Studies of student trajectories in language teaching programs in Mexico

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MTRA. BERTHA GUADALUPE PAREDES ZEPEDA

Bertha Gpe. Paredes Zepeda is a full time professor at the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo and for the past years teacher trainer and consultant in ELT. She holds a BA in ELT from Thames Valley University, UK; as well as an MA in ELT from the University of Warwick, UK. From 2003 to 2004 as a Fulbright teacher (FTEP), she taught English as a Second Language to Chinese immigrants in New York City, USA. She has published several articles, books and book chapters. Currently she is the head of the Applied Linguistics Department.

DRA. MARÍA CRUZ CHONG BARREIRO

María Cruz Chong Barreiro is a full time professor at the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo (UAEH). She holds a BA in Psychology from the Fundación Universidad de las Américas Puebla; and an MA in Education with a specialty in cognitive development from the Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey, as well as a PhD in Education Sciences from UAEH. Her main interest as a researcher is evaluation and educational planning. Chong Barreiro has published several articles and book chapters. She has also participated in research projects with funds obtained from CONACYT and PROMEP. She is currently the head of the Education Department at UAEH.

The research presented is the first part of a longitudinal study whose aim is to obtain a better understanding of students' academic behavior from the time they enroll at the university until the conclusion of their studies, in other words, during their academic trajectory. Based on demographic particulars and students' perceptions of their experiences in terms of factors known to affect academic performance, the current findings provide a profile of undergraduate students at an early stage of their studies in English Language Teaching Programs in public universities in Mexico. Data were collected by means of a questionnaire administered to 446 students at eight participating universities belonging to the states of Aguascalientes (UAA), Puebla (BUAP), Hidalgo (UAEH), the state of Mexico (UAEMex), Tamaulipas, Tlaxcala (UAT), Colima (UCOL), and Veracruz (UV).

The questionnaire was constructed in keeping with the definition of *academic trajectory*, proposed by Cuevas (2001) in Fernández, Peña, and Vera (2006), as ..."a set of factors and data that affect and account for the students' school behavior during their stay at the university. These factors can either be psychological and sociological (qualitative), or they can provide more precise data (quantitative) about students' academic performance." An analysis of the study's data reflecting the aforementioned factors reveals that there are more similarities than differences among the student cohorts, including a strong consensus that students are pleased with their BA programs.

The study's major findings suggest proposals for BA programs and university officials to consider in three broad areas. The recommendations respond to 1) students' interest and expectations about studying and working abroad; 2) students' neutral or mixed perceptions of tutorial programs vis-à-vis how well tutors respond to their academic and professional needs concerning, for example, the development of stress-management skills and good study habits, as well as what guidance they receive related to personal concerns such as relationship issues; and 3) students' views, evident in their perceptions of teachers' performance and other classroom realities, on the importance of supportive and meaningful learning environments. The researchers conclude that follow-up and interventionist steps are warranted to address students' needs and, by doing so, to respond to universities' concerns about improving the quality of tertiary education in Mexico.

PLAZA VALDÉS
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in language teaching programs
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Bertha Guadalupe Paredes Zepeda
María Cruz Chong Barreiro
(coordinadoras)

UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA
DE AGUASCALIENTES

Universidad Veracruzana

ecale

PLAZA Y VALDES
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DIRECTORIO

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CONCLUSIONS FROM THE MULTI-UNIVERSITY STUDY OF ACADEMIC TRAJECTORIES OF STUDENTS IN BA IN LANGUAGE TEACHING PROGRAMS IN MEXICO

Bertha Guadalupe Paredes Zepeda
María Cruz Chong Barreiro

The information drawn from the questionnaire used by the eight universities that participated in this study of student trajectories in tertiary education reveals more similarities than differences among the research populations. It should be noted that the cohorts from seven of the eight universities entered their BA programs in one of the semesters of the 2013 academic calendar. The eighth university's cohort began their studies in 2014; therefore, the 2014 cohort completed the research questionnaire at a different point in their academic trajectory than the students from the other participating universities.

This chapter highlights and capsulizes data deemed noteworthy by the researchers at each university and offers a comparative and summative analysis of the findings as well as implications of the research vis-à-vis recommendations for language-teaching programs as they affect students' university experiences and the quality of higher education in Mexico. The information is presented in the order the data were classified in each of the three sections of the research instrument. The chapter concludes with final comments.

Section A – Demographic Information

Population of students surveyed, gender and age

The majority of students who responded to the questionnaire were women, except for the cohort from the Autonomous University of Puebla (BUAP) in which 60% of the sample

population were men. However, it should be noted that in general the student population in BUAP's English-study program tends to be mostly female. The ages of BUAP's research participants ranged from 18 to 40. A similarly wide age span was also observed in the cohort from the Autonomous University of the State of Hidalgo (UAEH), where the age range of the student population was from 18 to 32. The average age of the students who filled out the questionnaire at the other universities ranged from 18 to 20 years.

Place of origin

In four universities the percentage of students that come from within the state was greater than the number of students that enter from communities outside of the state. These high *in-state* institutions are Aguascalientes State University, UAA (73%); the University of Colima, UCOL (78.3%); the Autonomous University of the State of Mexico, UAEMex (80.5%); and the Autonomous University of Tamaulipas, UAT (79.5%). At UAEH and the University of Veracruz (UV), 100% of the students in the B.A. in ELT program come from their respective "home" states.

UAA reported that most of its BA in Language-Teaching students live in the capital city where they are studying, as is the case for UAEMex and UAEH students. UCOL indicated that 41 out of 60 students live with their parents. Likewise, UAT found that three fourths of its research population live in their parents' home.

Economic status

The student respondents in this study can be described as middle class with the majority dependent on their families for their school expenses. A considerable number of students are not gainfully employed; they are full-time university students. Questionnaire

responses revealed that most students do not consider economic difficulties as a variable that could affect their academic performance.

