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Mtra. 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 stressmanagement 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.

Studies of student trajectories in language teaching programs in Mexico



Mtra. Bertha Guadalupe Paredes Zepeda
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Studies of student trajectories in language teaching programs in Mexico

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Universidad Veracruzana



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THE SCHOOL TRAJECTORY OF BA IN ELT STUDENTS AT AGUASCALIENTES STATE UNIVERSITY

*María Esther Lemus Hidalgo
Piry Herrera Alvarado*

Introduction

There is an increasing interest in evaluating the quality of higher education in Mexico. More universities are requesting that their bachelor's degree programs be evaluated by the Inter-Institutional Committees for the Evaluation of Higher Education (CIEES). At the same time, CIEES, as part of their evaluation methodology, requires universities to develop self-evaluations. The evaluation process takes into consideration different facets such as institutional policies, BA curricula, academic staff, university facilities and equipment, and students. A statistical school trajectory of students is an important element in the evaluation of universities (CIEES, 2014). Therefore, one could make the argument that conducting studies on student trajectory ought to be seen as part of institutional policy.

School-trajectory studies involve following the movements of students -- members of a cohort -- through school phases or cycles (Rodriguez, 1989). A *cohort* refers to a group of students who begin their studies in a specific term and year (Barranco and Santacruz, 1995). The *movements* of a cohort refer to the students' promotions (successful completion of courses during a semester), repetition of courses, dropout rates, and graduation rates (Rodriguez, 1989). Knowledge of the trajectories of students is a central issue for institutions of higher learning since knowledge of who their students are, how they have conducted their university studies, what has affected their development, and which problems they have encountered allows universities to support students more effectively

throughout their tenure in higher education. It also assists university administrators in their efforts to make appropriate decisions regarding policies, curricula, and other academic matters.

Over the years, Aguascalientes State University (UAA) has taken several actions to identify its students' trajectories. Barranco and Santacruz (1995) conducted a study of 5,158 UAA graduates that offered an important database of students' characteristics from the time they began their university studies, through their university experience, and into their employment trajectory. In addition, UAA, through its Statistics Department, has constructed a statistical trajectory of its students since the 1990s that covers rich information on a wide variety of aspects such as students' socioeconomic conditions, their previous school trajectory, dropout rates, and graduation rates. The findings indicate that UAA's overall graduation rate in 2013 was 55.5 %; the graduation rate for the Center of Social Sciences and Humanities was 65.5%; and the rate for the BA in ELT was 68.29%. Further evidence of UAA's commitment to know its students may be seen in a recently completed study of students' early abandonment of their studies (UAA, 2014).

To put the current research project in its proper context, historical information related to the university's evolution is valuable. Aguascalientes State University was created on July 19, 1973 (Martinez de Leon, 2000). UAA has a population of about 15,000 students; it offers over 50 BA programs and 30 postgraduate programs. Unlike other state universities in Mexico, the academic disciplines at UAA are organized into departments. The Language Department, initiated in 1977, is housed in the Center of Social Sciences and Humanities; the Department's charge is to teach English to university students. The Department also offers classes in French, Italian, German, Japanese, and Mandarin to the Aguascalientes community at large, as part of the University Extension Program.

In 1993, the Language Department offered a BA in ELT program for the first time. The BA in ELT aims to encourage teacher development. Its purpose is to provide students with knowledge that supports their future teaching practice and informs their development as English-language teachers. The program's curriculum has been modified three times (1995, 2003, and 2012) for the purpose of responding to changes in contextual needs. The 2012 program, in which the participants of this research study are enrolled, typically takes eight semesters to complete and is made up of five strands (Skills Development for English Communication, Applied Linguistics, ELT Methodology, Practicum, and Professional Electives) and 46 subjects. The degree covers 306 credit hours of core subjects; 24 credit hours of professional electives; 24 credit hours of required, English-skills electives; and eight credit hours of free electives. Therefore, during the BA in ELT students must accumulate a total of 362 credit hours plus nine credit hours in the Humanistic Institutional Program, which consists of courses and activities that enhance the development of students' personal, social, and natural conscience (BA in ELT curriculum, 2012).

