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Adaptive Assessment of English Language in the Uruguayan Educational System, 2014

Executive Summary

Departamento de Segundas Lenguas y Lenguas Extranjeras del CEIP

Programa Ceibal en Inglés – Plan Ceibal

División de Investigación, Evaluación y Estadística de ANEP

Departamento de Monitoreo y Evaluación – Plan Ceibal

Consultant: Mario Luzardo

Introduction

The first adaptive assessment in the Uruguayan System was held between November 17th and December 6th, 2014. Students of English of 4th, 5th and 6th grades of Public Schools of Uruguay who study English in the Program of the Department of Second Languages and Foreign Languages of CEIP and the Program Ceibal in English through video conference, took an adaptive assessment on activities of vocabulary, grammar and reading in English and an assessment of writing in English.

The assessment was carried out by the Department of Second Languages and Foreign Languages of CEIP (DSL and FL) and the Program Ceibal in English of Plan Ceibal (CI), the Investment, Assessment and Statistics Departments of CODICEN, the Monitoring and Assessment Department of Plan Ceibal, the British Council and the specialist in psychometry Mario Luzardo.

This type of assessments uses activities taken from a bank of measured items to estimate the student's level of performance. The activities answered by each child are adjusted by considering their answers; so, every child will face a group of activities which will depend on the performance level of the student. The development of the adaptive assessment was made in the SEA (System of Online Assessment) platform, the tests were taken in PCs and the teacher got the results immediately.

Aims of the Assessment

The three aims of the assessment were:

- To assess the knowledge of English Language in students of 4th, 5th and 6th grades in the two teaching methods the current System of Primary Education offers.
- To build a permanent assessment plan which enables us to follow the annual progress of English Language Learning in the last years of Elementary School.
- To build an information system for the continuity of the linguistic policies between Primary School and Secondary School (In Secondary Education English Language is a compulsory subject, so it is crucial for the Educational System to know the English Level primary school students have when leaving).

Scope of the Teaching and Assessment of English Language

The universe of analysis included students of 4th, 5th and 6th grades of Primary School who took part in any of the Programs of Teaching English Language in 2014.

Program	Scope of the Programs		Participants of the Assessment		Average of Answers
	Schools	Groups	Groups	Students	Groups
Ceibal English	383	2,128	1,502	30,196	71%
Second Languages	269	1,181	932	18,497	79%
Total	652	3,309	2,434	48,693	74%

2,434 students of 3,309 constituted the total potential universe, which builds a response average of 74% in groups, distributed among all social contexts and school grades. 48,693 students were assessed, 62% of which was part of the Ceibal in English and 30% of which belonged to the program of Second Languages. It is worth mentioning that the English Program of the Department of Second Languages focuses on Full Time Schools or Extended Time Schools, while Ceibal English is implemented in all the schools accepting the program and with no educational extensions.

Design of the Assessment

To develop the assessment we used a bank of 195 items which were adjusted through TRI¹ with the logistic model of two parameters. The measurement of knowledge of English was performed through the assessment of the comprehension and writing production skills. The writing skills were assessed in three dimensions: grammar, vocabulary and reading. Each student had to answer from 25 to 30 multiple choice questions and an open question in order to assess his/her writing skills. Lastly, the information on whether the student was also taking private lesson of English was revealed. Such question was answered by 35,452 students (73%) and 8,443 of the answers were positive (24%).

In the adaptive test students were able to obtain between 0 and 1500 points. This scoring system was classified in 5 categories connected to the performance standards of the European Reference Guide of Teaching and Learning of Languages. Scoring 0 to 288 corresponded to level A0, from 289 to 456 corresponded to level A1, and so on until reaching the top level (A2+) which corresponds to a score between 924 and 1500 points.

Chart 1. Performance Levels of the Test

Level	Score	Category
A0	0-288	IN PROGRESS
A1-	289-456	BEGINNER LOW
A1+	457-536	BEGINNER HIGH
A2-	537-923	ELEMENTARY LOW
A2+	924-1500	ELEMENTARY HIGH