Parents' education

All eight universities cited information about the education levels of the parents of the students participating in the study. UAA reported that 62% of the parents have higher education experience; UAT noted that 49.3% of the parents have university degrees -- one mother with a master's degree and another, a doctorate. At UV, 31% of parents have higher education experience. In contrast, UAEMex stated that 80% of the students' parents have *no* higher education studies.

At the Autonomous University of Tlaxcala (UATX), 35% of mothers have higher education experience compared to 28% of fathers. Similarly, at UAEH 20% of the mothers hold a BA degree compared to 12% of fathers with university degrees. At UCOL, the most often cited level of education for students' fathers (28%) was *higher education*; in contrast, the most often cited education level for mothers (43%) was *no higher education*. At BUAP 8.3% of students' parents (three mothers and two fathers) had higher education experience; 37 parents had *high school* as their highest level of education; and 13 parents were high school graduates. Researchers from both BUAP and UAT indicated that most of the students in the study represent the first generation in their families to attend university.

Section B – Students' Perceptions of Factors Affecting Academic Performance

The following paragraphs identify the most salient considerations reported by the participating universities based on data gathered for each of the seven factors.

Factor 1: Students' perceptions of teachers' performance

Student responses from all the universities showed high percentages of agreement that teachers *explain content clearly, encourage academic discussion,* and *stimulate critical thinking*. Six of the eight universities -- UAA, UAEMex, UAEH, UATX, UV, and UAT, -- found *neutral* and low percentages of *agreement* in respondents' perceptions of teachers' performance when it came to *identifying students' strengths and limitations.* UAEH researchers noted that one third of respondents were noncommittal (*Neutral*) about the feedback they receive from teachers. BUAP also reported that most of its students' responses were in the *Neutral* category; however, the researchers reported that a sizable majority of student-respondents (73%) perceived that their teachers provide suggestions for improvement in their academic work.

Factor 2: Students' perceptions of the theoretical and practical knowledge of the courses

Students in most of the participating universities expressed opinions that the knowledge in the courses they are studying is *up-to-date* and *useful* and that it will *contribute to future problem solving* in their teaching career. The UV research team noted that the students in its research cohort were enrolled in the BA program for only a month and a half when they completed the research questionnaire, and their initial positive perceptions could have been related to their level of motivation at this early stage in the first term of the program. At UAA, students' *agreement* responses for all six variables in this factor were quite high, 93-96%. The researchers suggested that the data support the conclusion that most students at UAA do not have negative perceptions of the knowledge their courses offer. The lowest percentage (87%) of agreement for this factor was for the variable *knowledge can be used for daily life*. It is interesting to note that the same variable had the lowest combined *agreement* responses at three other universities: UAEH,

UAEMex, and UAT. For this factor, BUAP reported that most of the responses were *Neutral*, similar to their findings for Factor 1. However, BUAP researchers highlighted the fact that 76% of students indicated that the courses *are useful to their professional education* and 83% perceived that the content of the courses would *contribute to future problem solving* in their profession.

Factor 3: Students' perceptions of the BA program in general

The researchers at UAA and UV reported that students had positive perceptions of their BA programs. UCOL researchers noted that students showed a degree of satisfaction at this point in their trajectory -- in the second year of a four-year program. At the same time, they expressed the opinion that students' perceptions may change as they face other needs and realities in their training and practice. At UAA, the variable *teachers work collaboratively to design program materials* received the lowest percentage (67%) of *Agree and Totally Agree* responses in this factor. The UAA researchers surmised that this could be attributed to the fact that the 31% of student-respondents who selected the *Neutral* option may not have much knowledge of how programs are designed. A similar result occurred at UAEH where a mean score of 3.6 for this variable suggested that students may have had limited understanding of what is involved in collaborative work to design program materials. The researchers pointed out that the somewhat unenthusiastic response presents an opportunity for BA program administrators to develop strategies that could not only modify students' perceptions of their teachers' efforts at teamwork but reinforce the importance of collaborative efforts to solve problems and achieve success across all educational spheres in the 21st century.

At BUAP, 63% of respondents perceived that their courses *foster the development of students' skills in group work.* At UAEH, 80% of the cohort responded with either *Agree* or *Totally Agree* for this variable.

BUAP researchers reported that 66% of their research population perceived that *the content of the courses is relevant.* Students' positive perception was also evident in the data from UAEMex where the mean for this variable was 4.0, showing solid agreement. Another variable, however, *Hours allotted for courses are adequate to cover course content* had the lowest mean for this factor, closer to *Neutral* than to *Agree,* among UAEMex respondents. UAEMex researchers believe that students' somewhat equivocal perception of this variable warrants a review and analysis of the number of hours currently assigned to the various courses. At UATX, students' opinions of this variable varied widely, registering a standard deviation of 1.10.

The variable addressing students' perceptions of whether courses need updating revealed contrasting opinions among the cohorts under study. A mean of 3.7 (*Neutral* tending toward *Agree*) for *content of courses needs updating* at UAT was interpreted by the researchers as possibly a natural perception by students that all courses ought to be reviewed to meet the context needs and the dynamic nature of the classroom. However, the researchers considered that it would be pertinent to query the students further to determine in what ways they perceive their courses need improvement. At UATX, the mean for students' opinions about the need for updating courses was 3.6 (nearly midway between *Neutral* and *Agree*); it was the lowest mean for variables in this factor. The researchers explained that the responses were not unexpected because the curriculum and syllabi were implemented only recently. The mean for UAEH's responses to this variable was also low (3.5).