In order for students to begin the first semester of the BA in ELT program, they must earn a score of 450 on the TOEFL exam. If their TOEFL score falls short, they are enrolled in a year of introductory courses that aim to develop their English proficiency for the BA in ELT program. The curriculum for the introductory year is comprised of seven subjects: Reading, Writing, Listening, Speaking, and Grammar that students take for 25 hours a week, and Language Learning strategies and TOEFL preparation that they study for six hours a week.

It is with this backdrop of academic particulars of the BA in ELT program at Aguascalientes State University that the current descriptive study on school trajectory has been done, with the expectation that it will contribute a fresh perspective with parallel

elements to the many linguistic and methodological issues that have previously been studied in relation to students' development in language teaching. The researchers' intent is to provide information on students' perceptions of the program in order to analyze and contrast them with other elements in an effort to support student development across the BA.

Since there is no precedent in the literature derived from studies on this matter at this BA, the current analysis may also provide material that encourages teachers to take meaningful action in their classrooms after considering students' perceptions of their learning environment. Furthermore, the research will be important as a starting point for continuous replication and mirroring as the students proceed through the BA, and may in the future involve students in other cohorts. In this way, the research might become longitudinal and comprehensive – a study that provides a full and in-depth view of UAA students in the BA in ELT program as they experience a wide array of changes and constants in their academic trajectory and their development as future teachers of English.

Methodology

The current study aims to increase the teacher-researchers' knowledge of students' characteristics, socioeconomic realities, and school trajectories, as well as their perceptions of teachers, the BA in ELT curriculum in general, their academic challenges, and their professional expectations. The research was conceived as a descriptive study of the school trajectory of the August-December 2013 cohort (48 students) enrolled in the BA in ELT program at UAA.

The original cohort consisted of 26 students who took the two introductory semesters during the year 2012, 14 students with direct entry to the first semester of the BA in ELT, four students that completed the introductory semesters in 2011, but postponed temporally the sequential continuity of the semesters for a year, and one student who interrupted the regimen of introductory studies for a year in order to repeat failed courses of the first semester. The remaining three students did not complete the questionnaire. Therefore, a total of 45 students from the original cohort participated in the research. These students took 13 courses with a total of 94 credits during their first and second semesters in the BA. They are currently enrolled in the third semester (six courses) with a total of 45 credits. At UAA, the minimum grade required to receive credit for a course is 7.0.

In the case of the research conducted at Aguascalientes, the process began with a search for and review of the studies on school trajectory developed by UAA. Then, a questionnaire, the central instrument for the current study, was electronically adapted using the Google platform through its *Formats* program. (The questionnaire is described in more detail in the methodology chapter of this book.) Briefly, it consisted of three sections. Section A contained questions intended to elicit a general profile of the student-participants as well as their previous and present school trajectory. Section B asked for students' perceptions of seven aspects believed to affect university experience, including factors such as their teachers' performance, the BA in ELT program in general, academic difficulties due to external and internal factors, and the tutorial process, as well as students' vocational beliefs and expectations. Section C, the qualitative portion of the questionnaire, was an open question that asked students to share feelings about and impressions of their first year at the university. To discuss the information gathered from the questionnaire, the data were analyzed using the *Formats* application of the Google platform. For the analysis of section

C, descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2009) was used to identify the different topics derived from student-participants' answers. Later, students' opinions were integrated into the resultant topics. Discussion of the results for the respective sections of the questionnaire follows.

Results and Discussion of Results

This portion of the chapter reports on data obtained from Section A of the questionnaire which addressed students' demographics, socioeconomic status, previous school trajectory, and their academic experience during the first year of the BA program. Table 1 offers a summary profile of the students in the study cohort.

