

# Performance of local and foreign applicants for the pediatrics specialty in the 2025 Unified Medical Residency Exam in Argentina

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction.** The medical residency system is a professional training program. In Argentina, the Unified Exam (UE) centralizes admission to most residencies. In 2025, a five-point bonus was added for graduates of Argentine universities to compensate for differences observed in graduation averages compared to those of foreign graduates.

**Objective.** To analyze the average grade point average, UE score, and differences according to foreign status.

**Population and methods.** Cross-sectional study. It included 470 applicants for pediatric residency; 32.8% were foreign nationals, and 28.3% were graduates of foreign universities.

**Results.** Foreign university graduates had higher academic averages (7.8 vs. 7.4;  $p < 0.001$ ) but lower UE performance (58.8 vs. 72.6;  $p < 0.001$ ). The correlation between career average and UE score was significant ( $R^2 = 0.25$ ).

**Conclusion.** These results provide evidence for evaluating the impact and relevance of the applied bonus to ensure equity in access to residencies.

**Keywords:** *medical education; postgraduate education; internship and residency; pediatrics.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The medical residency system is a fundamental stage in a physician's training, allowing them to consolidate theoretical knowledge from their studies and develop clinical skills in a real-world setting. Through supervised practice, residents acquire the technical, ethical, and communication skills essential for autonomous and responsible performance within the healthcare system.<sup>1</sup>

The selection systems for admission to medical residencies vary by country and educational policies, but they ensure fairness, transparency, and the suitability of applicants. In some countries, such as Mexico,<sup>2</sup> Argentina,<sup>3</sup> and Spain,<sup>4</sup> access to state systems is determined by standardized national exams that assess general medical knowledge, with some weight given to academic background. In others, such as the United States,<sup>5</sup> an exam and academic background are supplemented by interviews and letters of recommendation. All seek to select candidates with the necessary ability to undertake specialized training.

In Argentina, admission to medical residencies is coordinated through the Unified Exam (UE),<sup>3</sup> which, since 2017, has been integrated with the Unified Competition (CU, by its Spanish acronym) of the national, provincial, and municipal jurisdictions of Buenos Aires. This mechanism includes a unified assessment tool for health residencies in the three jurisdictions, with centralized correction and a unified schedule.<sup>6</sup>

The UE for admission to the National Health Residencies System was established to ensure a consistent and objective evaluation of applicants and to standardize selection criteria, thereby facilitating mobility and equitable access across jurisdictions and participating institutions.<sup>7</sup> In addition to the UE result, the order of merit for accessing a vacancy in the CU takes into account the average obtained during the undergraduate degree.

In an increasingly complicated global landscape for the medical profession,<sup>8</sup> which includes the migration of professionals in search of better opportunities, there has been a substantial increase in the number of physicians who graduated abroad seeking to complete their postgraduate training in Argentina's medical residency system.<sup>9</sup>

In this context, a recent discussion arose about the possibility that graduates from foreign universities systematically achieved higher graduation averages than those from local universities.<sup>10</sup> This prompted a provision by the

Ministry of Health that awarded additional points to local graduates.<sup>11</sup>

With UE 2025 now complete and the final order of merit (OM) established, it is interesting to analyze the comparative performance of local and foreign graduates, considering the changes introduced, particularly in pediatrics.

We aim to describe applicants for pediatric residency in the 2025 UE according to their foreign status, university of origin, career average, and UE score. In addition, we evaluate the career average and exam score by personal foreign status and university of origin, and examine their correlations.

## POPULATION AND METHODS

Cross-sectional study. Applicants included in the UE for medicine 2025, published by the Ministry of Health, were considered.<sup>11</sup> The list includes a national identity document (DNI, by its Spanish acronym), training institution, specialty, grade point average, UE score, type of university (local or foreign), final score, and OM.

The final score was calculated by adding the grade point average, 50% of the UE score, and a five-point bonus for graduates of Argentine universities.<sup>12</sup>

Participants whose national identity card number began with 90 million, a number reserved by the National Registry of Persons (RENAPER, by its Spanish acronym) for foreign residents, were considered foreigners.

The variables are presented as percentages with 95% CIs or as means with standard deviations. The means were compared using Student's t-test. The correlation between grade point average and UE score was evaluated using Pearson's coefficient. To determine whether this correlation differed by nationality, Fisher's Z transformation was used to compare independent correlation coefficients. Proportions were compared using the chi-square test.

In all cases, a *p*-value <0.05 was considered statistically significant. The analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics 20.0 and R version 4.3.2.

The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Pedro de Elizalde Children's General Hospital on November 13, 2025, ruling 17,840.

The data supporting the findings of this study are openly available at <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/2023/07/2025-08-20-odm-medicina-cu-2025-odm.pdf>.<sup>11</sup>

## RESULTS

Of the 6121 applicants included in the 2025 merit order, data were analyzed for the 470 who chose pediatrics as a specialty; 32.8% were foreign nationals, and 28.3% were graduates of foreign universities. The majority (71.7%) studied at national universities (Table 1).

The mean values were  $7.5 \pm 1.1$  for the average grade point average,  $68.7 \pm 10.5$  for the UE score, and  $45.5 \pm 6.9$  for the final score. No differences were found with the total cohort ( $n = 6121$ ) ( $7.4 \pm 1.2$ ;  $67.8 \pm 10.8$ ; and  $45.6 \pm 6.9$ , respectively;  $p > 0.05$ ).

