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Mra. Bertha Guadalupe Paredes Zepeda
Dra. María Cruz Chong Barreiro

Studies of student trajectories in language teaching programs in Mexico

Mra. Bertha Guadalupe Paredes Zepeda
Dra. María Cruz Chong Barreiro

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.

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Mra. Bertha Guadalupe Paredes Zepeda
Dra. María Cruz Chong Barreiro

MRA. 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 UAEN. 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 UAEN.

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Bertha Guadalupe Paredes Zepeda
María Cruz Chong Barreiro
(coordinadoras)



Universidad Veracruzana



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Pozuelo de Alarcón
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**AN INITIAL STUDY OF THE ACADEMIC TRAJECTORY OF THE 2013
COHORT IN THE UNDERGRADUATE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING
PROGRAM AT THE AUTONOMOUS UNIVERSITY OF PUEBLA**

*Rebeca Elena Tapia Carlín
María del Rocío Vélez Tenorio
Eliphelet Rivera Cuayahuitl
Julio Brandon Pérez Flores*

Introduction

Higher education in Mexico must continue its efforts to develop relevant programs and improve the caliber of the educational services it provides. According to Muñoz and Suárez (2012), Mexican public universities face a multipronged challenge. They must not only serve a large number of students, but also increase the number and type of educational programs they offer, while improving the quality of the programs and increasing their budgets. Mexican higher education in the past decade has been aligned with policies based on strategic planning, evaluation, and financial control. These tactical measures have improved the efficiency of universities and how they serve society. Thus, the government has become an external evaluator that seeks to find quantitative improvement by applying business models to academic processes.

This philosophy requires universities to transform their goals into numerical targets. According to this strategic-planning philosophy, such quantitative referents represent a first step to obtaining quality; however, qualitative changes and other improvements are also needed (Muñoz and Suárez, 2012). To achieve quality in higher education, it is necessary to look for ways to generate improvement in every aspect of the delivery of educational programs. Looking at students' experiences in higher education is a natural place to begin

an analysis of where improvements are needed. Further, conducting studies that follow students' academic trajectories may provide information useful for implementing lasting advances.

This chapter reports on a case study (part of a coordinated national research project tracing academic trajectories in several public universities in Mexico) of the 2013 cohort at the beginning of their undergraduate trajectory in the English Language Teaching (ELT) program at the Autonomous University of Puebla, Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (BUAP).

It is important to understand the context of the research described here. The Autonomous University of Puebla is one of five public universities in Mexico belonging to the network of macro universities of Mexico. (Macro universities are the largest and considered the most important institutions of higher education in the country.) BUAP has 151 programs that cover high school levels, Bachelors of Arts (BA) programs, and graduate degrees. In the state of Puebla, it can be said that BUAP serves 34% of the students studying at the BA level. External evaluators have certified all the BA programs at the university. There are 353 researchers at BUAP who belong to the National Association of National Researchers (SNI-CONACYT). The university consists of 12 campuses and five regional high schools; this means that BUAP provides education to 80% of the students in the state of Puebla. Internationalization is an important feature of the university as evidenced by its 219 agreements with universities and academic networks around the world. BUAP can be described as a leading university in Mexico with programs recognized nationally and internationally.

The faculty of languages at BUAP offers language courses – eight different languages -- to more than 50,000 students ranging in age from eight to 80 years. The

faculty of languages has access to a Language Center (CELE), three Houses of Language which offer English, French, and German at advanced levels, as well as five language laboratories, and an updated library.