Table 1 Demographic Profile of the Research Population

Demographic		Respondents
Sex		Male (33%) Female (67%)
Marital Status		Single (98%)
Age		20 (33%) 19 (22%)
Origin	Mexico	State of Aguascalientes (73%) Outside of Aguascalientes (25%)
		Outside of Mexico (2%)
Current Address		Aguascalientes, Capital of the State (87%)
Work		No (73%)
Parents' Education	Father	Higher Education (42%) Middle Education (25%) Basic education (24%)
	Mother	Higher Education (20%) Middle Education (32%) Basic Education (18%)
Social Status		Middle Class (67%)
Previous Studies		Public System (91%)
GPA in High School		8.0 - 8.9 (22%) 9.0 -10.0 (24%)
Students who received credit for all courses in their first year at UAA		40 (89%)

Although not evident in Table 1, the raw data from the questionnaire show that the student-participants' ages ranged from 18 to 25. Female students outnumbered male

students, two to one; one female student indicated being married. Two students have children; one student in the cohort was pregnant at the time. Most students could be identified as local residents: 33 are from Aguascalientes, 11 come from other states, and one is from the United States. While most of the student-participants live in Aguascalientes City, eight reside in towns nearby and have an approximate commute of 90 minutes.

The education backgrounds of the students' parents range from elementary school to university. A significant number of students' fathers have completed their university studies: Four also have master's degrees, and one holds a doctorate degree. In contrast, the fathers of three students have finished only primary school, and one father has had no formal studies. Among the students' mothers, seven have studied at the BA level, and two have master's degree studies. One of the students' mothers has no formal education. The researchers note that more students' fathers than mothers have university studies; however, less than half of the parents have higher education experience. The data suggest that for at least 26 students, completing their BAs would put their level of education beyond their fathers', and for 36 students, this achievement would mean reaching an education level higher than their mothers' formal schooling.

According to the questionnaire data, most of the participants in the study do not have a partner; however, ten students do. The education backgrounds of the students' partners are diverse: Three have BA studies, three more have high school studies, two have technical studies, one finished secondary school, and another finished primary school.

For the items in the questionnaire addressing student-participants' economic resources for their higher education, 30 students identified themselves as having a medium amount of economic support; 15 students described their economic support as low. Twelve students are employed. Nearly all work part time, but three students work eight hours a day.

Most of the students in the study rely on their parents for financial support. Six depend on income from their own jobs, one student depends on her grandfather, and one did not answer the question. Nine students indicated that their job had little or very little relation to their studies; one student responded that his/her job was highly related to the BA; another thought it was not related at all. Eight students reported extra income that ranged from \$750 to \$3,000. Nine of the research participants receive funds from scholarships.

The data indicate that most students live in their family's home while 12 students reported living in rental housing. A large number of students (27) live with their parents. However, six live with close relatives, five with their mother, four with friends, two with a partner, and one student lives alone.

The next part of the discussion addresses students' recent school trajectories and academic performance. Most students (91%) graduated from public high schools with technological baccalaureate studies, while three of them (7%) graduated from private institutions. One student (2%) came to the BA program from an open-system high school, which is an independent-study arrangement based on study guides and modular exams (SEP, 2014).

The participants' high school GPAs ranged from 7.7 to 9.9. The group average is 8.9. Their first-semester averages in the BA program ranged from 8.2 to 9.8, with the group average registering 9.1. The second-semester university GPAs extended from 6.5 to 10.0, with 8.9 being the group average. There appears to be no pattern or trend related to the courses students failed during their first year at UAA. Those who failed courses failed *different* courses, with a maximum of two. Nevertheless, taking into account the entire cohort, the data in Table 2 indicate which courses and how many students identified the courses as the most difficult during their first two semesters in the BA program.

Table 2 Courses Students Identified as Difficult (N = 45)

Course Name	Semester	Number of Students
Linguistics	Second	28
Introduction to Education	First	26
Teaching Workshop I	Second	12
Phonetics	First	10
Teaching Linguistic Systems (Lexical, Grammatical, Phonological)	Second	6
Teaching Approaches and Planning in the Teaching of English	First	5

The students also reported which courses they considered easiest during their first year (two semesters) in the program. A summary of the data appears in Table 3.

Table 3 Courses Students Identified as Easy (N = 45)

Course Name	Semester	Number of Students
English Communicative Skills I	First	31
English Communicative Skills II	Second	26
Spanish Grammar	First	23
Development of Critical Thinking	Second	23
Class Observation	First	20
English Grammar Analysis	Second	20
Verbal/Corporal Expression	First	17
Teaching Workshop I	Second	16

As explained earlier, this research study focused on a cohort of 45 students. Forty students have not failed any course, and they maintain a GPA higher than 8.0. Most of these students' GPAs were 9.0 or higher in one of the two semesters. The cohort also includes five students who during their first two semesters in the BA in ELT had a failing average in at least one course. Two of the students in the cohort have failed one course; three have failed two courses. Nevertheless, four of these five students have passing GPAs that range from 7.5 to 8.8. (N.B. The minimum grade required to pass a course at UAA is 7.0.) Only

one student in the cohort has a failing GPA of 6.5. This indicates that the four students with passing GPAs maintain high scores in the courses they did not fail.

