

Language Proficiency As A Regional Agreement

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Summary

COCESNA/ACSA as an integrated organism for the Central American region conducted a benchmarking of the air traffic controllers and pilots in the region. Now that benchmarking has been accomplished, training is required to address the language proficiency needs identified in the benchmark tests. With the experience achieved, COCESNA will be able to share the language proficiency experience with any other country interested in benchmarking, training, and licensing to accomplish ICAO's requirement by March 5th 2008.

Background

Since September 2005, supporting the Central American countries, COCESNA through out its Aviation Safety Agency (ACSA) has been working to improve air traffic controller and pilots' language proficiency level in the Central American region. In March 2006 COCESNA/ACSA sent four air traffic controllers with English teaching expertise to the FAA Academy to be trained as ratters and instructors and in that way be able to develop a language proficiency benchmarking program for air traffic controllers and pilots in the region. With this program, 95% of the air traffic controllers and 15% of the pilots were tested. With these results, the Central American Civil Aviation Authorities were to develop a training program for air traffic controllers and pilots and in this way be able to comply with ICAO's requirements by March 2008.

In a move to address safety and efficiency of global aviation systems, all air carrier operators and air traffic service providers are responsible for compliance from March 2008. COCESNA'S Aviation English program is aiming to lead air traffic controllers and pilots into compliance with ICAO language requirements, transferring program capability to other nations and ensuring continuing efficiencies in program development and delivery. COCESNA'S Aviation English program has been divided into three stages, these are: Benchmarking, Training and Licensing.

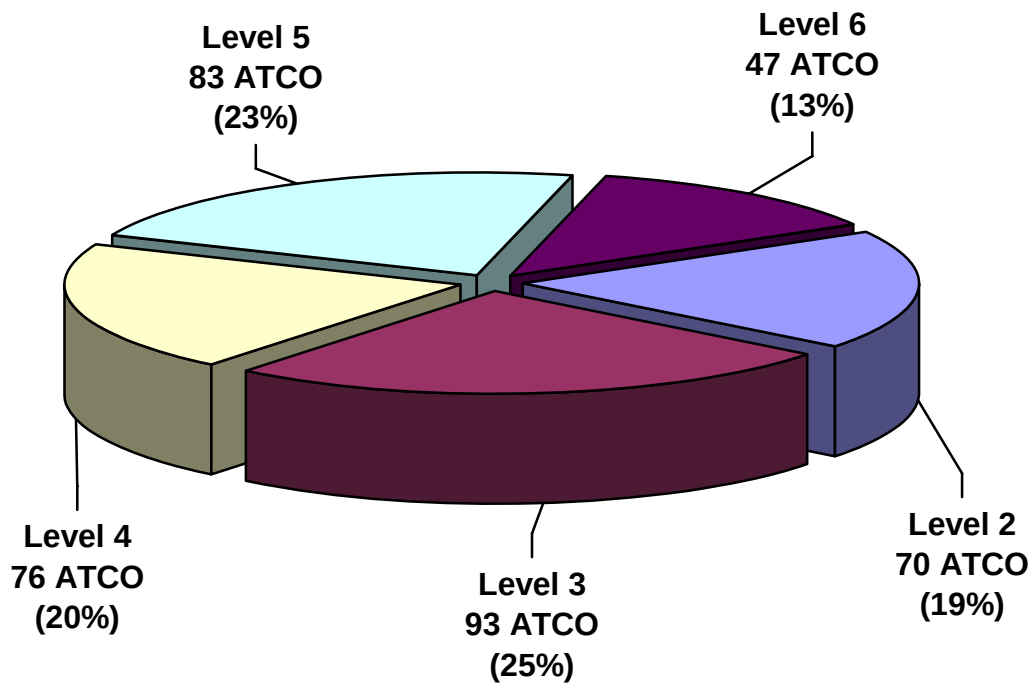
Benchmarking

In June 2006 COCESNA started the benchmarking of air traffic controllers and pilots of the Central American region with two ratters; benchmarking was done in five months testing 95% of the controllers and 15% of the pilots. Nowadays, there are five ratters in COCESNA, four air traffic controllers and one linguist. Six more instructors will be trained by FAA next month. The test COCESNA is using for benchmarking complies with ICAO regulations, testing the six linguistic descriptors required (Pronunciation, Fluency, Structure, Comprehension, Vocabulary and Interaction) and using ICAO scale for ratting.