Teacher education at the Autonomous University of Puebla comprises four programs: two BAs in English Language Teaching (one on campus and another as a distance-learning program), a BA in French Language Teaching, and an MA in ELT. The curricular model of the BA in ELT aims to educate pre-service teachers through an integrated curriculum addressing five areas: critical thinking, project learning, humanistic education, technology and communication, and foreign-language competence. This program is intended to be completed in four years, although the time is flexible, as students may take up to six years to finish the program. The courses students take are related to the areas of foreign language, linguistics, research, culture, and integral education. In addition, students may identify one of two areas of specialization -- *Teaching Spanish as a Foreign Language* or *Translation*. The program operates under a credit system. Students take a minimum of 11 and a maximum of 32 credits in regular semesters (which are, in fact, four-month periods). There are three semesters in an academic year: spring, summer, and winter. In the summer semester students may take a maximum of 18 credits.

Before moving to specific details of the BUAP study, it is important to review the literature related to language-teacher education and school trajectories.

Cross (2003) mentions that language-teacher education is a key factor in education because “the quality of teaching determines to a great extent the quality of education” (p. 41). Wallace (1991) suggests that teacher-education courses should be broadly educative to provide personal and intellectual development, and they should be fully professional to prepare trainees to become competent and to foster continuing professional development.

Cortes, Cárdenas, and Nieto (2013) point out that language teachers need to develop four types of competences: communicative, linguistic, pedagogic, and investigative. These competences foster integral education and prepare pre-service teachers to become professionals. Furthermore, Díaz and Quiroz (2013) suggest that integral education relates to educating human beings as whole persons. According to these scholars, integral education includes an ethical component integrating values and norms and an education that links theory with practice in a natural way. Thus, teacher education worldwide can draw from these recommendations to educate future language teachers and, in a broader sense, improve the quality of education.

Turning to the concept of educational trajectory, two definitions appear pertinent to the discussion and analysis of the research reported in this chapter. One definition of educational trajectory proposed by Barranco and Santacruz (1995; in García and Barrón, 2011) identifies a trajectory as a student's academic behavior, that is, his/her academic performance, history of grades earned, and record indicating the subjects he/she has passed or failed. An analysis of school trajectories is usually done with a specific cohort of students -- a group of students that started their studies at the same time. (The BUAP study draws mainly on the Barranco and Santacruz definition of educational trajectory.)

The second definition is provided by Flores, Batalova, and Fix (2012), who conducted a study in the United States. In their work, they identified educational trajectories as educational *outcomes* linked to results on standardized tests. This second definition underscores the fact that the term *trajectories* goes beyond merely obtaining a final numerical mark, or grade. (This definition will be relevant in the Conclusions portion of this chapter.)

When analyzing studies related to school trajectories, two main areas surface as key components for understanding: dropout rates and graduation rates. Dropping out is a problem because when students leave their program of study, they are not able to complete their studies and, therefore, their absence affects the graduation rate (Velazco and Estrada, 2012). *Graduation rate* is a concept that relates to the efficiency of a program as it compares the number of students in a cohort at the beginning of their studies with the number of students of the same cohort who successfully complete their studies.

Using dropout and graduation rates as markers of educational efficiency, the question of what factors influence academic success logically follows. McKenzie and Schweitzer (2001) state there are four types of factors that affect academic success: academic, psychosocial, cognitive perception, and demographic. Academic factors refer to academic history and grade point averages (GPAs); psychosocial factors are linked to students' integration both in the academic environment at the university and in the community of their cohort, i.e., their standing and relationships with their classmates. Cognitive-perception factors refer to students' perceptions about their own skills and their academic performance. Finally, demographic aspects include students' age, their parents' education, and the financial support they have to complete their studies.

Guided by the literature on educational trajectories and aware of the factors that affect students' university experience, the research team set out to study an identified cohort in the ELT program at BUAP.

Methodology

As stated earlier, a case-study approach using survey research was chosen. This case study was intrinsic; that is, it was conducted "to better understand the cases, not because they

represent a specific problem” (Sandín, 2003, p. 174). Due to the fact that participants in the study cohort share some temporal common characteristics, the research design can also be described as an initial step in a longitudinal study (Rasinger, 2010) of academic trajectories.