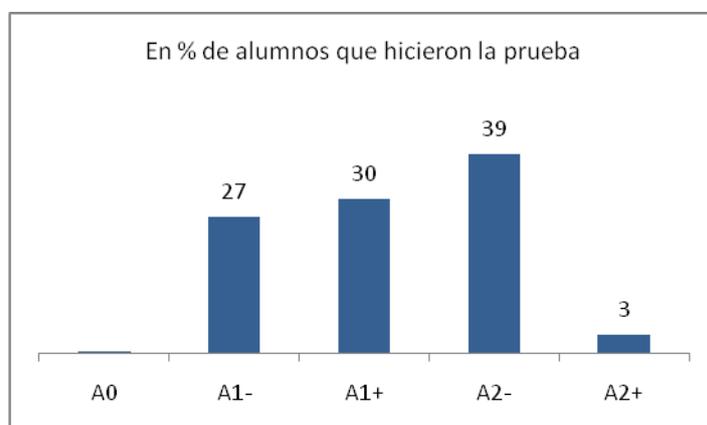
Results

Global Results

There follow the results obtained by all the assessed students.

As shown in chart 1, 57% of the students who sat for the test reached an A1 level, while 42% reached the A2 level.

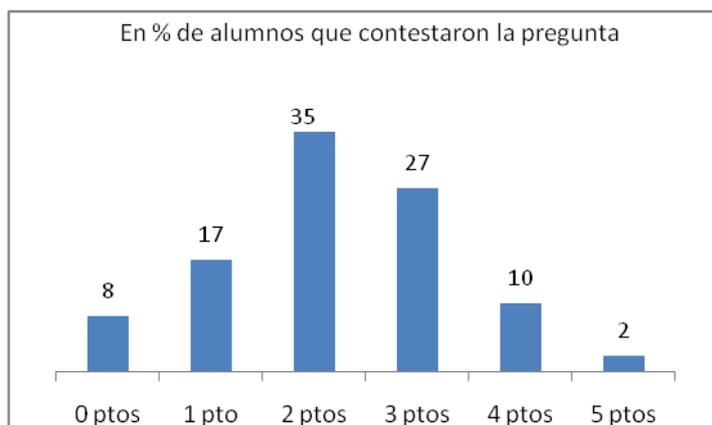
Chart 1. Global Results of the Adaptive Tests



In the question of writing production, there was a correction guideline implemented by the developers of the test with a score going from 0 to 5 points. A random sample of 2,419 answers was used for the correction of such production.

The results of such sample are shown in chart 2.

Chart 2. Global Results of the Written Production



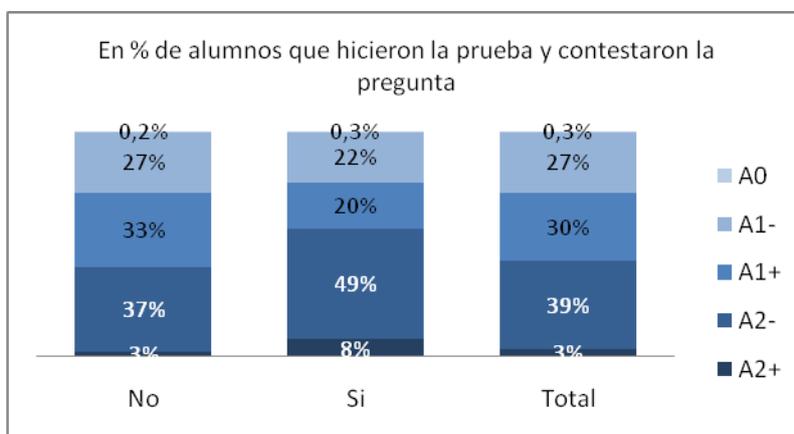
In writing skills, 39% of the students who answered the open question got a score of 3 or more points, which means the student is able to write sentences in English without turning into Spanish, even though there may be some spelling, syntax or vocabulary mistakes¹.

Results according to English Lessons taken outside the School, school grade, gender and socio-cultural context

There follows the analysis of the results considering the following aspects: if whether the student takes private lessons outside the school, according to the school grade, gender and socio-cultural context of the school.

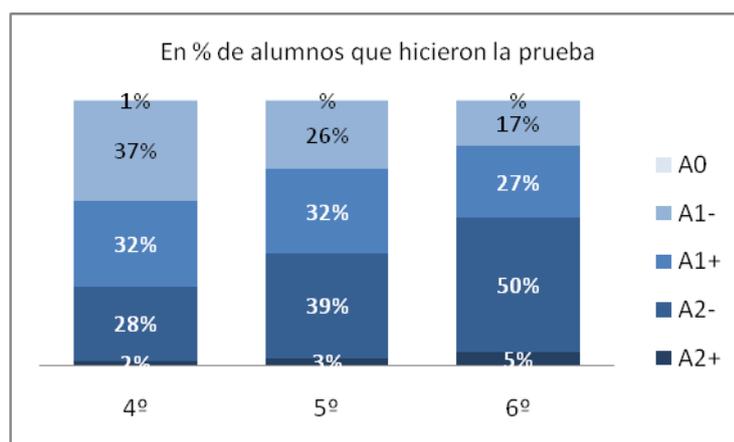
Students who take private lessons outside the school obtained greater results than those who only study the language through the teaching programs of English of Primary School, which evidences, among other aspects, the consistency of the design of the test. 57% of the students who take private lessons got an A2 level, in comparison to the 40% of the ones who only take lesson inside the school.

