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ORIGINAL

English language skills and their influence on the academic performance of high school students in the public schools of Cereté – Córdoba

Las habilidades lingüísticas en inglés y su influencia en el rendimiento académico de los estudiantes de la media académica de los colegios públicos de Cereté – Córdoba

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ABSTRACT

This paper highlights the crucial role of English in today's global communication and the need to integrate information and communication technologies (ICT) in language teaching. The research was carried out in Cereté, Córdoba, with a population of 560 students and a sample of 229 tenth and eleventh grade students from official schools. The survey technique was used to evaluate language skills and a checklist was used to measure academic performance. The objective was to analyze how the development of linguistic skills in English impacts academic performance and to propose improvements in the teaching-learning processes. The hypothesis stated was that there is a significant relationship between the development of English language skills and the academic performance of academic average students. The results of internal and external tests were examined, as well as the educational context in Latin America, highlighting the importance of modernizing curricula and adopting new methodologies. After applying the data collection instruments and analyzing the results, the hypothesis was corroborated, finding a significant positive correlation between all the linguistic skills evaluated. The paper discusses the contextualization of the problem, theoretical and methodological bases, data analysis and conclusions. It is hoped that this research will contribute to the improvement of educational processes in secondary schools in Colombia.

Keywords: Academic Performance; Language Skills; Didactic Strategy; Teaching; Learning.

RESUMEN

En este artículo se destaca el papel crucial del inglés en la comunicación global actual y la necesidad de integrar tecnologías de la información y la comunicación (TIC) en la enseñanza de idiomas. La investigación se llevó a cabo en Cereté, Córdoba, con una población de 560 estudiantes y una muestra de 229 alumnos de décimo y undécimo grado de colegios oficiales. Se utilizó la técnica de encuesta para evaluar las habilidades lingüísticas y una lista de verificación para medir el rendimiento académico. El objetivo fue analizar cómo el desarrollo de habilidades lingüísticas en inglés impacta el rendimiento académico y proponer mejoras en los procesos de enseñanza-aprendizaje. La hipótesis planteada fue que existe una relación significativa entre el desarrollo de habilidades lingüísticas en inglés y el rendimiento académico de los estudiantes de la media académica. Se examinaron los resultados de pruebas internas y externas, así como el contexto educativo en Latinoamérica, destacando la importancia de modernizar los currículos y adoptar nuevas metodologías. Luego de aplicar los instrumentos de recolección de datos y analizar los resultados, se corroboró la hipótesis, encontrando una correlación positiva significativa entre todas las habilidades lingüísticas evaluadas. El artículo aborda la contextualización del problema, las bases teóricas y metodológicas, el análisis de datos y las conclusiones. Se espera que esta investigación contribuya a mejorar los procesos educativos en las instituciones de educación secundaria en Colombia.

Palabras clave: Rendimiento Académico; Habilidades Lingüísticas; Estrategia Didáctica; Enseñanza; Aprendizaje.

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INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, education is considered an indispensable factor in the growth of a country; through education, the formation of intellectual people is sought since knowledge opens the door to the development of a society. For this reason, countries must provide their citizens with access to quality education, guaranteeing that students have the opportunity to acquire at least one foreign language and the use of emerging technology for teaching and learning processes, which guarantees a better adaptation to the modernization processes that are currently being generated globally.

English plays a fundamental role in communication in the current century since it is recognized as one of the most widely used foreign languages globally. Therefore, we all must acquire English language skills to make international connections and interact with individuals from various nations around the world, not just those whose native language is English.

Likewise, information and communication technologies (ICT) are generating significant transformations in our society, even defining the characteristic features of this era compared to previous periods. Today, our society is known as an information and knowledge society. For this reason, it is necessary to develop an educational approach that promotes the growth of English language skills and contributes to raising students' academic performance.

Consequently, creating an educational strategy that integrates two fundamental components, information and communication technologies (ICT) and foreign language learning, is essential. This strategy will focus on strengthening English language skills and improving students' academic performance.

Accordingly, the present research, "English language skills and their influence on the academic performance of high school students in the public schools of Cereté - Córdoba", has required exhaustive and committed research, which includes reading analysis, observation and considerable effort to provide a perspective that contributes to the improvement of education and the reduction of the educational disparity faced by the official institutions.