The study participants comprised a sample of 30 students chosen at random from the cohort that began the BA in ELT program in August 2013. The participants represent a subset of the 352 students who entered the program at the same time. To gather data, the researchers administered a questionnaire to the study subjects in the summer term that, as explained above, is the second semester of the year. The questionnaire was based on and adapted from an instrument proposed by García and Barrón (2011). The title of the original instrument was “Cuestionario sobre trayectorias escolares de licenciaturas en enseñanza del inglés y programas afines,” *Questionnaire on school trajectories for the BAs in ELT and similar programs*. (The instrument was also administered to a number of BA in ELT groups at other public universities in Mexico to generate data for comparison at the national level.)

The questionnaire, presented in Spanish, was organized into three sections. Section A aimed to obtain general information about the students, including their previous school trajectory and their socioeconomic background. Section B evaluated seven factors chosen because of their potential effect on students’ academic trajectories. In this section of the questionnaire students used an *agreement-disagreement* Likert rating scale to respond to variables associated with the seven factors listed below.

- *Perception of teachers’ performance*
- *Perception of the theoretical and practical knowledge of the courses*
- *Perception of the BA program in teacher education*
- *Perception of academic difficulties due to external factors*
- *Perception of academic difficulties due to personal factors*
- *Vocational beliefs and expectations*
- *Perception of the tutoring process*

The third part of the questionnaire, Section C, was reserved for open-ended comments related to how students felt in the teacher-education program. Their responses contributed significantly because of the various issues they suggested.

To administer the questionnaire, the cohort of student-participants assembled in a classroom on a specific date. The research instrument was administered by volunteers who were given appropriate instructions for accomplishing the task. After students completed the questionnaire and before they left the classroom, the researchers checked that all items of the questionnaire had been answered. (The researchers are grateful to the students who participated in the study.)

Students' responses to the questionnaire were processed and analyzed, and the resulting numbers and percentages were obtained. Responses to Section A are reported in both text and tables. Responses to Section B are displayed both as raw numbers and percentages in tables and further analyzed within the body of the chapter. Commentaries that accompany the results from each section of the questionnaire reflect the researchers' analysis of each factor and related variables and highlight the significant findings. A sample of students' written responses to the open question in Section C is included in a table followed by researchers' interpretations.

Results and Discussion of Results

The results of the instrument are organized in three sections. The data presented in the first tables represent students' responses to items in Section A of the questionnaire.

Table 1 describes the research sample in general. As the table indicates, most of the participants of the cohort are male (61.3%) which is particularly significant for a BA in ELT, where the female population is usually dominant. In the case of BUAP, over 50% of

the students in the total BA in ELT population *are* female, which indicates that the cohort under study are an atypical sample of the groups at the faculty. It is also significant that all the participants graduated from a *public* high school, which suggests they may come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and families with limited economic resources. In most cases, the students in this study are the first generation in their families to have access to higher education.

Table 1 **Demographic Profile of the Student-Participants**

Cohort	Sex		Age							Marital Status			Type of High School	
	M	F	18	19	20	21	22	24	40	Single	Free Union	Married	Public	Private
30 students	22	8												
			3	13	7	3	1	2	1	28	1	1	30	0

As for the question about the students' hometowns, the data show that 12 participants are from Puebla city, three from Tlaxcala, two from Tecamachalco, and two from Tlachichuca. The remaining students are from smaller towns in Puebla State or come from other states in the region, namely, Hidalgo, Oaxaca, the state of Mexico, and Mexico City. The data indicate that there are nearly twice as many students from other towns or cities as students from Puebla which is significant, given the distance from their hometowns to the university. This finding indicates that some students commute every day from their communities to the BUAP campus, which is challenging in terms of time and money. Students whose hometowns are farther away live on their own, away from their families. They rent small rooms and have part-time jobs to sustain themselves in the city; the researchers recognize that these circumstances may affect their academic performance.