Chart 3. Results of the Test by considering English Lessons outside the School



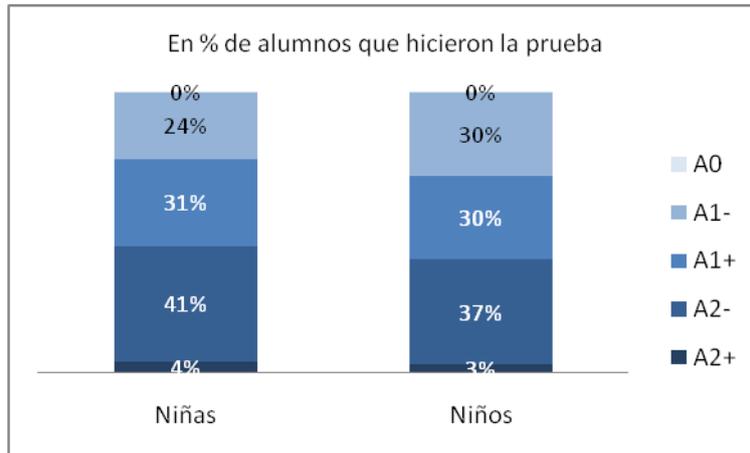
After analyzing the **results by school grade**, it was observed that the performance is better in upper grades even though school grades are not always connected to a higher exposure to the English Teaching Programs (a group of 6th grade may be participating for the first time in any of the programs, the same could happen to a 4th grade student). So, we may conclude that the maturity of the child, the exposure to more tests, among other things, are the main influencing factors.

Chart 4. Results of the test according to school grade



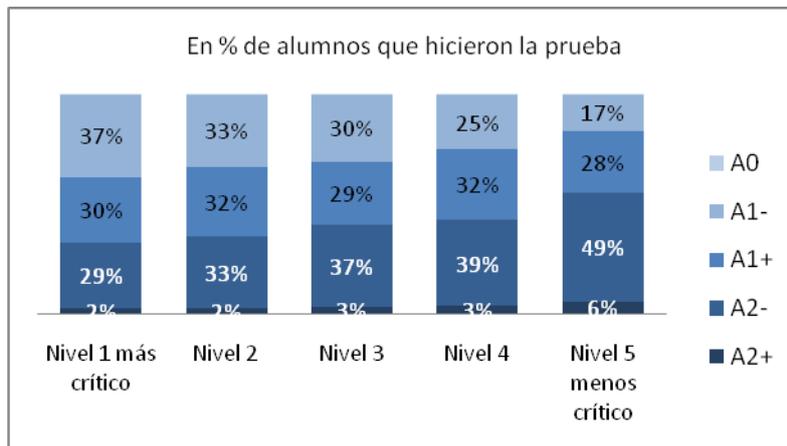
Regarding gender, results show that girls achieved a higher performance if compared to boys.

Chart 5. Results of the test according to gender



The results by **socio-cultural context** of the school are consistent with what happens in other subjects, where students of more favorable social context obtain better results than those belonging to lower socio-cultural contexts, even though the results obtained from English Language learning are less pronounced than those observed in the assessments of Reading or Mathematics. This information could suggest a lower determination of the socio-cultural context in the performance of the students, which is crucial to achieve social justice.