One variable identified as key by the research team at UATX concerned students' perceptions of whether the *BA program has high standards*. Because students' responses were not broadly positive (the mean was 3.7), UATX researchers expressed the opinion that it would be worthwhile to explore in-depth what needs to be addressed in teaching and learning in order to raise the standards. At UV, the *Neutral* mean of 3.4 for this variable was attributed to respondents being in their first semester with not enough experience to have an opinion of the program's standards. UV researchers also noted a contradictory response to two other variables in this factor: 70% chose the *Totally Agree* and *Agree* options for the variable about *courses being up-to date*, while 45.3% considered that it is *necessary to update course content* and topics in the program. The researchers proposed that further study would be necessary to determine how interpretations of these two variables could change over time.

Factor 4: Students' perceptions of academic difficulties due to external factors

In general, student-respondents at most of the universities did not perceive that their academic difficulties were caused by external factors. At UAA particularly, students indicated that outside influences had little effect on their academic performance. At BUAP, most responses were *Neutral,* and students did not have strong opinions of the related variables. Most responses from the UAEMex cohort tended in the direction of *neutral* (means of 2.7+), but it was observed that the variables addressing *relationships with peers and teachers* had means of 2.2 and 2.4, clearly on the *disagreement* side of the rating scale. In other words, students' relationships with others did not seem to have a negative impact on academic performance in the UAEMex program. The same variables were discussed by UCOL's researchers, but their cohort had different results. They found that students *were*

affected by little or limited contact with classmates and by interactions with teachers who did not adequately respond to their questions. The means for these variables at UCOL were 3.7 and 3.6, respectively, tending toward *agreement.*

UATX also reported that its respondents did not have academic difficulties due to external factors. However, the researchers cited two items that could be worth exploring in more depth: those concerned with *demanding teachers* and *distractions that inhibit studying.* Combined *agreement* responses, 44% and 48% respectively, to these two variables were also noted by UAEH researchers, who observed that when nearly half of students are negatively affected, a closer look at the variables and their influence may be indicated. At UV, where students' responses suggested they did not perceive the external variables as problematic, the researchers considered *demanding teachers* as one of four variables with a mean close to 3.0 which they judged as potentially problematic. The other variables cited were *distractions that inhibit studying*, *administrative processes,* and *complex course content*. At UCOL, the means for *administrative procedures* and the "supporting" *administrative processes,* 3.6 and 3.5 respectively, tended toward *agreement*. The researchers cited the university's course-payment system as a fitting example of how administrative systems may adversely affect students.

Factor 5: Students' perceptions of academic difficulties due to internal factors

In all the participating universities, internal factors were not found to be major contributors to the students' academic performance. In general the means for the variables were low. The highest mean reported was by UAT where the *family problems* variable resulted in a mean of 4.0 (*Agree*). This variable (along with *problems relating to others*) was also mentioned by UCOL researchers. Both variables at UCOL had means of 3.7. The

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family problems variable had the highest standard deviation (1.25), indicating variance in students' responses which is not surprising given the individual nature of what students consider problematic.

In UAEH's study, the variable that obtained the highest mean (3.1) for Factor 5 variables was *lack of stress management skills;* 40% of the students responded with *agreement.* Though the means for this variable were low (between 2.5 and 3.2) at UAA, BUAP, UCOL, and UAEMex, the researchers at these universities took note of and commented on this variable in their discussions. The variable *lack of dedication to studies* was considered worthy of note or further study by five universities -- UAA, BUAP, UAEMex, UAEH, and UV. At UAA, slightly more than one fourth of the students signaled *agreement* that this variable affected their academic performance; at BUAP, 46% of students expressed *agreement*; at UAEH, 36% of respondents felt the same. While the mean for this variable at UAEMex was relatively low, 2.7, (showing *disagreement*), researchers proposed that students may have underestimated what affects their performance. At UV, just under one third of the students chose an *agreement* option for this variable and overall, the variable had a mean of 2.7. The variable *personal problems* was noted in the discussions of four universities: at UAA, the data suggested this variable was the main cause of difficulty for students; at UCOL, the variable had a mean of 3.4; at UAEMex a low mean of 2.6 was recorded; and at UAEH, 40% of student respondents selected *agreement* for their response to this variable. *Poor study habits* was noted as potentially problematic at UV with a mean of 2.6. UAEMex reported a low mean of 2.5 for this variable, and UAEH reported that 44% of its population chose one of the *agreement* options for this variable.

UAA researchers remarked that of the five students who failed courses, one responded *Agree* to all the variables in Factor 5. Additionally, students who failed at least one course identified *poor study habits* and *problems relating with others* as causing difficulties in their academic performance. UAT reported that students did not seem to identify personal concerns as contributing to whatever academic difficulties they had. UATX researchers observed that personal factors affected their students' academic performance only minimally. The cumulative mean for Factor 5 responses in the UATX study was 2.12.

Factor 6: Students' vocational beliefs and expectations

Across all participating universities, it can be said that students seem to have positive expectations of the teaching vocation they are pursuing. At UAA, between 91% and 98% of respondents expressed *agreement* with the six variables in this factor, and researchers reported that students overall have positive perceptions of their future profession. Researchers at UAT mentioned that students in the research cohort had positive and high expectations regarding their professional future after graduation and that *students' commitment to the BA program* was evident in a mean of 4.4 for this variable. Similar observations were made by UV researchers whose student responses to the *commitment* variable had a mean of 4.3.

The optimistic perceptions of respondents were substantiated by other participating universities with high scores for students' beliefs about their future in the teaching profession. At BUAP, students believe (a mean of 4.3) that *the BA program will allow them to have a teaching career.* At UCOL the same variable registered the highest mean of *agreement* (4.2) of all the variables in Factor 6. A similar result was observed by the UAEH

research team who indicated that 100% of their cohort chose *agreement* with this variable, registering a mean of 4.8. Further, BUAP reported that 69% of their students *see themselves as future teachers of English.* At UCOL and UAEH, students responded similarly where this variable had means of 4.0 and 4.3 respectively. Researchers at UAEMex and UATX also observed encouraging results for this variable.