The correlation between grade point average and UE score was low, although significant among foreign applicants ( $R^2 = 0.04$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), and increased when analyzing Argentine applicants ( $R^2 = 0.25$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). The difference between the two correlations was significant ( $Z = -3.6$ ;  $p = 0.003$ ), indicating that the degree of correlation between previous and exam performance differs by nationality.

Comparative analysis showed significant differences across university types. Graduates from foreign universities obtained higher career

averages (7.8 vs. 7.4;  $p < 0.001$ ), but lower scores on the UE (58.8 vs. 72.6;  $p < 0.001$ ) and, consequently, in the final score (37.3 vs. 48.7;  $p < 0.001$ ) (Table 2). Similar results were observed when comparing by nationality (Table 3).

When comparing the proportion of Argentine university graduates ranked above the median in the OM, this increased significantly with the addition of the leveling component (91.4% vs. 97.8%; OR 4.2; 95% CI 1.5-11.6;  $p = 0.002$ ).

## DISCUSSION

This analysis describes the profiles and performance of applicants to pediatric residency in Argentina during the 2025 UE, in the context of the recent regulatory change that added additional points for graduates of national universities. The results show significant differences between local and foreign graduates, both in terms of career averages and exam performance.

Graduates from foreign universities had higher academic averages than local graduates (7.8 vs. 7.4). Still, they achieved significantly lower scores in the UE (58.8 vs. 72.6). The correlation between grade point average and

**TABLE 1. Characteristics of the nationality and type of university of applicants to the Unified Exam**

Variable	Category	n	%
Nationality	Argentine	316	67.2
	Foreign	154	32.8
Type of university	National	337	71.7
	Foreign	133	28.3

**TABLE 2. Comparison of scores by type of university**

Variable	National university (n = 337)	Foreign university (n = 133)	p-value*
Average grade (career)	$7.4 \pm 0.8$	$7.8 \pm 1.2$	< 0.001
Exam score	$72.6 \pm 7.5$	$58.8 \pm 10.5$	< 0.001
Final score	$48.7 \pm 4.2$	$37.3 \pm 5.7$	< 0.001

\*Independent samples t-test.

**TABLE 3. Comparison of scores by nationality**

Variable	Argentine (n = 316)	Foreign (n = 154)	p-value*
Average grade (career)	$7.4 \pm 1.8$	$7.8 \pm 1.2$	< 0.001
Exam score	$72.5 \pm 7.8$	$60.9 \pm 10.9$	< 0.001
Final score	$48.6 \pm 4.6$	$39.1 \pm 6.6$	< 0.001

\*Independent samples t-test.

exam score was low among foreign students ( $R^2 = 0.04$ ). Still, it increased when the analysis was limited to Argentine graduates ( $R^2 = 0.25$ ). These results could reflect differences in evaluation criteria and scoring systems between local and foreign universities, or indicate that, in more homogeneous educational contexts, there is greater consistency between academic performance and standardized test performance.

This Argentine experience shows similarities and contrasts with medical residency selection systems in other countries. In Mexico, where admission is based on the ENARM (National Examination for Medical Residency Applicants, by its Spanish acronym), a significant correlation has been observed between grade point average and exam score ( $r = 0.58$ ).<sup>13</sup> In Spain, the MIR (Resident Medical Exam, by its Spanish acronym) system shows a comparable pattern; although the exam has a predominant weight over the academic record (90% versus 10%), there is a clear correlation between both scores.<sup>14</sup>

The low correlation between grade point average and exam score, especially among foreign applicants, suggests limitations in the comparability of academic averages across heterogeneous educational systems, likely due to different scales and evaluation criteria. In this context, standardized testing could contribute to equity by providing a common framework for performance evaluation. However, caution is required when interpreting results in heterogeneous training contexts.

In the United States, access to medical residency through the National Resident Matching Program (NRMP) involves multiple components: standardized exams (United States Medical Licensing Examination, USMLE), interviews, and academic records, all used to balance cognitive merit with interpersonal skills and professional background. In this system, undergraduate grades carry less weight in determining success in gaining the desired residency on the first attempt.<sup>15</sup> In this context, the introduction of weighting or bonus mechanisms can be interpreted as a valid strategy used in different systems with the intention of managing educational heterogeneity. However, their ethical and educational policy implications are beyond the scope of this study.

The analysis of foreign applicants' performance is more complex. In Spain, for example, there is a specific quota for foreigners (varying between 5% and 10%). In addition, Bailles reports that foreign applicants perform worse than Spanish

applicants on the MIR.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, in the United States, the USMLE pass rate on the first attempt is significantly lower for graduates of foreign universities.<sup>15</sup>

These comparisons show that, although admission models differ, the tension between equity, educational homogeneity, and objective evaluation is a constant. Across all the systems analyzed, standardized test results tend to show better performance by local graduates.

Limiting ourselves to a single specialty and a single cohort limits the generalizability of our findings. However, it constitutes one of the first quantitative descriptions of the impact of the new differential scoring regulations on the residency selection process in Argentina. On the other hand, this study did not allow for a more in-depth analysis that differentiated nationality and place of training due to the imbalance in the sample. This aspect could be addressed in future research with more balanced cohorts.

The best correlation observed between the average grade and the exam score within the local group suggests that the measure adopted in this edition could be justified. It will be important to analyze whether this bonus effectively meets its objective of promoting equity.

These findings provide evidence for discussing the mechanisms for accessing medical residencies, highlighting the need to continue evaluating the balance between equity, transparency, and merit in this selection process.

## CONCLUSION

In the 2025 UE for medical residencies in Argentina, the pediatrics specialty showed better performance by local graduates in the UE and higher career averages among foreigners. A significant correlation was observed between graduation average and exam score, with a stronger correlation among Argentines. ■

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