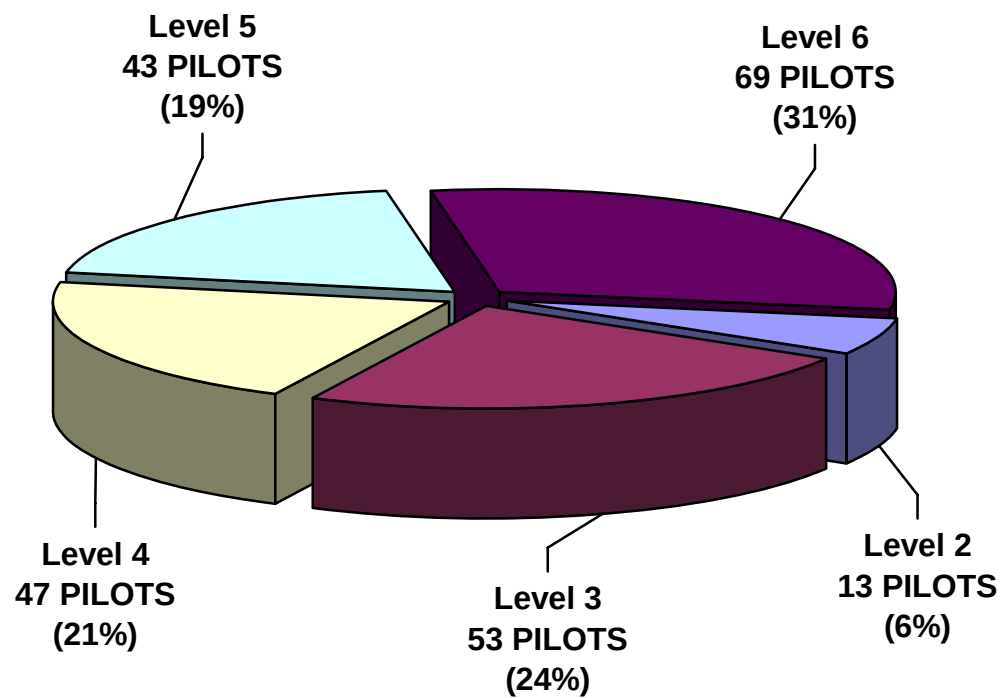
The two major air carrier operators in Central America and Panama have asked COCESNA/ACSA to do a benchmarking of all of their pilots on April, and very soon, agreements will be signed with Colombia and Venezuela to do benchmarking of their air traffic controllers.

These are the benchmarking results of the air traffic controllers and pilots tested in the Central American region:

CENTRAL AMERICAN REGION		
ATCOs	TESTED ATCOs	TO BE TESTED
390	369	21



CENTRAL AMERICAN REGION		
PILOTS	TESTED PILOTS	TO BE TESTED
2500 (aprox.)	225	2275



Training

Training is now required to address the language proficiency needs identified in the benchmark tests. Knowing how many controllers and pilots need to be trained, COCESNA/ACSA has developed an Aviation English training program. With this program, air traffic controller and pilots that are below level 4 will be lead to accomplish ICAO requirements by March 2008.