As a check of the reported students' optimism about their future as teachers, it is appropriate to consider the results for the variable *would consider changing their BA, if possible.* To summarize, the respondents expressed strong *disagreement* with the statement. UCOL reported a mean of 2.7; UAEH, 2.5; and UAEMex and UAT registered the lowest mean of 2.3. At UAA, 76% of the research population chose *disagreement* as their response to the variable.

In contrast to students' generally unified response to staying in their current BA program, there was variation in their answers to variables such as *expect to earn a good teaching salary* and *teaching English will improve economic status.* At UAEH, students' responses (a mean of 4.2) indicated that they expect their economic situation will improve upon completion of their studies. However, their expectations of *earning a good teaching salary* registered a mean of 2.9. A similar contrast in perceptions for these two variables was noted by UATX researchers. While the student respondents at UATX indicated that a job as an English teacher would help them achieve good economic status, the researchers reported that the students did not feel particularly positive about earning a good salary (the mean for the *salary-expectations* variable was 3.3). Opinion on the *good-salary* variable was a bit more positive at UAEMex, where students' responses delivered a mean of 3.5 At UAA, this variable had the highest percentage of *Neutral* responses. At both UAT and

UAEMex, researchers observed that students appear confident that their work as English teachers will improve their economic status.

All participating universities found *agreement* and general consistency in students' responses to the variables *would consider working or studying abroad* and *expect to develop professionally*. At UAEH 100% of the students chose an *agreement* response for the *work-study abroad* variable. At the other universities, means for this variable ranged from 4.0 to 4.7. Similarly, students' positive perceptions about their continuing professional development accounted for means of between 3.7 and 4.6 across all universities in this study.

Factor 7: Students' perceptions of the tutorial experience

Of the eight universities that participated in this study, two universities, UAA and UV reported that their student participants had attended very few tutoring sessions. At UV, the students completed the research questionnaire when they had just begun the first term of their BA program; in other words, they had very little experience with tutors from which to form opinions about the process. In the case of UAA, the 2013 Institutional Program of Tutorship had undergone a period of change; not until August 2014, when the participating cohort were in the third semester of their program, were students assigned designated tutors and an established tutorial schedule. In this case, the students completed the research questionnaire during the second week of the third semester with practically only an initial encounter with their tutors.

Generally, across universities participating in this research, student respondents agreed that *their tutors treat them respectfully and in an ethical manner* and that they *communicate well and show trust and empathy.* Researchers at BUAP and UAT reported

that most of their students' perceptions of variables in Factor 7 were *Neutral*; UCOL researchers observed that their students' were noncommittal about the tutoring process. At both UAEMex and UAEH the highest percentage of *disagreement* responses was recorded for the variable *tutor proposes extra activities unrelated to students' personal development.* Further, the UAEMex data indicated that the variables in Factor 7 showed the highest dispersal of ratings of all the factors in the questionnaire (all standard deviations for variables in Factor 7 were greater than 1.0). UAEMex researchers expressed the opinion that the variables chosen to measure tutorial experience may need to be reviewed and revised in a future investigation. UAEH researchers also suggested looking further at this factor to design action plans and support programs to ensure positive tutorial experiences for students.

Section C -- Students Reflect on their Experience in the BA Program

Section C of the questionnaire consisted of a single open-ended question intended to gather students' personal opinions regarding their initial experience in their respective BA programs. The data revealed that most of the respondents had positive feelings about their study program at this relatively early point in their academic trajectory.

UAA noted in their analysis of Section C responses that despite a few critical comments about the program that deserve "review and attention," most respondents were pleased with their BA. Similarly, UCOL's tally of Section C responses revealed that more than 80% of the students felt positive about their academic experience. In their analysis of Factor 3 results, the UCOL research team noted that students' degree of satisfaction at this stage of their educational trajectory could change as they face other "necessities and realities in their training and practice."

The similarity between the open question in Section C and the variables in Factor 3 in Section B of the questionnaire, *Students' perceptions of the BA program in general,* should be noted. Whereas Factor 3 tallied a more controlled response (limited to numbers in a Likert scale) as a picture of students' satisfaction, the open question provided students the opportunity to freely express their feelings – e.g., *satisfied, happy,* and *motivated* (responses from UAA students) and *good, happy, comfortable, at ease* (responses from UAEMex students). Responses received in the other universities' studies echoed similar affirmation. Indeed, students' favorable perceptions, written in their own words, concur with what was reported overall for Factor 3.

Responses to the Section C question also brought to light the value of qualitative input from research respondents. For instance, BUAP's students' perceptions of variables in Factor 1, *Students' perceptions of teachers' performance,* generated many *Neutral* responses. However, in students' written comments about how they felt in the program, details emerged in the information they chose to share – e.g., difficult subjects caused them stress; they were demotivated by teachers they perceived to be ill prepared to teach their courses. Similarly, in their Section C responses, students at UAT and at UATX expressed concerns about insufficient resources and facilities needing improvement, specifics that could not have been mentioned in the limited numerical responses tabulating perceptions of the seven identified factors and related variables.

Students' responses to the open-ended question presented researchers with opportunities for how to address their cohorts' concerns. UV researchers cited the value of exploring ways to provide additional support to "positively affect students' well-being." Such proactive steps could include initiating programs in which senior students help new students adjust to university life, providing students with timely information about taking

exams that would allow them to bypass "beginner" courses, and promoting stress-management dialogues between tutors and tutees.

Students at various universities expressed opinions about facilities and administrative or institutional practices. At UAEH, students offered suggestions related to administrative aspects of the program (the webpage, class schedules, organizational procedures) as well as learning environments (more guidance from teachers and more communication with tutors, more native speakers as resources, and the request that English be used as the teaching medium beginning with the first, rather than the third semesters, as is the current case). The UAEH researchers' analysis of the results noted the inevitability of occasional contradictions between students' qualitative and Likert-scale responses. They further observed that careful scrutiny of the wording of factors and variables in the questionnaire, ongoing review of the BA program's policies, and further inquiry into students' concerns would be appropriate responses.