This is a study which was carried out in the main headquarters of the educational institutions Santa Teresa and 24 de Mayo of the municipality of Cereté; this arises due to the different problems related to teaching and learning that have been evidenced in the different internal and external tests, which have been accentuated even more with the pandemic, This study, through rigorous and committed research, using observation processes and coherent analysis, allowed to establish and raise the problem, as well as to find alternative solutions for it, reinforcing theoretical foundations.

Taking into account that the teaching-learning processes in Latin America and the Caribbean represent a great challenge, as can be evidenced in the results of the Program for International Student Assessment - PISA, carried out in 2018, said test shows that the average of the global results by area of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development - OECD, regarding the results of the participating Latin American countries, place Chile in first place with a total of 444 points, followed by Uruguay, Mexico, Costa Rica and finally Colombia. This leaves uncovered a problem in the educational processes in these countries (OECD, 2018).

Considering that educational institutions must show excellent results, in Latin America, the effort is greater; therefore, curricula must be modernized, and new methodologies must be adapted and projected to improve the results of internal and external tests, which measure the educational learning of students, without forgetting the emotional component, the latter being fundamental in the development of a productive, thinking and human society.

Este estudio tiene como objetivo, analizar la influencia del desarrollo de las habilidades lingüísticas en inglés en la mejora del desempeño académico de los estudiantes en la media académica de los colegios públicos del municipio de Cereté – Córdoba, de igual forma, pretende impactar los currículos de estas instituciones, mejorando los procesosde enseñanza- aprendizaje del idioma inglés, así mismo influenciar en las demás áreas del conocimiento evaluada por el Instituto Colombiano para la Evaluación de la Educación. (ICFES), lo cual, posee gran relevancia debido a que, este componente es donde los estudiantes de colegios oficiales presentan más dificultades de aprendizaje.

This research will impact the improvement of the teaching-learning processes in the educational institutions of academic middle schools in Colombia.

Problem: taking into account that the problems of English language teaching and learning have been very marked throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, which can be seen in the results of the EF ranking (2021), where it can be noted that countries such as Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela are at a low level concerning English language proficiency.

Paradigm

When starting a research or an investigative process, it is necessary to know and identify with a paradigm, which is of great importance at the moment of continuing with the research; as stated by Guba and Lincoln (1994), "one cannot enter the field of research without having a clear perception and knowledge of what paradigm directs the researcher's approach to the study phenomenon" (p.10).

This research is related to the Positivist paradigm because it strengthens the research, it is measurable, both the researcher and the investigated phenomenon, in which the main objective is to prove a hypothesis; it can be done using statistical tools or by the limitation of parameters of certain variables, where it is necessary to make use of numerical data or statistical methods. Likewise, it emphasizes observation and description to guarantee the explanation and analysis of the investigated facts.

In this order of ideas, it is necessary to make a measurable characterization of the current academic situation of high school students in the municipality of Cereté to achieve the proposed objectives.

Therefore, the research is framed in a quantitative approach, intended to prove or discard the hypotheses. Likewise, it is intended to describe and explain the research topics, which goes in search of the creation of knowledge promoting the comparison between similar studies and generating, from there, a curricular proposal.

On the other hand, it is found that this study is descriptive - correlational and explanatory, considering that it addresses the characteristics and crucial aspects related to the object under investigation; likewise, a series of issues, concepts and variables are selected, and each one of them is measured independently of the others, with the purpose, precisely, of describing them for their subsequent analysis and understanding.

In turn, this research seeks to specify the important properties of persons, groups, and communities about the phenomenon that motivates the articulated deployment of the strategies to be developed with the students of the educational institutions of the official order of the municipality, making them an essential part of the process of resolution of the problematic situations described.

METHOD

For Cesteros and Vásquez (2005), the method refers to the procedures that can be followed to demonstrate the hypothesis, fulfil the objectives or give a concrete answer to the identified problem. It starts from the concrete to the specific, and it is necessary to understand in depth from where it starts, referring to the knowledge and up to where it is intended to be achieved. Likewise, he emphasizes that the type of problem posed must be considered to determine the method that should support the research.

Accordingly, this research follows the hypothetical-deductive method since, according to Bernal (2010), this "consists of a procedure that starts from assertions as hypotheses and seeks to refute or falsify such hypotheses, deducing from them, conclusions that must be confronted with the facts" (p.60). This method is used to find feasible solutions that make it possible to solve or improve the research problem. In this sense, the deduction will be used to construct premises derived from the research hypothesis, allowing us to validate or reject them.