The third item in Section A of the questionnaire was related to the education levels of the participants' parents. The findings show that the greatest number of parents (37) studied at primary and secondary levels. Thirteen parents completed high school. Five

parents have had higher education experience. Students reported that two parents were illiterate and that three were deceased. These demographic findings support the aforementioned observation that the majority of students belong to the first generation of students in their families to have access to higher education. One can surmise that in many cases most of the family income is invested in the child's university education.

Table 2 presents information about the students' parents' occupations. The data for mothers' occupations show that nearly two thirds of the mothers are homemakers whose work provides no extra income for the families. Eleven mothers have jobs in a variety of occupations; of these, three (two teachers and one nurse) appear to have a degree.

Table 2 **Parents' Occupations**

Mothers		Fathers			
Occupation	Frequency	Occupation	Frequency	Occupation	Frequency
Homemaker	19	Deceased	3	Mechanic	2
Factory Worker	2	Taxi Driver	3	Veterinarian	1
Cleaner	1	Worker	2	Peasant	2
Hairdresser	2	Driver	3	Salesperson	4
Merchant	1	Teacher	1	Technician	1
Employee	2	Load Transporter	1	Merchant	2
Teacher	2	Cook	1	Security Guard	1
Nurse	1	Book Maker	1	Artisan	1
				Gardener	1

The remaining mothers have low-income jobs, such as cleaners, employees, and factory workers. Overall, the fathers' and mothers' occupations seem to be in keeping with the socioeconomic status of the students in this study.

The next item in the questionnaire focused on the economic resources supporting students' studies. Their responses indicate that two thirds (21) of the students depend economically on their parents' support; one third (9) work to support themselves and their academic pursuits. These data confirm that the majority of students, who come from rural

contexts, depend on families with low incomes. As mentioned earlier, most of these dependent students often need to find part-time jobs to satisfy their financial needs. This fact likely impacts their academic performance and may lead some students to drop out of school.

Table 3 offers a summary of the academic performance of the participants. The data reveal that two thirds are students with high scores, and one third are students who have failed subjects and have lower scores. Ten percent of the students had GPAs of 9.0 or above, while the remaining 90% earned GPAs below 9.0. This finding is significant

Table 3 Grade Point Average and Academic Performance

GPA and Academic Record	Students	Percentage
GPA of 9.0 or 10.0	3	10%
GPA below 9.0	17	57%
GPA below 9.0 with one failed one subject	5	16.5%
GPA below 9.0 with two or more failed subjects	5	16.5%

considering that students at BUAP can obtain a BA degree automatically if they complete their program with an 8.5 GPA and without having failed a course. The results presented in Table 3 indicate that the grade averages for the majority of the cohort fall below the 9.0 level, which suggests that these learners may need additional academic support as they proceed through the BA.

The next section of this chapter presents students' responses to items from Section B of the questionnaire dealing with factors affecting their university experience. Raw data, percentages, means, and standard deviations are presented in tables and subsequently analyzed.

For Factor 1, *Perceptions of Teachers' Performance*, most of the students' responses registered in the *neutral* category. This could indicate that the procedures for

giving feedback to students (how teachers respond to student performance and behavior in the classroom) may not be clear to students. Another possible explanation for the high number of *neutral* responses is that the way feedback is given may not be well defined, and for this reason, the students may not recognize feedback when it is given. The significant findings for Factor 1 surface in the responses to variables 3 and 6 as shown in Table 4. A sizeable majority of the student-respondents (73%) perceive that their teachers provide suggestions for improvement in their academic work and 70% report that teachers encourage and/or stimulate the development of their critical-thinking skills.