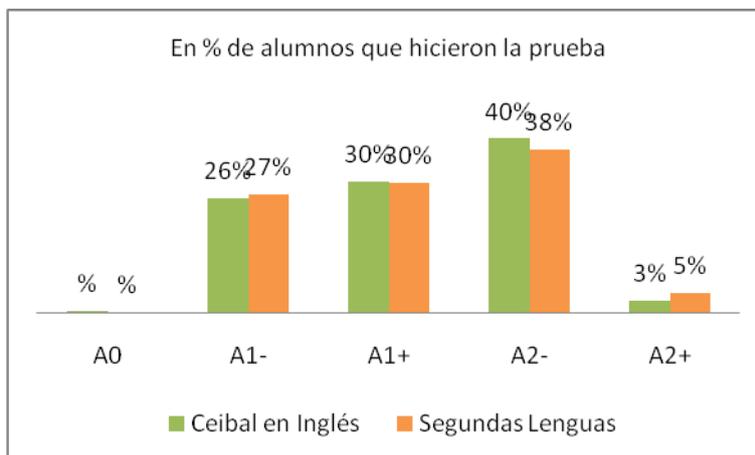
Chart 6. Results of the text according to socio-cultural context 2010



Results by Program

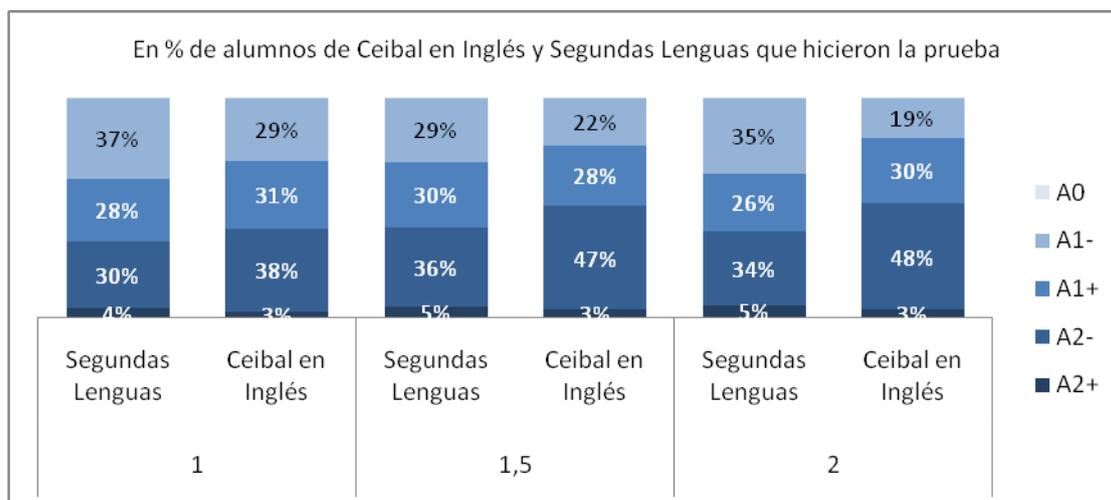
The results obtained by the students of both programs were similar. 56% of students of Ceibal in English obtained an A1 level if compared to the 57% of the DSLandFL and the same percentage (43%) obtained an A2 level in both programs.

Chart 7. Results of the test according to program



If results are analyzed by considering the time of exposure to English language, it is observed that the levels obtained by both programs are similar. In order to obtain this analysis, it is essential to cut the years of English Teaching from one to two years, because while in the DSLandFL students may receive up to 7 years of English exposure, in Ceibal in English in 2014 the period of exposure was of 2 years top.

Chart 8. Results of the test according to time of exposure to the program





The slight differences found between the levels obtained may be due to the comparison of the total of the students of Ceibal in English with just 40% of the students of DLSandFL (aprox. 60% has more than two years exposure), apart from the fact that there are different groups of people.

Main Conclusions

The adaptive assessment performed by the end of 2014 expresses the learning experience of the English Language in Primary School. Three very important objectives were achieved¹:

The **first objective** is connected to the importance of having a unique and systemic assessment which does not assess the curricular content of the programs, but takes the European system as reference.

Second objective achieved: it was the first time an adaptive assessment was performed in Uruguay. Such assessment enabled us to assess a great number of children with different knowledge levels as they have very different educational backgrounds. The adaptive assessments differ from the traditional tests since the former enables us to apply an assessment format to heterogeneous populations. The performance and administration of a massive adaptive assessment meant an important technical progress in the Uruguayan system of educational assessment which intends to be consistent and express the annual progresses. The idea then is, by the end of every school year, to be able to generate relevant information for all the parties involved. Likewise, this program is essential to support the continuity of English Language in Secondary Schools.

The **third objective** achieved refers to the great results obtained in connection to English learning in children of both programs. Uruguayan children are leaving primary schools with a considerable level of English, which should be recognized by the global levels of English Teaching in secondary education. However, there is a heterogeneous nature regarding performances at the moment of ending primary school, and it is also worth mentioning that not all populations have been part of the process of learning English.