Figure 1. Steps of the hypothetical-deductive method

Sociodemographic Data

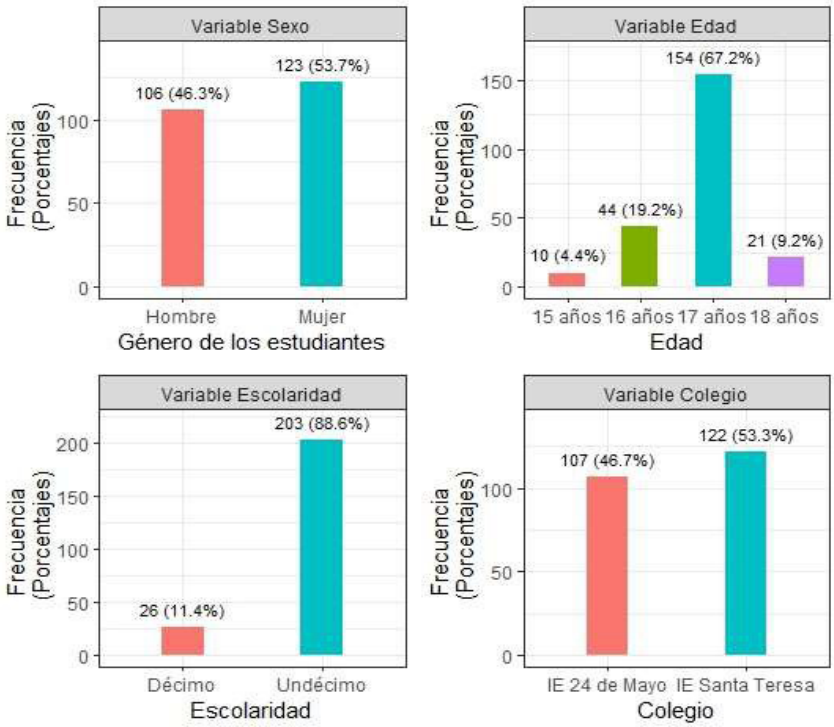

Figure 2. Student socio-demographic information

Figure 2 presents the socio-demographic information of the students participating in this study. This graphical representation provides a comprehensive view of the sample's composition, including gender, age and educational level. The analysis of these data is important to contextualize and enrich the understanding of the results obtained in the research.

Regarding the level of linguistic skills of the students who participated in the study, the data are detailed statistically in the following figures, which show the distribution and trends obtained during the research process. Through this graphical representation, we seek to offer a clear and concise view of the patterns and relationships present in the data, which facilitates their interpretation and analysis.