Table 4 (Factor 1) **Students' Perceptions of Teachers' Performance**

Variable – Teachers...	Totally Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Totally Disagree	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. Provide feedback on students' participation	6.6%	33.3%	56%	3.3%	0%	3.4	0.68
2. Motivate students to improve	13%	40%	40%	6.6%	0%	3.8	0.81
3. Offer suggestions for improvement	23%	50%	20%	3.3%	3.3%	3.6	0.94
4. Identify students' strengths	6.6%	26%	43%	17%	6.6%	3.1	0.99
5. Identify students' limitations	10%	17%	50%	17%	6.6%	3.8	1.02
6. Stimulate critical thinking	20%	50%	26%	3.3%	0%	3.6	0.78
7. Have positive expectations of students	6.6%	43%	50%	0%	0%	3.7	0.27
8. Explain content clearly	13%	46%	30%	10%	0%	3.4	0.85
9. Adhere to the syllabus	20%	43%	30%	6.6%	0%	3.0	0.86
10. Encourage academic discussion	17%	36%	46%	0%	0%	3.5	0.75
11. Observe students' performance	13%	30%	46%	10%	0%	3.7	0.86
12. Are mindful of students' previous knowledge	6.6%	43%	40%	6.6%	3.3%	3.4	0.86

Table 5 below addresses Factor 2 in Section B of the questionnaire: *Students' Perceptions of the Theoretical and Practical Knowledge of the Courses*. Most of the participants' answers were again neutral regarding the group of variables related to this

factor. The main findings appear in responses to variables 13 (*Knowledge in courses is useful*) and 18 (*Courses contribute to problem solving*). More than 76% of students indicated that knowledge in their courses is useful to them for their professional education, and 83% perceived that the content of their courses would contribute to future problem solving. These opinions or impressions suggest that teachers are doing something in their lessons to make them relevant and/or significant for students, and not simply presenting them as curricular components. One could posit that teachers may be helping students to see the usefulness of the courses beyond the classroom.

Table 5 (Factor 2) **Students' Perceptions of the Theoretical and Practical Knowledge of the Courses**

Variable	Totally Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Totally Disagree	Mean	Standard Deviation
13. Knowledge in courses is useful	43%	33.3%	23%	0%	0%	4.2	0.81
14. Planned activities contribute to learning	30%	20%	43%	6.6%	0%	3.7	0.98
15. Knowledge provided is up-to-date	26%	43%	20%	6.6%	3.3%	3.8	1.02
16. Knowledge can be used in daily life	20%	43%	33.3%	0%	3.3%	3.4	0.90
17. Courses improve critical-thinking skills	36%	33.3%	26%	3.3%	0%	4.0	0.89
18. Courses contribute to problem solving	30%	53%	17%	0%	0%	4.1	0.68

Table 6 looks at Factor 3, *Students' Perceptions of the BA Program in General*. The students' responses to the related variables were clustered around the *neutral* area, with no significant findings emerging. What is noteworthy in this Table, however, are the responses for variables 20 and 21. Sixty-three percent (combined *agreement* responses) of the students perceived that their courses foster the development of skills related to group work. This suggests students recognize that teachers organize activities that promote group work, a very pertinent and useful competence for them as future teachers. The other important finding in this table is that 66% of the participants perceived that the content of their

courses is relevant. In other words, they believe that what they are learning in their courses is appropriate for their professional future in language teaching.

Table 6 (Factor 3) **Students' Perceptions of the BA Program in General**

Variable	Totally Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Totally Disagree	Mean	Standard Deviation
19. Program has high standards	3.3%	40%	43%	10%	3.3%	3.3	0.84
20. Courses foster the development of students' skills in group work	13%	50%	26%	10%		3.7	0.84
21. Content of courses is relevant	23%	43%	13%	20%		3.7	1.06
22. Content of courses is up-to-date	23%	26%	46%	3.3%		3.7	0.88
23. Content of courses needs updating	26%	30%	43%			3.8	0.83
24. Hours allotted for courses are adequate to cover course content	3.3%	46%	26%	23%		3.2	0.88
25. Teachers work collaboratively to design program materials	6.6%	33%	43%	10%	6.6%	3.2	0.97