When comparing students' high school GPAs to their averages during the first and second semesters in the BA in ELT program, the researchers found that 26% raised their grade point averages, while 49% maintained their GPAs with minimal variation (1 decimal point). One fourth of the students had lower averages, from 6 to 11 decimal points. The greatest difference was seen in the students with failed subjects, with one extreme case of a drop of 11 decimal points. These data illustrate a continuity in the students' academic standing as measured by their GPAs, which might be a reflection of reasonable academic demands in their first and second semesters, considering the students' academic history when they enrolled, with only a few specific cases running counter to this observation.

The discussion of the data turns now to the students' responses to items in Section B of the questionnaire, those pertaining to seven factors affecting their university experience: (1) Students' Perceptions of Teachers' Performance, (2) Students' Perceptions of the Theoretical and Practical Knowledge of the Courses, (3) Students' Perceptions of the BA Program in General, (4) Students' Perceptions of Academic Difficulties due to External Factors, (5) Students' Perceptions of Academic Difficulties due to Personal Factors, (6) Students' Vocational Beliefs and Expectations, and (7) Students' Perceptions of the Tutorial Experience.

The students' responses to 12 variables related to Factor 1, *Perceptions of Teachers' Performance*, revealed students have a positive perception of their teachers' presence in the classroom. Their responses, summarized in Figure 1, to variables such as teachers offering meaningful feedback, motivating students, and encouraging academic discussion leaned toward *Agree* and *Totally Agree* in all cases. The variables with the highest percentage of

agreement (91%) were those gauging whether teachers offer suggestions for improvement, adhere to the syllabus, and are mindful of students' previous knowledge. When asked whether teachers explain content clearly, a large percentage of students (84%) gave a very positive combined (4 and 5) *agreement* response.

The variables that received the lowest percentage of *Totally Agree* responses were those that focused on how well teachers *identify students' strengths* (18%) and *identify students' limitations* (13%). In general, the data in Figure 1 appear to suggest that teachers' performance in the classroom meets students' expectations. Nevertheless, eight to 12 students chose the *Neutral* option as a response to four of the 12 variables. It could be argued that some of the students were not sure about or convinced by their teachers' performance regarding these variables. On the other hand, Aguascalientes State University conducts a formal systematic evaluation of its teachers every semester that involves most of the variables identified in Figure 1. Therefore, one could say that students are familiar with these evaluation measures and that teachers are aware of them as well.