On June 2007, COCESNA will start the air traffic controllers and pilots Aviation English training; this training will be delivered in each one of the Central American countries. Therefore, time will be optimized and costs will be decreased. Six more instructors will have to be trained next month to deliver the training in a decentralized way and after the training is completed, maintain and improve air traffic controllers and pilot's language proficiency levels. With this plan, by February 2008 air traffic controllers and most pilots in the region will be at least at a level four according to ICAO scale.

The course material to be used in the Aviation English training program are the same FAA is using at the FAA Academy to train controllers and pilots from different countries around the world.

To accomplish ICAO requirements by March 2008, the air traffic service providers in some Central American countries will have to make and send groups (one group at a time) of up to ten controllers to receive Aviation English classes six hours a day during five weeks; doing it this way the training would be completed by November 2007. The air traffic service providers that are not able to send groups of ten controllers will have to make and send groups of five or six controllers and receive Aviation English classes four hours a day, one group will receive classes in the morning and the other one in the afternoon during eight weeks, in this way the controllers would be able to stay on working shifts, they could work at their facilities in the morning and go to Aviation English classes in the afternoon or the other way around. This option takes more time because the course is three weeks longer and the training would be finished by January 2008. This is much easier for controllers; however, with pilots is different, because air carrier operators can not take a pilot off the line for so long. Therefore, a different plan must be develop.

Developing this process as a region, it is much easier than if each one of the Central American countries did it by themselves. Otherwise, costs would be increased and the time needed for training would be longer. We are convinced that sharing resources between countries or regions is the best and easiest way to have the job done.

On April this year, COCESNA will be assisting Colombia in doing a benchmarking of 75% of their air traffic controllers; then on May, five Colombian English instructors will be trained as ratters by COCESNA and this five under a close supervision of COCESNA's ratters will do the benchmarking of the other 25% of the controllers left, and have ready a team of ratters in Colombia for licensing next year. COCESNA's test used for benchmarking will be given to the Colombian Civil Aviation authority training center, so it can be use whenever they need to for future benchmarking.

COCESNA is not only assisting Colombia, but also Venezuela; it is been provided assistance in benchmarking, training, and licensing and COCESNA might be assisting Panama, too.

Licensing

Licensing for the Central American countries will start on February 2008. According to the Civil Aviation Authorities of the region, the population between air traffic controllers and pilots is approximately 3000. A licensing test will be developed by COCESNA; this will comply with all of ICAO requirements and it will be finished by November 2007, and ready to be share with any interested country.

For licensing, COCESNA will have ten ratters ready for Central America and in this way be able to finish this process for the Licensing Department of the Civil Aviation Authorities of the region by March 2008.

By February 2008 with the assistance of COCESNA, the countries of Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, and Venezuela will have at least 2 ratters in each country and they will be able to redesign and deliver the licensing test according to ICAO requirements for future licensing tasks and maintain an objective and reliable process.

Conclusions

1. With this training, the controllers and pilots that were identified in the benchmarking below level 4 will be lead to accomplish ICAO requirements by March 2008.
2. As a result, due to the fact that the air traffic controllers will be train in their own countries, instead of taking them to a specific one, the per diem will be reduced in 350%. Therefore, the costs will be reduced for the States and training time will be less.
3. The teaching material to be used is the one FAA is using for teaching Aviation English.
4. Training at least two instructors for each country will ensure continuous efficiency developing the program and each country will maintain and improve its proficiency level after March 2008.
5. COCESNA is willing to share experience and material with any interested country.

Recommendations

1. We recommend all the States to let the holders of a controller and a pilot licenses know the provisions to be taken by the Civil Aviation authorities if they do not reach the operational level by March 2008, this way the people to be trained will put more interest on the training.
2. We recommend providing training in a decentralized way, this way costs will be reduced and time will be optimized.
3. We recommend that the teaching material to be used in the Aviation English training is the one FAA is using, because it has been proven to give excellent results.
4. We recommend that the Civil Aviation Authorities that do not have a language Proficiency program yet (benchmarking, training, and licensing), to ask an organization that has already implemented one for assistance.

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