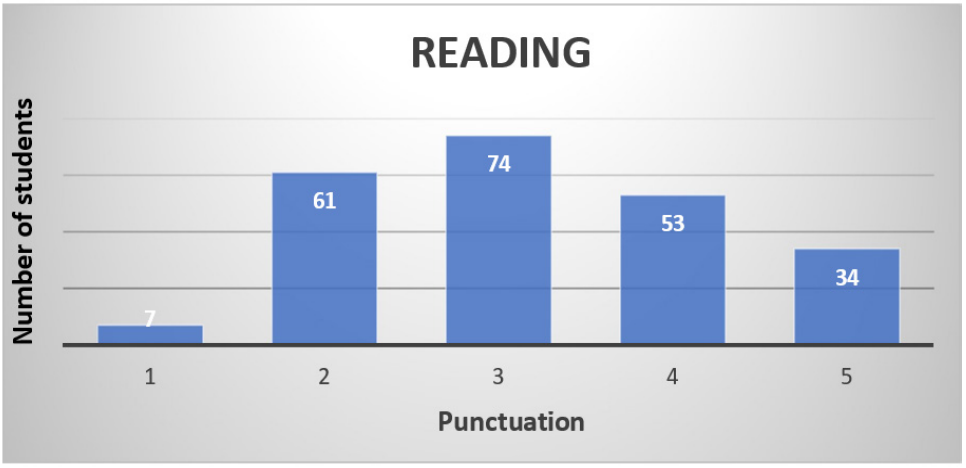

Figure 3. Reading Skills

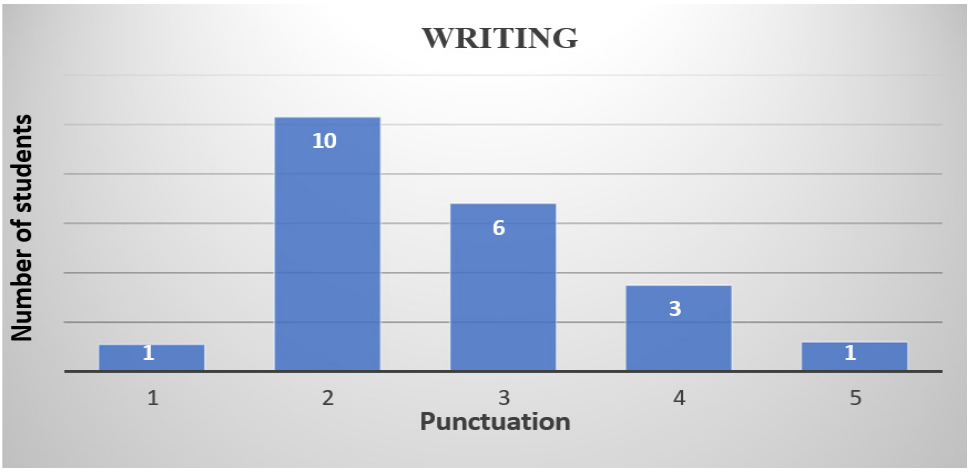

Figure 4. Writing Skill

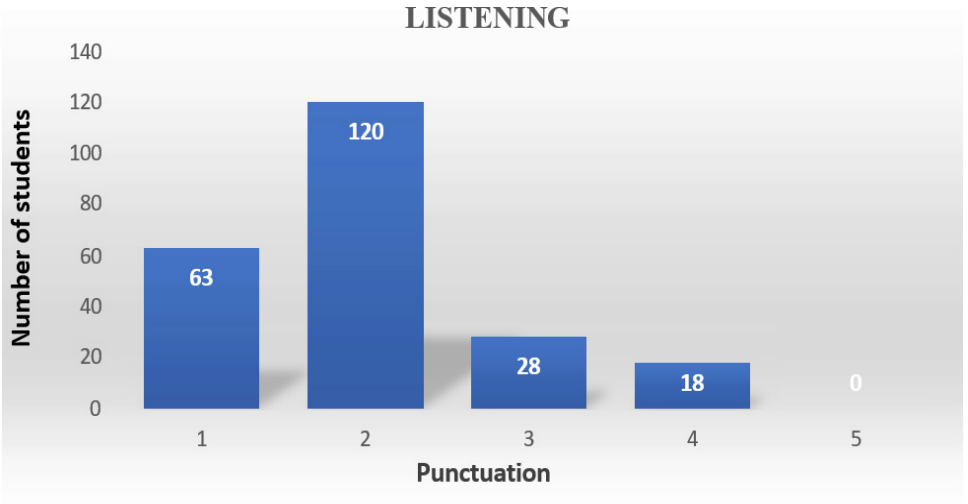

Figure 5. Listening Skills

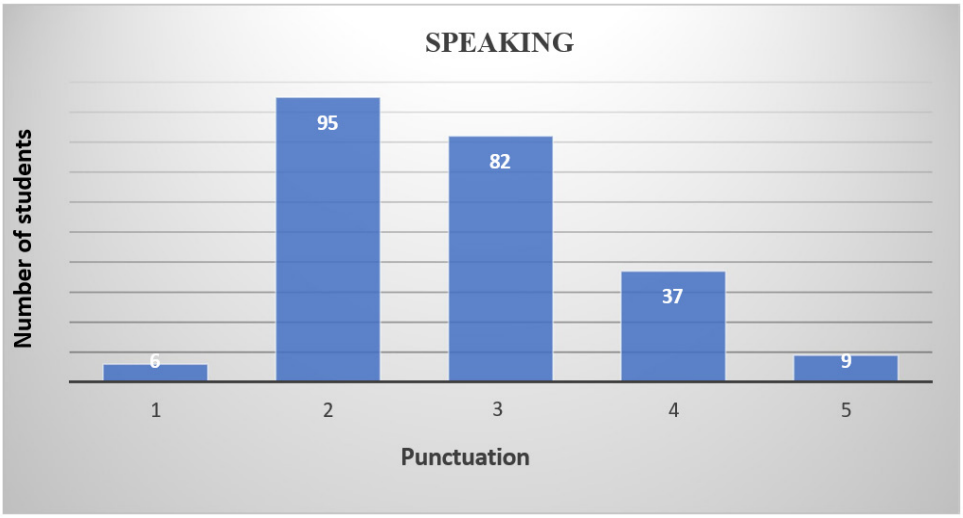

Figure 6. Speaking Ability

Associations Between English Level and Language Skills

Analyses of bivariate distributions between English proficiency and language skills scores were conducted to investigate how students were distributed according to their English proficiency in each skill. In addition, a chi-square test of independence was performed to determine whether there was any association between students' English proficiency and their language skills. In this context, the hypotheses to be tested were as follows: H0: There is no dependence between students' English level and their language skills H1: There is dependence between students' English level and their language skills. There is a significant association between students' level of English and their language skills. This is evident in each case since p-values that are not significant were obtained, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H0) in all cases.

The analyses suggest a significant association between students' English proficiency and language skills. Here is a summary of the findings and how they are interpreted:

Reading: It is observed that there is a relationship between English level and reading performance. For example, students with higher levels of English tend to score higher in reading (A2 and B1 scores of 4 and 5), while students with lower levels of English score lower (A- and A1 scores of 2 and 3).

Listening: Similarly, an association is observed between English level and listening comprehension.

Students with higher levels tend to obtain higher scores (A2 and B1 scores of 4 and 5), while lower levels tend to obtain lower scores (A- and A1 tend to obtain scores of 1, 2 and 3).

Speaking: Again, an association between English level and performance is noted for speaking English. Students with higher levels tend to score higher (A2 and B1 score 4 and 5), while lower levels score lower (A- and A1 score 2 and 3).