Responses to the open question in Section C reinforced the belief that a qualitative component in an educational trajectory study is both relevant and needed to establish a complete picture of a cohort's academic experience. Indeed, the university research teams who posited that students' interpretations of some of the variables in Section B were not necessarily uniform suggested that qualitative follow-up questions would be useful to clarify how students comprehended the questionnaire items. Additional qualitative data on students' perceptions of variables affecting their academic performance could lead to a far richer understanding of students' experiences.

Final Comments

The findings of this multi-university study aimed at creating a meaningful profile of undergraduates at an early stage in their academic trajectories in language-teaching programs are a call to action, with respect to the BA programs themselves and to future research on students' trajectories. The conclusions from this initial study, the first step of a longitudinal investigation of educational trajectories in public universities in Mexico, reinforce the researchers' belief that there is much to be gained from responding to the current findings and building on what has been learned by taking informed steps toward monitoring the research population as they move through their programs. Through carefully determined strategies and measures based on the research findings, teachers, BA administrators, and university officials can effectively address both students' needs and the universities' broader concerns related to low completion-timetable and dropout rates. In short, meaningful action will contribute to improving the quality of higher education in Mexico.

What emerges from the findings are recommendations that encompass three broad areas for further inquiry and interventionist action: 1) opportunities for students to study abroad in English-speaking countries; 2) attention to the definition and delivery of the tutorial process as it affects students' needs and the totality of their experience in higher education; and 3) increased awareness and consideration on the part of teachers and administrators of the importance of cultivating meaningful learning environments in university classrooms.

Students' overwhelmingly positive perceptions of the *working or studying abroad* and *expect to develop professionally* variables in the research questionnaire should be viewed as a catalyst for the universities' future endeavors to expand international exchange

programs. Such positive action would lead participating universities to examine existing opportunities for scholarships and other study-abroad options at their respective institutions and investigate ways to expand them to accommodate more students. The BA programs could also explore possibilities for supporting their future graduates through exchange programs jointly constructed and promoted through the resources and global connections of the Mexican government's state and national offices of education. Another proactive measure would be the formation of partnerships with other academic institutions and socially conscious organizations and businesses in Mexico and abroad through which universities could develop academic exchange programs, pre-service training programs, and continuing-education programs for students.

Such "partnerships for learning" within Mexico would be well placed to address students' expectations concerning professional development. The partnerships could work collaboratively to coordinate educational conferences and seminars that welcome and encourage student participation. In this way, the concept and value of *growing as a professional* would be reinforced for future language teachers, and their expectations for involvement in professional-development experiences would be met. Finally, the BA programs should consider establishing opportunities for students to engage in multidisciplinary "dialogues in education" at their universities as part of a future teacher's lifelong learning beyond the classroom. To be sure, the aforementioned measures would require commitment from and careful, informed planning by language-teaching program administrators and university officials.

In fact, the findings of this study behoove the entire university community to review, invigorate, and expand their commitment to students. According to Roddan (2002), there is substantial evidence to show that extra support provided by universities does have a

significant effect on student performance and retention. Such support significantly improves success rates, exam grades, and levels of retention. The evidence, according to Roddan, highlights the fact that targeting students for intervention is beneficial and that research of this nature is worthwhile. In a similar vein, Rosenfeld & Rosenfeld (2003) point out that interventions and appropriate support services are possible after identifying the factors that influence academic performance and enable teachers to recognize students "at risk."

The second aspect of a proactive response to the findings of this study addresses tutorials, an academic support intended, at its best, to serve students as individuals and attend to their needs which can vary widely and span academic, professional, and personal concerns. In response to students' *perceptions of the tutoring programs,* an important element in developing purposeful action would be an in-depth examination of the objectives and the realities of the tutorial process in language-teaching programs and the gap between the two. Students' detached, neutral, and less-than-enthusiastic responses to the variables related to tutoring experiences suggest that further evaluation of the entire process is called for. Interventionist measures in this area could involve careful selection of tutors and periodic in-service training for tutors to ensure they are fully prepared to anticipate challenges and respond resourcefully to students' ever-changing needs. Updating tutors' training would further develop their expertise and confidence in facilitating sessions on stress-management techniques and improving study habits, two variables many students perceived as contributing to their academic difficulties.

A similarly forward-looking response to the study's findings on tutorials would include regular reviews (perhaps using interviews and focus-group dialogues that would generate qualitative information) of students' tutorial expectations, detailed descriptions of

the tutoring they receive, and feedback on tutoring sessions at various stages of their academic trajectory. From this data, coordinated efforts (input from students, tutors, and administrators) at making thoughtful revisions in the tutoring programs would contribute to a more positive student experience. As reiterated by a number of researchers in this study, the importance of students' candid contributions about what they need and want from tutors (as well as the BA program in general) cannot be overemphasized. Similarly, the university's commitment to creating a tutorial environment where substantive interactions lead to a more holistic and integrated educational experience for students cannot be overstated.

The third broad sphere in need of intentional inquiry and action based on the findings of this academic-trajectory study involves learning environments in higher education, specifically the need for greater attention to the importance of cultivating a meaningful learning atmosphere. Burton & Dowling (2005) state that teachers face a challenge in today's tertiary education sector, and that is creating "an environment for learning that is inclusive and caters to the increasing diversity among student populations." Tertiary educators, according to McKenzie and Schweitzer (2001), particularly those teaching students in the early stages of their university experience, "need to take a fresh look at the learning environment they provide and how it caters to vast differences in backgrounds, abilities, skills, and learning styles."

