

# Proficiency level in English teachers of the Seventh-day Adventist elementary schools in the North Mexican Union Conference

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Today, using foreign languages effectively has become essential. English is, without a doubt, the most expanded language of communication with more than a billion speakers and has come to be considered the lingua franca that everyone must learn to have higher chances of professional success. There is plenty of evidence from teaching experience and the literature to suggest that English language proficiency is an essential aspect of EFL teaching and teacher expertise. This study aims to evaluate the English proficiency level in teachers of the Seventh-day Adventist elementary schools in the North Mexican Union Conference, applying the Michigan Test. The studied population were the elementary school teachers who teach English in the Adventist schools of the North Mexican Union Conference. The total of participants were 24 teachers. 54,2% of participants are women and 45,8% are men. Out of 24 participants just 3 teachers have a degree in English teaching, but almost all of them received a certification for teaching English; 2 participants are native English speakers. 33,3% of participants had studied in Adventist universities. The examination was used to collect data for this study. The examination was designed from the Michigan Practice Tests for the sections of grammar, vocabulary, reading and listening, and from TOEFL and a Ted Talk video for the speaking section. The findings obtained by the examination in the LimeSurvey that was applied to the 24 English teachers showed that they have strengths in the Listening and Speaking skills, but they have weaknesses in the Reading skills. In general, most of the teachers got a good level in the English proficiency that respond to the Teacher Profile requirements.

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## Introduction

For many years, official English teaching in Mexico has been limited to secondary and high school. However, recently, the federal government has initiated a curricular reform of primary education. This is mainly derived from the twelve recommendations that the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) made to the Mexican education system based on the results obtained in 2006 in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). Two of them refer to the need to establish achievement standards in areas considered vital, such as reading, arithmetic, and digital literacy, and to align their curriculum so that they are consistent in the progression from one level to another and design teaching materials that support them

(Hopkins et al. 45). Within that context, the various educational policy documents have considered the need to reform, reinforce, and articulate the teaching of a foreign language in all primary education. Today, using foreign languages effectively has become essential (Curtain 5). English is, without a doubt, the most expanded language of communication with more than a billion speakers (UNESCO 15) and has come to be considered the lingua franca that everyone must learn to have higher chances of professional success. Initially, it was young people and adults who learned English as a foreign language. There is plenty of evidence from teaching experience and the literature to suggest that English language proficiency is an essential aspect of EFL teaching and teacher expertise. In an EFL setting, where many of the instructors are non-native English

teachers, there is a growing difference between the teachers' current language proficiency level and the language proficiency level required in the system. Language proficiency may become an increasingly important element in professional development (Andrews 23; Kamhi-Stein 16). This study aims to evaluate the English proficiency level in teachers of the Seventh-day Adventist elementary schools in the North Mexican Union Conference, applying the Michigan Test. The main research question that is pertinent to this study is as follows: What is the proficiency level in English teachers of the Seventh-day Adventist elementary schools in the North Mexican Union Conference?

## **Background**

### **2.1 Importance of English**

Currently, the process of globalization has significantly affected different aspects of our life. In modern society, there is a need for one language of communication. Indeed, because of its spread, English became that language. The knowledge of English, along with that of the mother tongue, becomes the norm. That is why it is appropriate to speak of English as a global lingua franca. The term "lingua franca" is usually used to refer to the language used as a medium of interethnic communication. English as Lingua Franca (ELF) has become a medium of universal communication, not only for native English speakers and those who speak it as a second language, but also between those for whom English is not their native language.

### **2.2. Profiles of English teachers**

One of the main challenges of the widespread implementation of the English programs in Mexico has been the teachers: their qualifications, types, and working conditions.

### **2.3. English proficiency level**

English proficiency level is a person's ability to use the English language. It is usually measured by a standardized and internationally recognized test (TOEFL/ IELTS/ CAE), where a combination of skills (writing, reading, listening, and speaking) is tested. People can continue to expand their foreign language proficiency during their whole lives. Depending on how we define proficiency, we can tell what the teacher's level is (Pasternak and Bailey 163).

### **2.4. How is the proficiency level is measured**

English language proficiency (ELP) refers to learner's dominance of the language and is measured by "The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages" (CEFR) which is a system that defines and explains the different levels of oral and written skills and comprehension of languages.

### **2.6. Language**

Skills Speaking and writing are productive skills; we use those skills to transfer information to other people. Speaking is the second skill we acquire in our native language; however, it is the hardest skill to be learned in a foreign language. Writing skill is the last skill we acquire in our native language. We use that skill to produce the spoken language on paper. Same as reading, writing is the artificial skill.

### **2.7. Government requirements**

In 2016, the Federal Government of Mexico implemented the National English Program, which seeks to strengthen the teaching and learning processes of English as a second language. It is expected that in 10 to 20 years, Mexico can become a bilingual country.

## **Objective**

This study aims to evaluate the English proficiency level in teachers of the Seventh-day Adventist elementary schools in the North Mexican Union Conference, applying the Michigan Test.

