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## The benefits for college students and professionals who master and use a second language

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### Summary

This article is about the importance current college students and professionals should give to the acquisition and mastery of a second language. English is the language which has become a fundamental element of communication in the academy of business. In this paper we present the contributions of eminent scholars as well as findings from studies conducted by national and international researchers. We also discuss this topic from the perspective of language studies in which English language is considered a lingua franca what leads us to the fact that the certification and accreditation of knowledge and mastery of this language is nowadays one of the required tool in this globalized world.

### Introduction

Throughout history, economic and cultural aspects have influenced decisively in the expansion and importance of certain languages in the world. Currently, under the circumstances of an economically culturally and politically globalized society we live in, the advances in science and information technology and communications, a new form of knowing, has emerged and has been consolidated with the knowledge, socialization and command of a foreign language, English is an example because it has been recognized as the lingua franca in the XXI century.

Today, there is no doubt that the lack of mastery of a second language is a disadvantage for everyone, because regardless of occupation or profession the opportunity to compete with others is limited because English has been adopted by many speakers as a second language to meet communication needs.

In this context, being able to handle a foreign language such as English means having the doors open to a world of opportunities; on the one hand, ensuring competition in all professionals, and on the other, allowing everyone the exchange of experiences to contact the outside world, thus obtaining a multifaceted view of the culture of other peoples and civilizations.

Currently, a large number of people and students around the world are enrolled in language courses. For Hutchinson, (2005 p. 10) the individuals who learn and practice English possess a tool for an end; however, for certain professional programs it is absolutely necessary to focus on English for specific purposes, as it adapts to the needs, then, they do not only have a tool that addresses a need, rather it prevents the need itself.

It is possible to track some of the historical events that contributed to the growing importance of language learning, some of them are: the medieval and religious conflicts, the era of enlightenment which led to great scientific discoveries, the industrial revolution that led to great advances in technology and hence in society and their lifestyles, and the first and second world war. We can interpret that people have always moved for different reasons and with different impacts on certain sectors of society.

Based on such movements specially the mass movements of people, we have found that humans have looked for the satisfaction of specific needs and interests, which has had an impact in the development and growth of society in its different sectors: economics, and science and technological inventions and innovations that are now part of the contemporary scene. Student or professionals should pay attention to all these facts and consider the acquisition of a second language of great significance in their development.

Bustamante (2003) states, "in the XXI century, the world is interconnected, English language being the language to exchange and disseminate information. The knowledge of the language has become the main vehicle to the process of globalization of knowledge " (p. 4).

In this sense, knowledge is valued as a factor in human development and the English language as a tool for communication to gain understanding with the rest of the world's

societies; then, it is necessary to mention the university as an institution that contributes to the construction knowledge and training of human potential.

Once this situation was explained, it is important to consider the views expressed by UNESCO in 2005 in its document called "towards knowledge societies", where one of its sections deals with the importance of education communities in promoting the teaching of other languages, with emphasis on the leading English language acquisition with respect to the others, claiming the agency that in the universality of knowledge, the English language was imposed as the hegemonic international language. A question is posed: will the domain of spoken, written and comprehension of English among university students and graduates, will provide better options for work?

If we believe societies influence each other economically and politically, and that the phenomenon of globalization and the changes in lifestyles and inhabitants require a set of trained and competent professionals to meet the demands and commitments, then we can state that the individuals without English language skills, limit their job projections and their future within the studied field and will be affected negatively.

### **The importance of English language proficiency to globalization**

Globalization, according to the Larousse Encyclopedia, must be understood as the process of internationalization of political, economical and financial relations. The latter being predominant in the context and among their potential effects we have the access to markets and the increase and exchange of capital and cultural migration.

Definitely, to globalization, the spread of cultural process and development of technology is strong, but this would not have been possible without the mastery of foreign languages, especially English, the predominant language of international relations in all areas. Delors said in his document *The Treasure within Learning*: (emphasis added), "Knowledge of an international language, will be indispensable in the global village and global market of the century" (1996, p.140).