Coupling such observations from the literature with the research population's perceptions of their teachers' performance in the classroom suggests that teachers on the faculty of teacher-training programs need to be better equipped to *identify students' strengths and limitations*, a perception held by many students who participated in this research study. Pitkethly & Prosser (2001) state that teachers need a deeper understanding

of the factors that influence learning at the faculty or school level. Teachers' awareness of and ability to assess what students know, what learning challenges they face, and what they learn from classroom encounters as well as teachers' resolve to better understand *how* their students learn are critical to the nurturing of meaningful learning environments. These aspects are as central to cultivating a relevant and vibrant learning atmosphere as the findings in this research study that show students' strong commitment to their chosen BA and their future career as teachers. How students perceive their teachers *see* them and how teachers perceive learners and interact with them can affect classroom life in both dramatic and imperceptible ways.

There are a number of actions BA programs could consider and promote to encourage positive learning environments. Most involve improved communication within the university's teaching-learning community. Arguably at the heart of the better-communication recommendation is the need for significant learning encounters between teachers and their students. A five-minute conference (either early in the semester or at the midpoint of the semester) during which students self-assess their performance and identify or reflect on their strengths and weakness in class could lead to valuable teacher-student dialogue, substantive changes in the classroom, and increased understanding and even empathy on both sides of the teaching-learning partnership. Another approach to creating relevant learning environments would be to encourage "town-hall style" sessions between students and their teacher in their own classroom. Through open and respectful dialogues, students and teachers would share their impressions and observations of the classroom's learning atmosphere (what helps and hinders their learning, for instance) with an eye toward jointly building the kind of learning community that supports learning and, at the

same time, appropriately challenges and motivates students on their individual learning paths.

Another valuable step toward encouraging classroom environments conducive to learning would be to increase and improve communication and collaboration among teachers, not only with regard to designing program materials and responding to the university's administrative procedures but to gaining knowledge about students' academic history and their behavior in other courses. Teachers can often educate other teachers about students' interests and their special needs, based on *their* classroom experiences with the same students, thereby providing background information useful for planning learning opportunities likely to generate positive student response. Another communication effort worth consideration by BA programs would be the establishment of regular in-service presentations by faculty members on relevant research addressing classroom concerns in higher education. A collegial forum for professional dialogue on developing teachers' awareness of students as individual learners, identifying characteristics of meaningful learning environments, and improving teachers' praxis using theory-into-practice approaches could be grounded in the exchange of ideas and the acknowledgment of challenges in service to solving problems that university contexts share.

Much remains to be done to enhance students' chances for academic success and personal growth in BA teacher-education programs at public universities in Mexico. The study's findings offer direction and perspective. Ongoing self-assessments, vigilant attention to students' realities and monitoring their academic trajectories, and increased awareness of the evolving professional needs of teachers in 21st-century language classrooms will stimulate purposeful action. Consideration of the multi-pronged recommendations suggested by the findings of this first installment of a longitudinal study

of educational trajectories will require diligence and perseverance from BA program administrators, teachers, and university officials. The development of corresponding measures, the researchers believe, can strengthen and deepen the academic programs that educate and train future teachers of English and other languages. A commitment to thoughtful action serves the shared hope that Mexico's foreign-language students and society at large will be the ultimate beneficiaries.

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GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

ACT -- atypical completion timetable. *A term used to describe the schedule or trajectory of students who (for whatever reason) are out of sync (timewise) with the group with which they started the program... Many students who follow an atypical completion timetable* do *complete the BA program, but not according to the traditional timetable of eight semesters. (See TCT.)*

ANUIES -- Asociación Nacional de Universidades e Instituciones de Educación Superior. *Founded in 1950, ANUIES is a non-governmental organization that participates in the formation of programs, plans, and policies for the further development of institutions of higher education in Mexico. ANUIES promotes improvement in the areas of teaching, research, cultural outreach, and institutional services.*

BA -- Bachelor of Arts. *An undergraduate degree awarded for completion of a program in the liberal arts, the sciences, or both. BA programs generally take three or four years to complete, depending on the country, academic institution, specializations, etc.*

BUAP -- Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla *(Autonomous University of Puebla)*

CEFR -- Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. *A reference document designed to provide a transparent, coherent, and comprehensive basis for the development of language syllabi and curriculum guidelines, the design of teaching and learning materials, and the assessment of foreign language proficiency. The CEFR is now available in [39 languages](#).*

CENEVAL -- Centro Nacional de Evaluación para la Educación Superior. *The National Center for the Evaluation of Higher Education develops and administers a series of examinations designed to evaluate students when they complete their bachelor's level studies.*

CIEES -- Comités Interinstitucionales para la Evaluación de la Educación Superior. *Created in 1991, the Inter-institutional Committees for the Evaluation of Higher Education is devoted to the evaluation of higher education in Mexico and is the largest body for quality assurance in Mexican higher education. The organization evaluates both educational programs and institutional functions.*

COAPEHUM -- Consejo para la Acreditación de Programas Educativos en Humanidades. *The Council for the Accreditation of Educational Programs in the Humanities evaluates academic programs in the humanities with the aim of improving the programs, as well as the quality of teaching, and the training of graduates at institutions of higher education in Mexico.*

GPA -- Grade Point Average. *The mean of all the grades for all the classes within a semester, identified marking period, or specific length of time within a student's trajectory of study.*

PhD -- Doctor of Philosophy. *In English-speaking countries, the PhD is a postgraduate academic degree awarded by universities. The academic level known as a* doctorate *varies by country, institution, and time period. The term "philosophy" is used in a broad sense in conjunction with its original Greek meaning, which is "love of wisdom."*

RECALE -- Red de Cuerpos Académicos en Lenguas Extranjeras. *A network of academic institutions offering foreign language programs in Mexico.*