The main research question that is pertinent to this study is as follows: What is the proficiency level in English teachers of the Seventh-day Adventist elementary schools in the North Mexican Union Conference?

## **Methodology**

In this research, the studied population were the elementary school teachers who teach English in the Adventist schools of the North Mexican Union Conference. The total of participants were 24 teachers. 54,2% of participants are women and 45,8% are men. Out of 24 participants just 3 teachers have a degree in English teaching, but almost all of them received a certification for teaching English; 2 participants are native English speakers. 33,3% of participants had studied in Adventist universities.

The examination was used to collect data for this study. The examination was designed from the Michigan Practice Tests for the sections of grammar, vocabulary, reading and listening, and from TOEFL and a Ted Talk video for the speaking section. Each question had a multiple-choice answer, except for the speaking section. In the speaking section the participants were given the statements and a Ted Talk video where they had to give their opinion by recording their answer. When the platform with the examination was ready, a group of 10 students of the Bachelor of Education in Teaching English tested the platform; some observations were made for improving the test. After the corrections were made, another group of 5 student tested the platform and made their observations. Finally, when the second corrections were done, the researchers of the study tested it as well making sure there were no other mistakes or inconveniences. After that, the link with the survey was sent to the participants.

The director of Adventist Educational System provided the contacts of all English teachers in the North Mexican Union Conference. The examination was uploaded on the LimeSurvey platform. E-mails were sent to every teacher with a link for the exam. Participants had 60 seconds to answer each question in the Grammar and Vocabulary sections. 180 seconds were given for each text and 90 seconds to answer each question in the Reading section. In the Speaking section the participants had to record one audio of a maximum of 45 seconds for each statement given; watch a Ted Talk video and give their opinion about it. And in the Listening section, the participants were given short audio recordings of 2-5 seconds each, and then the participants had 80 seconds to answer the questions.

The quantitative data obtained from the LimeSurvey was transferred to the Microsoft Excel 365 page. All answers in the Grammar, Vocabulary, Reading and Listening sections were evaluated. The correct answer received the value of 1 and the incorrect answers the value of 0. After that, all items in each dimension were added and divided by the number of items in the dimension and multiplied by 80. And the Speaking section was evaluated by 3 different people using the Oral Assessment Guidelines and averaged. After that, the scores of every dimension were averaged to

receive the final evaluation; the proficiency level was assigned according to the CEFR Score Range.

## Results

### Variables description

Through the analysis of the data in the Grammar section the arithmetic average of 52 was obtained by the English teachers in the Adventist schools of the North Mexican Union Conference. The highest value presented in the test was of 74, and the lowest value was of 24. In the Grammar section the scale of reliability was of .855 according to the Cronbach's  $\alpha$ .

In the Vocabulary section the arithmetic average of 57 was obtained by the English teachers in the Adventist schools of the North Mexican Union Conference. The highest value presented in the test was of 74, and the lowest was of 38. The scale of the reliability was of .754 according to the Cronbach's  $\alpha$ , which is lower than in the Grammar section.

In the Reading section the arithmetic average was of 48 by the English teachers in the Adventist schools of the North Mexican Union Conference. The highest value presented was of 64, and the lowest was of 8. In this section the scale of the reliability showed the lowest result of all sections, which was of .255 according to the Cronbach's  $\alpha$ . Due to the length of the test, the participants might have gotten tired and they started answering at random. Also, there is another theory: that the participants do not have a good reading comprehension.

In the Speaking section the arithmetic average was of 60 by the English teachers in the Adventist schools of the North Mexican Union Conference. The highest value presented was of 79.1 and the lowest of 34.1. In this section the scale of the reliability showed the highest result, which was of .911 according to the Cronbach's  $\alpha$ .

In the Listening section the arithmetic average was of 64 by the English teachers in the Adventist schools of the North Mexican Union Conference. The highest value presented was of 80, and the lowest of 16. The scale of the reliability showed the result of .834 according to the Cronbach's  $\alpha$ .

The results of English proficiency levels showed that most of the teachers have a level that

is required by the English Teacher Profile which is higher than B1 level. 33.3% of the teachers have a C1 level, 33.3% a B2 level, 29.2 % a B1 level, and 4.2% have an A1 level, which doesn't respond to the Teacher Profile requirements.

### Conclusions

The findings obtained by the examination in the LimeSurvey that was applied to the 24 English teachers showed that they have strengths in the Listening and Speaking skills, but they have weaknesses in the Reading skills. In general, most of the teachers got a good level in the English proficiency that respond to the Teacher Profile requirements.

Even though, the Proficiency level of the participants responds to the requirements of the Teacher Profile, most of the teachers do not have a degree in Education. For that reason, summer courses could be offered to teachers to improve their skills in which they have weaknesses and to improve their strengths more. Also, teachers can take different certifications to better develop their teaching skills.

For future studies, it was found that in order to obtain better results, shorter test should be used. It is not evident, but the examination might have tired the participants and they might have started answering at random.

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