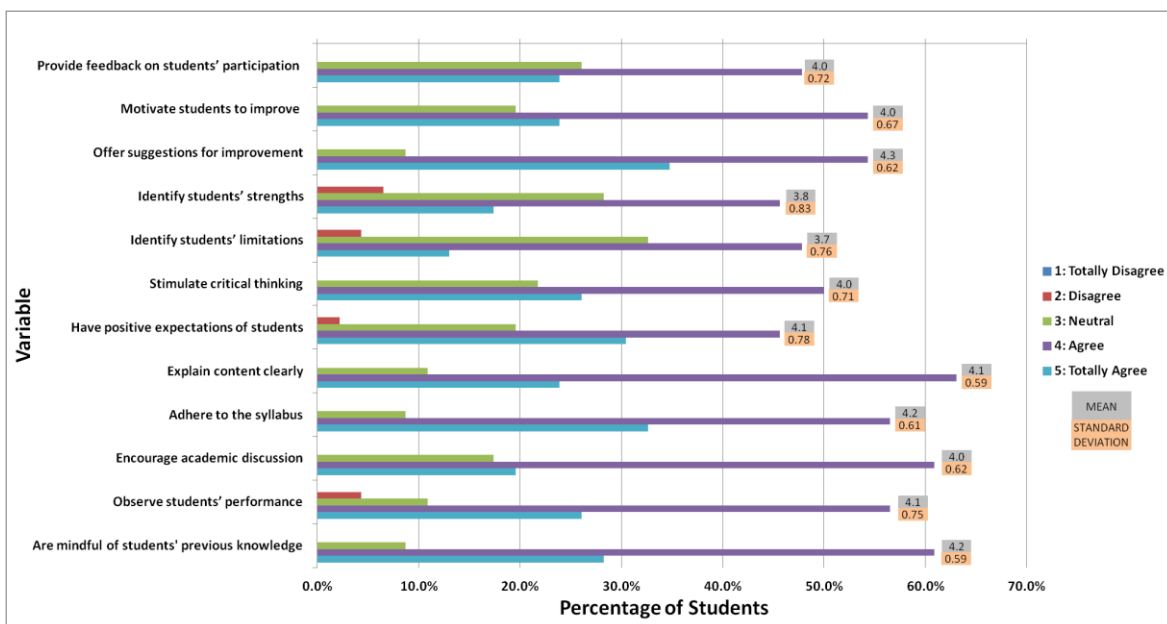


Figure 1 (Factor 1) Students' Perceptions of Teachers' Performance

The next factor in Section B of the questionnaire addressed *Students' Perceptions of the Theoretical and Practical Knowledge of the Courses*. Students' responses to the six variables related to this factor were positive, with 93% to 96% of students choosing either the *Agree* or *Totally Agree* option as shown in Figure 2. The variable with the lowest combined *agreement* response -- *knowledge can be used in daily life* -- registered 87%. The *Neutral* option selected by 13% of students suggests that most do not have negative perceptions of the knowledge their courses provide. Therefore, it may be said that students are satisfied with the theoretical and practical knowledge they have attained during their first two semesters at UAA.

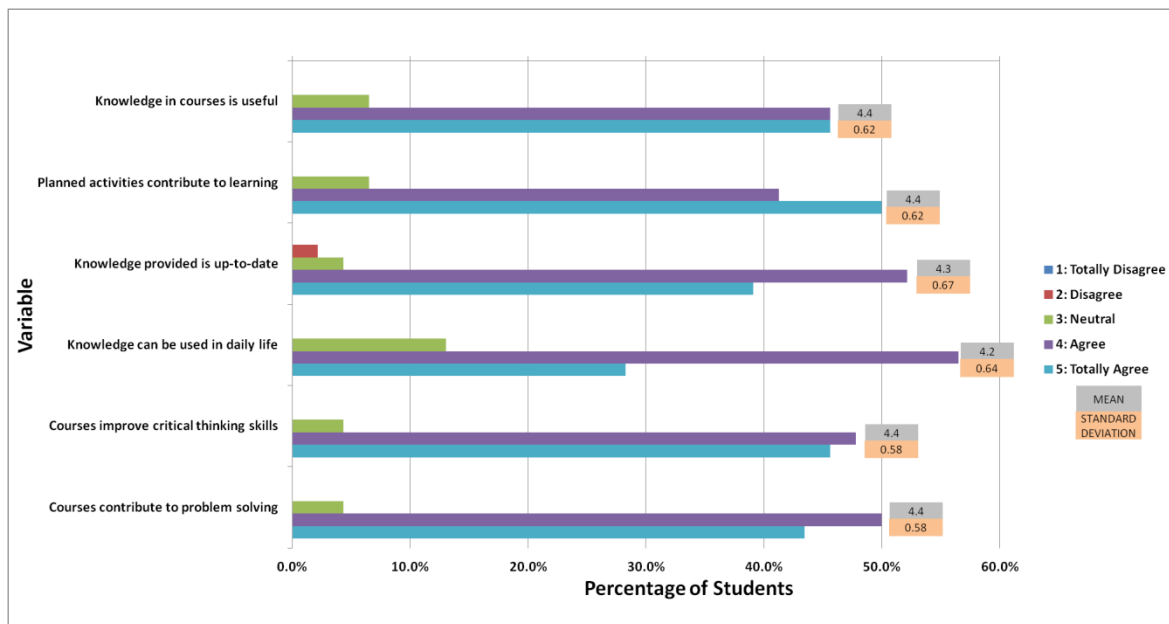


Figure 2 (Factor 2) Students' Perceptions of the Theoretical and Practical Knowledge of the Courses