Table 7 depicts students' perceptions of academic difficulties they have had stemming from or influenced by outside factors and circumstances. Many participants' answers reflected that external factors had a *neutral* effect on whatever academic problems they experienced. There were no significant findings in this table due to the fact that students did not appear to have strong opinions of these specific variables. However, an important result for Factor 4 in the research questionnaire is that 30% of the participants expressed agreement with the variable, *dissatisfaction with course content*. It may be worth exploring why students signaled this level of disapproval of the content of their courses. The researchers are aware that about 30% of the students enrolled in the BA program do not want to be language teachers. They are in the program because they want to learn English and use the language in other fields, such as tourism. The researchers propose that conducting interviews with

the members of this cohort could be beneficial in order to gather more information about what influenced the relatively high *dissatisfaction with course content* rating.

Table 7 (Factor 4) **Students' Perceptions of Academic Difficulties due to External Factors**

Variable	Totally Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Totally Disagree	Mean	Standard Deviation
26. Demanding teachers	3.3%	20%	33.3%	26%	17%	2.7	1.09
27. Dissatisfaction with course content	3.3%	30%	40%	20%	6.6%	3.0	0.96
28. Administrative processes	3.3%	20%	33.3%	33.3%	10%	2.7	1.01
29. Complex course content	0%	20%	36%	30%	13 %	2.6	0.96
30. Distractions that inhibit studying	6.6%	26%	30%	30%	6.6%	3.0	1.07
31. Program not meeting students' expectations	3.3%	13%	26%	26%	30%	2.4	1.16
32. Presence of economic problems	6.6%	26%	40%	17%	10%	3.0	1.07
33. Relationships with classmates	0%	6.6%	26%	23%	43%	2.0	1.00
34. Relationships with teachers	0%	13%	23%	30%	33.3%	2.2	1.05
35. Administrative procedures	0%	6.6%	46%	30%	17%	2.4	0.86

The next item (Factor 5) in Section B of the questionnaire focused on gauging students' perceptions of personal factors that have contributed to their academic difficulties. Most of the participants' answers were *neutral* for this group of variables. The data are presented in Table 8. The main findings appear in responses to variables 37 and 40. Students indicated that a *lack of dedication to their studies* (46%) and a *lack of stress-management skills* (43%) were personal factors associated with problems they had with their academic performance. It is worth mentioning that participants' answers were quite dispersed for Factor 5, suggesting students had varying opinions that reflected their individual differences.

Table 8 (Factor 5) **Students' Perceptions of Academic Difficulties due to Personal Factors**

Variable	Totally Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Totally Disagree	Mean	Standard Deviation
36. Lack of previous knowledge	10%	13%	33.3%	17%	26%	2.6	1.30
37. Lack of dedication to studies	13%	33.3%	30%	13%	10%	3.3	1.17
38. Problems relating to others	0%	20%	26%	23%	30%	2.6	1.13
39. Lack of interest in content	3.3%	26%	20%	23%	26%	2.6	1.25
40. Lack of stress-management skills	10%	33.3%	23%	33.3%	0%	3.2	1.03
41. Personal problems	6.6%	30%	40%	10%	13%	3.1	1.11
42. Poor study habits	0%	36%	36%	17%	10%	3.0	0.98
43. Family problems	3.3%	13%	20%	36%	26%	2.3	1.12

The next item in the survey instrument queried students about their vocational beliefs and expectations, Factor 6. Table 9 presents their responses in percentages. Most of the participants' answers were *neutral* for this group of variables. However, the responses to variables 44 and 45 present an important finding: Students identify strongly with what they are studying. The majority of students (69%) *see themselves as future teachers of English*. An even higher percentage (89%) *believe that the BA program will allow them to have a teaching career*. In addition, 89% of the students *would consider working or studying abroad*. This result advances the notion that these twenty-first-century learners may be beginning to consider themselves global citizens. Further, the finding indicates the importance of BUAP's reinforcing its agreements with universities abroad to foster exchange opportunities for students.