Writing: In writing, the pattern observed in the other skills is repeated. Students with higher levels tend to score higher, while those with lower levels tend to score lower.

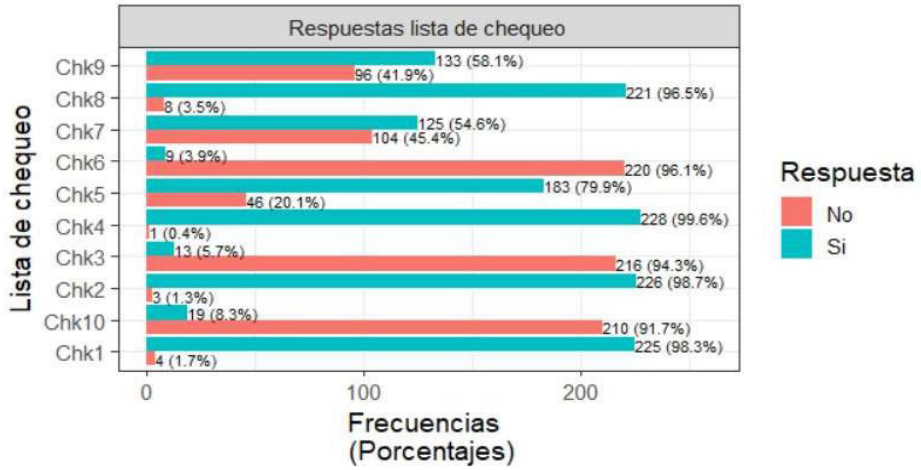

Figure 7. Responses check list

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After the data collection instruments have been applied and their analysis completed, the results are contrasted with different aspects of the study's theoretical foundation. During this procedure, the findings obtained throughout the research and whether they

are coherent or aligned with each other are identified and described.

The great majority of the respondents consider that learning the areas evaluated by the ICFES is difficult. This indicates that teaching methods and curricula need to be revised and improved to address the needs of students in these areas.

Likewise, they perceive that the educational level of their parents influences their academic performance. This highlights the importance of family support and suggests that additional interventions may be needed to support those whose parents have a lower level of education educational level. Corroborating what was established by Fajardo et al. 2017 "Students whose parents or legal guardians present a level of education higher than secondary school will obtain higher scores in their academic performance level than those students with parents with lower educational levels." (p.217). Similarly, (Piñero and Rodríguez 1998 as cited in Edel, 2003), postulate that: "the wealth of the student's context (measured as socioeconomic level) has positive effects on the student's academic performance. This result confirms that the sociocultural wealth of the context (correlated with socioeconomic level, but not limited to it) positively impacts students' school performance. This underlines the importance of the shared responsibility between the family, the community and the school in the educational process".