In particular Molina (1998, p.28) highlights inter alia the use of communication to ensure success in the quality of products and services internationally in any business and company, it is precisely in this area, where English language becomes relevant to the exercise of any profession. Thus, in economical activity, communication is the best form of interaction among individuals, and in case of an encounter between people with different language; English is the language that has made possible, through time and history, the exchange of ideas among citizens of the world.

### **The advantages of a second language proficiency at present**

In particular, every student and / or professional who learns English can:

- meet information needs effectively in various disciplines (in written and oral form).
- understand other cultures and exchange different types of messages.
- be sufficiently informed about various events in a second language.
- occupy key positions in institutions and companies.

I agree with Grice when he says that "in an exchange of words, if participants contribute as much as it is required, then, it is assumed that the conversation is reliable, informative enough, clear and relevant, thus fulfilling the principle of cooperation" (1975, p. 41).

On the other hand, Richard and Rodgers (1985) mention that through history, the teaching / learning of a foreign language has always been an important practice because English is now the most studied language in the world. (p.1). Then, we can perceive that there are many advantages when you master a second language like English.

### **The internationalization process of a student**

The educational reform that took place in the 80's forced every institution of higher level to modify the curriculum in which it is considered the inclusion of a number of certified programs which aim to provide quality education.

We should recognize the efforts of educational institutions such as the Autonomous University of Baja California, which, since 2003, through the Department of International Cooperation and Academic Exchange is implementing the Student Exchange Program, which provides students with the opportunity to spend a semester or two at a university abroad. In this program, students know other ways of thinking, acting and living which promotes academic growth.

Students or academic staff who wish to participate in this kind of program in English-speaking foreign institutions can perform undergraduate or graduate activities such as subject taking, research projects and / or credit value academic practices, which allow cultural enrichment. The participants of this program must pass the TOEFL test which is an internationally recognized tool to assess the language proficiency level.

### **The required college graduates' profile to meet the local and national job requirements**

The National Association of Universities and Institutions of Higher Education (ANUIES), in its Strategy Papers for Higher Education presented in 2002, shows a prospective view for 2020 which refers to the characteristics of the future graduates of higher education. They propose the following profile: to possess multidisciplinary generic skills, to be flexible to the diversification and evolution of the workplace, to be prepared for the internationalization of the labor market through an understanding of different cultures and mastery of other languages, being English a better option.

Maldonado (2004) who teaches at the Master of Science in Strategic Development for the Universidad de Occidente in the state of Sinaloa, found in her research that the criteria employers emphasized as the most important when hiring are: 78% agreed that professionals must have experience in office, 72% emphasized the need for disciplined, responsible and ethical staff, 67% emphasized on English language proficiency, and 52% on capacity for decision-making.

As for employers who have not hired, she identified the following causes: 39% said job candidates lack experience, 29% because of inadequate English , 18% stated that they did not cover the requirements for the job and 14% prefer to hire technical graduates.

As we can see in the findings of the research conducted by Maldonado, employers base their staff recruiting on key issues such as experience, responsibility, English language proficiency and ability in decision-making. (2004).

At the regional level, Valderrama and Flores, in their study "Identifying college graduates' professional skills" identified English speaking as one of the core competencies among other skills and pointed out that " in the actual growing market demands, only a well- trained professional who develops competitive skills will be able to access to a job and development" (2006, p.4 ).

## **The Curriculum**

According to Taba (1976), it is necessary to develop curricula based on a theory of curriculum that is based on the investigation of the demands and requirements of a society for the present and the future. In the curriculum, we should consider a generic, a disciplinary and a professionalizing stage, in which we could reflect on the link of learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live within the framework of the professional competencies.

Competencies as personality configurations are constructed and expressed by the individuals, which determines a number of capacities directly observed in the activity. They express certain qualities that individuals reflect in the performance of

tasks that represent some degree of difficulty and that are activated to respond effectively to the contingencies of a particular claim. Regarding language learning (English), students must develop some linguistic competences: speaking, writing, reading and listening to be able and willing to communicate.

After having analyzed the context in which college students and professionals develop as part of a strong sustainable development of all activity that occurs in the region and the country, it is necessary to consider the importance of acquiring and mastering English which has to be seen as an essential and laudable component in the students' academic and future career success.

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