Table 9 (Factor 6) **Students' Vocational Beliefs and Expectations**

Variable	Totally Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Totally Disagree	Mean	Standard Deviation
44. Envision themselves as English teachers in the future	46%	23%	13%	6.6%	10%	3.9	1.35
45. Believe that the BA will allow them to have a teaching	43%	46%	6.6%	3.3%	0%	4.3	0.75

career							
46. Believe that completing the BA is a factor in improving their economic status	40%	26%	20%	10%	3.3%	3.9	1.16
47. Committed to studying in the BA program	56%	17%	17%	6.6%	3.3%	4.2	1.15
48. Would consider changing their BA, if possible	6.6%	23%	23%	13%	33.3%	2.6	1.36
49. Expect to develop professionally	33.3%	26%	33.3%	6.6%	0%	3.9	0.97
50. Would consider the possibility of working or studying abroad	46%	43%	10%	0%	0%	4.4	0.67
51. Expect to earn a good teaching salary in the future	3.3%	23%	46%	13%	13%	2.9	1.03
52. Believe good job opportunities exist for graduates	13%	43%	23%	13%	6.6%	3.4	1.10

The last factor (Factor 7) addressed by the questionnaire directed students' attention to the university's tutorial process. As is evident in Table 10, most of the participants' perceptions of their tutorial experience were *neutral*. The high number of middle-of-the-road responses and the wide dispersal of responses (many standard deviations above 1.0) propose that students may not be certain whether (or how to measure whether) their tutors are performing tasks adequately, and that the participants have different perceptions of their tutors' performance. Perhaps the most revealing finding (and certainly the response with the greatest consensus) emerged in students' answers to variable 53: Seventy percent of the cohort perceived that their *tutors treat them respectfully and in an ethical manner*.

Table 10 (Factor 7) **Students' Perceptions of the Tutorial Experience**

Variable	Totally Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Totally Disagree	Mean	Standard Deviation
53. Treats students ethically and respectfully	30%	40%	20%	6.6%	3.3%	3.9	1.04
54. Carefully supervises students' academic trajectory	13%	36%	33.3%	6.6%	10%	3.4	1.13
55. Makes suggestions for improvement	6.6%	30%	43%	10%	10%	3.1	1.04
56. Respects students' time and keeps appointments	17%	33.3%	36%	13%	0%	3.5	0.94
57. Communicates well and shows trust and empathy	13%	40%	43%	3.3%	0%	3.6	0.76

58. Is responsible and willing to compromise	17%	26%	40%	13%	3.3%	3.4	1.04
59. Provides information about scholarships	6.6%	20%	33.3%	26%	13%	2.8	1.13
60. Offers social support for achieving goals	3.3%	33.3%	36%	13%	13%	3.0	1.08
61. Offers cultural support for achieving goals	3.3%	30%	40%	13%	13%	3.0	1.07
62. Offers emotional support for achieving goals	10%	13%	50%	17%	10%	3.0	1.07
63. Assigns activities integral to learners' development	3.3%	10%	46%	26%	13%	2.6	0.96
64. Proposes extra activities unrelated to students' personal development	6.6%	13%	40%	13%	26%	2.6	0.95

In Section C of the research instrument, students answered the following question: *In general, how do you feel about your first year in the BA program?* Their responses are presented in Table 11. The phrases in this Table represent a sample of participants' answers divided into two categories, *positive* and *negative*. These were the types of responses most participants (80%) provided.