Likewise, many students feel that teachers need to use appropriate teaching strategies to facilitate learning in the areas evaluated by the ICFES. This indicates the need to implement more varied and effective teaching strategies to improve the learning process and thus promote equity in the educational system, as stated by Serrano and Perdomo (2021): «The inclusion of the possibilities offered by ICT in the formation of language skills is insufficient» likewise the authors highlight that there are « Insufficiencies in the development of oral expression and listening skills, which restricts the possibilities of learning English.»

In this order of ideas, it is necessary to complement with what Valenzuela et al. (2016) assert, referring to the fact that no matter how many tools or strategies are used, the teacher is the most influential factor within the teaching-learning processes, this contrasts with the growth mindset, which refers to the belief that skills, intelligence and personal qualities are not fixed, but can be developed and improved through effort, practice, continuous learning and the use of various strategies. Hattie (2020).

In addition, it was found that most students obtained average scores in all skills assessed, with some variations in the percentages depending on the specific skill. The skill they did best was Reading, where 14,9 % achieved the highest score; in contrast, the skill with the worst performance turned out to be Listening because 27,5 % of them obtained the lowest score, and none managed to obtain the highest score. Avalos and Corcoran (2017) state that the strategies and approaches used so far have focused on teaching grammar, oral expression and vocabulary, but they have done so in a fragmented way and disconnected from the natural environment in which students need to communicate, as can be seen in the results yielded by this subsection. Berrio (2019) "A student can have good listening comprehension but is not necessarily going to express himself correctly or vice versa." (p.19)

On the other hand, it was possible to establish a significant positive correlation between all the language skills evaluated (Reading et al.). This suggests that students who perform well in one skill tend to perform well in the others; good performance in language skills may be associated with better performance on the standardized English assessment.

Language skills are interrelated, and good performance in one skill may be associated with good performance in the others, as well as with the ICFES English test score.

The affirmative hypothesis Ha: There is a significant relationship between the development of linguistic skills in English and their influence on the academic performance of high school students in the public schools of Cereté, Córdoba.

Similarly, the vast majority of students show a moderate level of proficiency in all the language skills evaluated; only some stand out in specific areas. This indicates that these areas could benefit from strategies to improve learning and skill development in general. Likewise, the results indicate a correlation between the students' level of English and their performance in different skills, which could guide the design of teaching-learning methods adapted to the student's individual needs according to their English proficiency. There is also evidence of an interrelationship between these skills, suggesting that progress in one may positively impact others. This has significant implications for language teaching and learning, highlighting the importance of improving one skill to strengthen overall performance in the others. The above contrasts with the concept of Scaffolding, which emphasizes the importance of providing structured and personalized support to students learning English as a second language to provide a more effective way of learning English as a second language. English as a second language, with the ultimate goal of promoting their academic success and linguistic autonomy. (Gibbons, 2002)

However, the correlations between some skills are higher than between others. For example, the correlations between Speaking and other skills (Reading, Listening, Writing) are particularly high, suggesting a strong relationship between Speaking and other language skills. Also, a significant positive correlation is observed between language skills and the ICFES English exam score. This implies that good performance in language skills may be associated with better performance on the standardized English assessment. Since the language skills are interrelated, and a good performance in one skill may be associated with a good performance in the others, as well as with the ICFES English test score, there is a clear association between the level of language skills and the ICFES English test score. There is a clear association between the level of English proficiency and performance in the language skills of reading, listening, speaking, and writing.

In contrast, it was possible to establish that language skills, although correlated with performance in English and ICFES test results, are not related to academic performance in the other areas evaluated by the said entity, except for an association found between these results and performance in mathematics; however, more rigorous research is needed to obtain information to support an argument in this sense.

FINANCING

None.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTION

Conceptualization: Amparo Maria Estrada Martinez, Claudia Durango Warnes.
Writing - initial draft: Amparo Maria Estrada Martinez, Claudia Durango Warnes.
Drafting, revising and editing: Amparo Maria Estrada Martinez, Claudia Durango Warnes.

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