SEP -- Secretaría de Educación Pública. *The Mexican Secretariat of Public Education is a federal government authority with Cabinet representation and responsibility for overseeing the development and implementation of national educational policy and school standards in Mexico.*

SOV profile -- Sistema de Orientación Vocacional. *A questionnaire completed by applicants to different BA programs. Based on their responses, descriptive profiles of the students are generated. During an admissions interview, the applicants present the results/profiles to the programs to which they are applying as a measure of their readiness and suitability.*

SPSS program -- Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. *A statistical program used to analyze data.*

TOEFL – Test of English to Speakers of Foreign Languages. *Administered by Educational Testing Service, the TOEFL exam is recognized by thousands of colleges, universities, and agencies in more than 130 countries.*

TCT -- Typical Completion Timetable. *A term used to describe the usual academic trajectory in which students complete the credit requirements for a BA degree in Mexico in eight semesters.*

UAA -- Universidad Autónoma de Aguascalientes *(Aguascalientes State University)*

UAEH – Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo (*Autonomous University of the State of Hidalgo)*

UAEMex - Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México *(Autonomous University of the State of Mexico)*

UAT -- Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas *(Autonomous University of Tamaulipas)*

UATX -- Universidad Autónoma de Tlaxcala *(Autonomous University of Tlaxcala)*

UCOL -- Universidad de Colima *(University of Colima)*

UV -- Universidad Veracruzana *(University of Veracruz)*

APPENDIX

CUESTIONARIO SOBRE TRAYECTORIA DE LOS ESTUDIANTES DE LICENCIATURAS EN ENSEÑANZA DEL INGLÉS Y PROGRAMAS AFINES
Cohorte Generacional 1302 (Agosto-Diciembre 2013)

Estimado (a) alumno (a), este cuestionario tiene como propósito identificar información sobre La trayectoria Escolar de los Estudiantes de la Licenciatura en Enseñanza de la Lengua Inglesa y campos afines, así como posibles factores relacionados con tu formación profesional.
SECCIÓN A. Instrucciones: La siguiente información que proporciones es totalmente confidencial. Por favor contesta con toda sinceridad, asegúrate de que tu letra y número sean claros y legibles.

DATOS GENERALES

1. Nombre: _____2. Número de cuenta/Matrícula: _____

3.Teléfono_____ 4.Correo Electrónico:

_____

5. Edad: _____ 6.Sexo: Femenino ( ) Masculino ( )

7. Estado civil: Soltero ( ) Casado ( ) Otros:_____

8. ¿Tienes hijos? Si ( ) No ( ) ¿Cuántos?: _____ ¿De qué edades?: _____

9. ¿Si eres mujer, estás embarazada? No( ) Si ( )¿Si eres hombre, tu pareja está embarazada? No ( ) Sí ( )

10. ¿Cuál es tu lugar de procedencia?:_____

11. ¿Actualmente donde vives?:_____

CONDICIONES SOCIOECONÓMICAS

12. ¿Cuál es la escolaridad de tu papá?: _____

13. ¿Cuál es la ocupación de tu papá?

_____

14. ¿Cuál es la escolaridad de tu mamá?: _____

15. ¿Cuál es la ocupación de tu mamá?:

_____

16. ¿Cuál es la escolaridad de tu pareja?:_____

17. ¿Cuál es la ocupación de tu pareja?:_____

18. El recursos económico con el que cuentas semanalmente para tus estudios es:
    Bajo ( ) Mediano ( ) Alto ( )

19. ¿Trabajas? No ( ) Sí ( ) ¿Cuantas horas al día trabajas) :

_____

20. ¿Económicamente depende alguien de ti? No ( ) Sí ( ) Número de personas:

_____

21. ¿Económicamente dependes de: Tus padres ( ) Familiares ( ) Tu trabajo ( ) Beca ( )
    Esposo ( ) Pareja ( )
Otro:_____

22. ¿Tienes algún otro ingreso mensual? No ( ) Sí ( ) ¿A cuánto asciende:

$_____ mensuales

23. ¿Tu trabajo se relaciona con tu carrera? Nada ( ) Casi nada ( ) Poco ( )   Mucho ( )

24. ¿Vives en casa propia o rentas? _____ ¿Con quién vives?

_____

TRAYECTORIA ESCOLAR PREVIA

Medio superior

25. ¿Cuál es tu escuela de procedencia del nivel medio superior?: _____

¿De qué tipo?: Escuela pública ( ) Escuela privada ( ) Escuela abierta ( ) Otra ( )

¿Cuál?_____ ¿De qué Estado? _____

26. ¿Cuál fue tu promedio general de nivel medio superior?: :_____

Licenciatura

27. Año de ingreso: _____ Promedio general del semestre 1° _____ 2°_____, o

cuatrimestre: 1°_____ 2°_____ 3°_____

28. ¿Tienes materias reprobadas? No ( ) Sí ( ) ¿Cuáles?:

_____

_____

29. ¿Cuáles son las materias que se te han dificultado más?

_____

_____

¿Por qué?

_____

_____

30. ¿Cuáles son las materias que menos se te han dificultado?

_____

¿Por qué?