Table 11 Students' Feelings About Their First Year in the BA Program

Positive	Negative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feeling good because of the classes - Comfortable - Happy - Motivated - Satisfied because of the curriculum and the teachers - Want to profit from what teachers offer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feeling not good - Demotivated because teachers are not ready to teach a subject - Stressed because of hard subjects - Feeling bad because of the quality of teachers - Do not like dealing with administrative tasks

The answers given by the research population reveal that the majority of students are happy with their decision to study in this BA program. They feel comfortable with BUAP and their teachers. However, some students stated that they expected something different from the school and the teachers. It appears that these students believe that their teachers are not well prepared to teach the courses they teach. The students wrote that they did not feel comfortable in these teachers' classrooms because they were afraid to ask

questions; they felt the teachers might scold them. Another telling detail students pointed out in their responses was that their academic problems did not come from their experiences at school; they mainly were the result of their economic situation, i.e., having to work in order to support their families. It may be that even though not all students in the first part of the questionnaire acknowledged having to work or having economic concerns, most participants face some economic challenges, and many have part-time jobs to cope with their economic situations. For these students, studying and working at the same time is difficult.

It is clear that the information given in Section C of the questionnaire communicates important findings. Firstly, students wrote that they are satisfied with the decision they made to enroll in this language-teaching major, but they also mentioned they are not very satisfied with the affective environment present in their classrooms. It may be important to conduct further research to study in greater depth what effect teachers' performance has on authority issues in the classroom. Secondly, participants described their economic situations as difficult. BUAP offers scholarships for lower-income students, but it may be that these scholarships are not enough to meet the needs of all students. Thus, it may be worth exploring students' economic necessities in order to design programs in which they feel supported in their efforts to continue with and succeed in their studies.

Conclusions

As discussed in the early part of this chapter, higher education in Mexico faces various challenges, one of which is a review or revision of current educational and administrative processes in order to enhance the quality of the education students receive. We researchers acknowledge the necessity of looking for ways to generate improvement

and to make the improvement visible and meaningful. Our efforts to conduct this study tracing students' academic trajectories represent one response to this need. Academic tutors contribute to following students' trajectories, but external researchers, too, can conduct educational-trajectory studies in order to follow students throughout their university experience. This study has reported on initial information provided by students responding to a questionnaire regarding their academic performance and their life in the BA in ELT program at BUAP.

An overview of the findings reveals that students' main perceptions regarding their academic trajectories to this point are the following:

- Most teachers provide suggestions for improving students' work and design activities that develop critical thinking.
- Knowledge acquired in previous educational settings can be useful for students' professional studies.
- The competences and theoretical knowledge acquired in the program can help students in future professional and real-world situations that require problem solving.
- Most students visualize themselves as future English teachers, and they are clear about the goal of the major in which they are enrolled: The program prepares them to be English-language teachers.
- Tutors treat students respectfully, but do not help them improve their academic performance and do not follow their academic trajectory.

These findings can be used as springboards for discussion among teachers, academic tutors, and academic coordinators and may eventually influence changes in policies and programs affecting students' academic trajectories.

It is advisable to continue following the academic performance of this generation of students using an instrument similar to the one suggested by García and Barrón (2011) and the questionnaire modified by Garcia to follow the trajectories of English-language teachers. It may also be worth considering tandem research using the approach suggested by Flores et.al. (2012), as mentioned in the Introduction to this chapter, to complement this type of study. By doing so, we could also examine the participants' academic outcomes and the results of standardized tests (language proficiency tests, for instance) to analyze the participants' progress in language competence as suggested by Tapia (2010). Further, other studies investigating different features relevant to the academic success of future language teachers could be explored. Research on multiple intelligences as in the study by Tapia, Castillo and Velázquez (2013) or language proficiency, self-esteem, and beliefs as reported by Funderburk, Hidalgo, Paredes, and Dzul (2013) could prove valuable in rounding out a fuller picture of the cohort's academic trajectory.

To sum up, we believe that it is crucial to identify the needs of our learners throughout their studies by following their academic trajectories, academic performance, or development of competences as suggested by Cardenas et. al. (2013) and using the information gathered to address the goal of improving the quality of higher education in Mexico. In the end, whatever research approaches are used will contribute not only to achieving this far-reaching goal but to accomplishing the more immediate objective of serving and supporting students in their quests for academic achievement and professional and personal growth.

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