; (c) They could also conform to the high performance appraisal ratings that students give their teachers at the end of each semester. – Though not always bearing the necessary criteria– low student' marks may cause teacher dismissal; (d) the academic level that students have when they arrive, and (e) their intrinsic degree of motivation to study.

- **DEGREE OF IMPORTANCE GIVEN TO EACH SKILL IN CLASS, AS PERCEIVED BY THE SURVEYED STUDENTS.**

Participants say that Grammar is given the most class time and therefore assumed to be most important, while both Oral and Written production are given just an average importance, and Listening is neglected. Though this major emphasis on Grammar undoubtedly questions our degree of expertise in the target language, it also casts doubt on the teaching approach used to design the classes which should, supposedly, promote the use of critical and analytical skills through the solution of life-like problems critically analyzed which is the preferred methodology at La Universidad Libre. It may also have to do with the lack of class time to provide for varied language deficiencies that most students bring, among other reasons.

On the contrary, when *this degree of importance to each one of the different skills turns to tests*, the ranking given to each one of the different skills improves, (average to good, good, average to excellent, but emphasis on Oral production continues to be "average".

- **DEGREE OF IMPORTANCE GIVEN IN CLASSES VS DEGREE OF IMPORTANCE GIVEN IN TESTS TO EACH ONE OF THE SKILLS**

When asked to grade the degree of importance given to each one of the skills to be learned, in classes, participants report that Grammar is given the most, while both the oral and written production are given just a mere average importance, and that Listening is neglected.

- **DEGREE OF IMPORTANCE GIVEN, IN GENERAL TO ALL SKILLS IN CLASS**

Eventually, when asked about the degree of importance given, in general to all skills in class, they

grade the question "average", and when asked this same question about tests, they grade it "good". This different skill emphasis in tests may have to do with the format that we are given now in which we are required to design a classroom test for each one of the skills.

- **"I WOULD LIKE THIS STUDY PROGRAMME BETTER IF TEACHING WAS..."**

However, in an open-ended question where participants are asked "*I would like this Study Programme better if teaching was...*" (for them to complete it), the bulk of completions by students in the morning schedule coincide in '*...more dynamic*', followed by '*...more didactic*'. In the night schedule, the majority of the answers agree on '*...more didactic*', followed by "*...if it included more oral activities like speeches and expositions*", followed by '*...more dynamic*', '*...in depth*', and '*...specific*'.

When asked whether they think they are taught one way and evaluated another, participants say '*no*'. Answers are the same, when asked whether the tests used to evaluate the English language include topics not studied in class.

- **ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

When asked how well they are doing in their studies participants say "*Good*", in agreement with the Category "Degree of difficulty given to the different tests" which they graded "average" to "easy".

- **ACADEMIC SUCCESS VS ATTITUDES TOWARDS EVENTUAL FAILURE IN TESTS**

As asserted above, most of the participants affirm they are doing well academically, and when asked "what they think when they don't do well either in classes and/or on tests, the greatest number of answers agree that *they have to study more*.

- **APTITUDE VS MAJOR SELECTION**

Participants affirm that their aptitude to learning foreign languages is average, but when asked whether they think they chose their major well, they uphold they did.

- **APTITUDE VS ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

As has just been said, they affirm their aptitude is average, but when asked whether they consider they are doing well in the university, they say they are.

- **MOTIVATION VS MAJOR SELECTION**

Neither classes, nor tests are alleged by participants to motivate them (rated *average*), but most of them asseverate that they chose the right major, inviting us to look into the reasons why classes are not inspiring, and even more so, why our tests are not stimulating them to learn. Reasons could have to do with the lack of rigor to select the candidates as mentioned earlier, but also to the way our classes are given and the kind of tests we are designing, or both.

- **ECONOMIC CONDITION**

Most students surveyed in the morning schedule do not work, while most students in the night Schedule, do, but when asked whether they know how they will pay for the tuition fees, the great majority, of them say they do, regardless of the study schedule to which they pertain.

- **DEGREE OF INTEGRATION TO THE STUDENT GROUP**

Sometimes, the students do not like the group to which they were assigned.

8. CONCLUSION

The high rate of drop-outs found in the Licenciatura viewed, poses many questions that systematic research can resolve. For example, those akin to the different reasons why students abandon the Programme; where they are now; and at what moment of their career the highest figure rate of drop-outs occurs.

Concerning the results of the exploratory survey given to first through fourth semester students of the Licenciatura Programme in the morning and night schedules, apparently, abandonment by these students is not linked either to career choice or economic reasons. Instead, the teaching-learning process of the English language -one of the most important subjects in the Programme-, might become one of the chief causes for students to drop out. Care should also be given to activities that promote student integration in the groups to which they are assigned.

Using English progress tests as a source to find reasons for the students to drop out of the Licenciatura Programme is relevant because test analysis obliges a reconsideration of the teaching method, as said in the literature revision offered. It also urges for an adjustment to be made by the Administration of the Licenciatura Programme regarding the teaching time, devoted to the English language. Additionally, it offers some of the tools for student retention.

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