_____

_____

TUTORIA

31. ¿Cuentas con tutor en la licenciatura? Si ( ) No ( ) ¿Qué tipo de tutoría tienes? Individual (
)

Grupal ( ) Ambas ( )

32. ¿Cuál es el motivo por el que asistes?_____

_____

33. ¿Estás becado? No ( ) Sí ( ) ¿Qué tipo de beca(s)? _____

Monto de la(s) beca(s) mensual: $_____ $_____

SECCIÓN B. Instrucciones. Lee cuidadosamente y contesta lo que mejor describa tu situación considerando estos valores:

1: Totalmente en desacuerdo 2: En desacuerdo 3.Neutral 4: De acuerdo 5: Totalmente de acuerdo

Factor 1. Percepción del docente

No.	Preguntas	1	2	3	4	5
1.	Los docentes te retroalimentaron por tu participación					
2.	Los docentes motivaron tu desempeño escolar					
3.	Los docentes te dieron sugerencias para mejorar tu desempeño					
4.	Los docentes identificaron tus fortalezas					
5.	Los docentes identificaron tus limitaciones.					
6.	Los docentes promovieron actividades en el aula para desarrollar el pensamiento crítico en sus estudiantes.					
7.	Los docentes tuvieron expectativas positivas de tu desempeño					
8.	Los docentes te explicaron claramente los contenidos					
9.	Los contenidos del programa por asignatura fueron cubiertos por el maestro					
10.	Los docentes estimularon la participación activa de los alumnos en las discusiones académicas					
11.	Los docentes observaron tu desempeño en el desarrollo de tus proyectos de trabajo.					
12.	Los docentes impartieron temas a partir de tus conocimientos previos					

Factor 2 Percepción de conocimientos teóricos y prácticos durante la licenciatura

No	Preguntas	1	2	3	4	5
13.	Los conocimientos aprendidos durante los ciclos previos son útiles para tu formación profesional					
14.	Las actividades planeadas en el programa de licenciatura se realizaron para tu formación					
15.	Los conocimientos adquiridos durante el semestre son vigentes con relación a tu formación profesional actual					
16.	Aplicas lo aprendido a situaciones de la vida cotidiana					
17.	Tu formación en la licenciatura contribuye para mejorar tu capacidad de					

No	Preguntas	1	2	3	4	5
	crítica					
18.	Las competencias y conocimientos teóricos adquiridos durante el semestre te permitirán elaborar diagnósticos de problemas en los próximos semestres.					

Factor 3. Percepción del programa de licenciatura en la formación

No	Preguntas	1	2	3	4	5
19.	Tu experiencia en los ciclos previos te permiten constatar que tu programa educativo es de excelencia					
20.	Tu formación en el semestre influyó para aumentar tus habilidades para trabajar en equipo					
21.	Las materias de tu programa son relevantes en tu formación					
22.	Los contenidos de las materias son actuales					
23.	Las temáticas en tu programa deben actualizarse					
24.	El número de horas dedicadas a las materias dentro del aula don suficientes para cubrirlas					
25.	Los profesores trabajan colaborativamente en el diseño de los programas de las materias					

Factor 4. Percepción de dificultades académicas debido a factores externos

No.	Preguntas	1	2	3	4	5
26.	Tienes dificultades académicas porque los profesores son exigentes					
27.	Tu insatisfacción por los contenidos te genera dificultades académicas					
28.	Los trámites administrativos te provocan dificultades académicas					
29.	El grado de complejidad de los contenidos te genera dificultades académicas					
30.	Te distraes con facilidad al estudiar					
31.	Tus dificultades académicas se deben a que la carrera no cumple con tus expectativas					
32.	Tus dificultades académicas se deben a que tienes problemas económicos					
33.	Las relaciones con tus compañeros afectan tu desempeño académico					
34.	Las relaciones con tus profesores afectan tu desempeño académico					
35.	Los procesos administrativos te generan dificultades académicas					

Factor 5. Percepción de dificultades académicas debido a factores internos

No.	Preguntas	1	2	3	4	5
36.	Tus conocimientos previos te ocasionan dificultades académicas					
37.	Tu falta de dedicación en el estudio hace que tengas dificultades académicas					
38.	Tu dificultad para relacionarte con los demás afectan tu rendimiento académico					
39.	Tu falta de interés por los contenidos hace que tengas dificultades académicas					
40.	Tu falta de control del estrés te genera dificultades académicas					
41.	Tus problemas personales se reflejan en tu rendimiento académico					
42.	Tienes dificultades académicas porque tienes dificultades en tus hábitos de estudio					
43.	Tienes dificultades escolares debido a problemas familiares					

Factor 6. Expectativas del estudiante

No.	Preguntas	1	2	3	4	5
44.	Te ves como un docente de lengua(s) en el futuro					
45.	La carrera que estudias te permitirá trabajar como docente					
46.	Concluir tus estudios de esta licenciatura te permitirá mejorar tu posición económica					
47.	Esta es la carrera que quieres estudiar					
48.	Si tuvieras la oportunidad te cambiarías a otra carrera					
49.	Te ves desarrollando las funciones que establece el perfil de egreso de tu licenciatura					
50.	Concluir la licenciatura te permitirá la posibilidad de trabajar o estudiar en otro país					
51.	El egresado de esta licenciatura es bien pagado					
52.	Existen suficientes fuentes de empleo de acuerdo a mi perfil					

Factor 7. Percepción de la tutoría

No.	Preguntas	1	2	3	4	5
53.	El tutor te atiende con respeto y ética durante sus asesorías y supervisión					
54.	El tutor supervisa con calidad tu trayectoria académica					
55.	El tutor modela en todo momento correcciones y sugerencias en tus trabajos					
56.	El tutor respeta en tiempo las citas de supervisión de tus trabajos					
57.	El tutor favorece la comunicación, la confianza y la empatía					
58.	El tutor muestra compromiso y responsabilidad en tu formación como estudiante					
59.	El tutor facilita los procesos para la obtención de becas					
60.	El tutor te apoya socialmente para la obtención de tus metas					
61.	El tutor te apoya culturalmente para la obtención de tus metas					
62.	El tutor te apoya emocionalmente para la obtención de tus metas					
63.	El tutor te designa actividades distintas a las académicas que ayudan a tu desarrollo integral					
64.	El tutor te encomienda a actividades que no se relacionan con tu desarrollo personal					

SECCIÓN C: Instrucciones. Por favor, contesta la siguiente pregunta.

En general, ¿cómo te sientes en este primer ciclo escolar?

_____
_____