The responses to Factor 3, *Students' Perceptions of the BA Program in General* are summarized in Figure 3. This factor also yielded positive perceptions from students. The *agreement* options were selected by 67% to 89% of the students for the affirmative variables; the *Neutral* option was chosen by as low as 11% and as high as 31% of the

students. The *teachers work collaboratively to design program materials* variable received the lowest combined percentage (67%) of *Agree* and *Totally Agree* responses. One could argue this was the case because some students may not have much knowledge of how program materials are designed and revised. This might have been the reason why 31% of the students selected the *Neutral* option for this variable. It seems that most of the students are pleased with the BA program; only one or two students chose *Disagree* as their response to the positive variables associated with this factor.

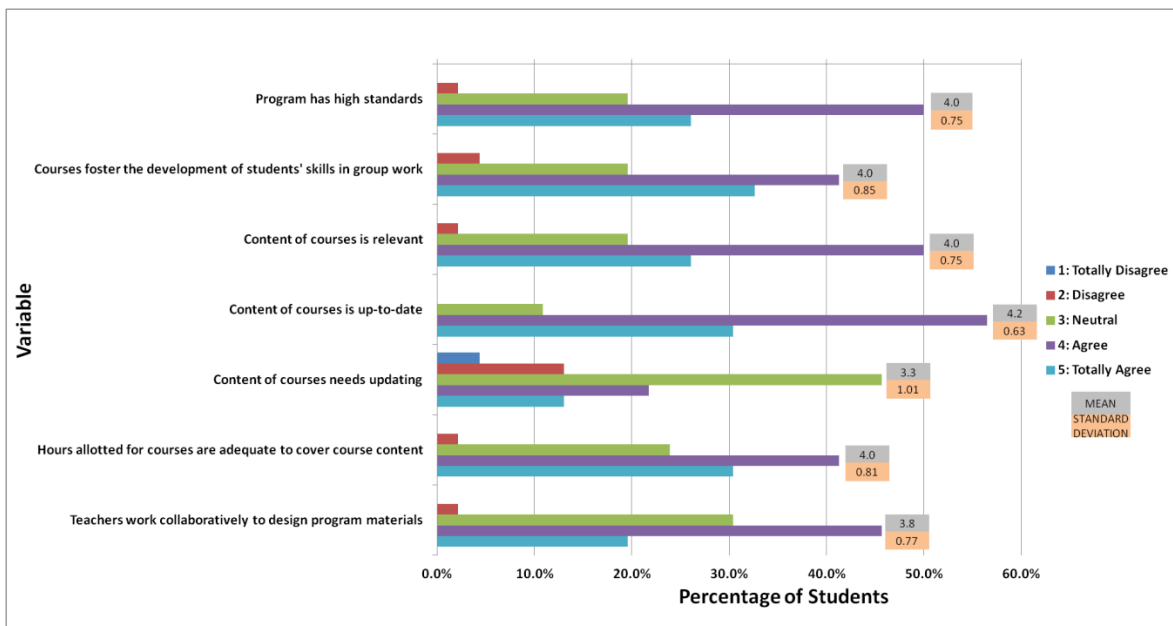


Figure 3 (Factor 3) Students' Perceptions of the BA Program in General

Results of Factor 4 of the questionnaire aimed to measure *Students' Perceptions of Academic Difficulties due to External Factors* are depicted in Figure 4. Most of the students perceived that external factors had little effect on their academic performance, evidenced by the fact that most of the variables garnered a high percentage of *Disagree* and *Totally Disagree* responses. In other words, the potentially negative variables seemed not to have a major impact on whatever academic difficulties they experienced. Only the variable

distractions that inhibit studying had a noteworthy combined *agreement* score of 37%. In other words, more than one third of the students felt this variable affected their academic performance. In addition, it is important to consider the *neutral* responses for this factor which could signify that students were not sure whether these variables were the reasons behind their academic problems. Further analysis of the data reveals that five students who failed courses perceived three variables -- *demanding teachers*, *dissatisfaction with course content*, and *relationships with teachers* -- as contributing to their academic difficulties. It could be argued that how the students felt about the courses and the teachers could also be a reason for their academic problems.

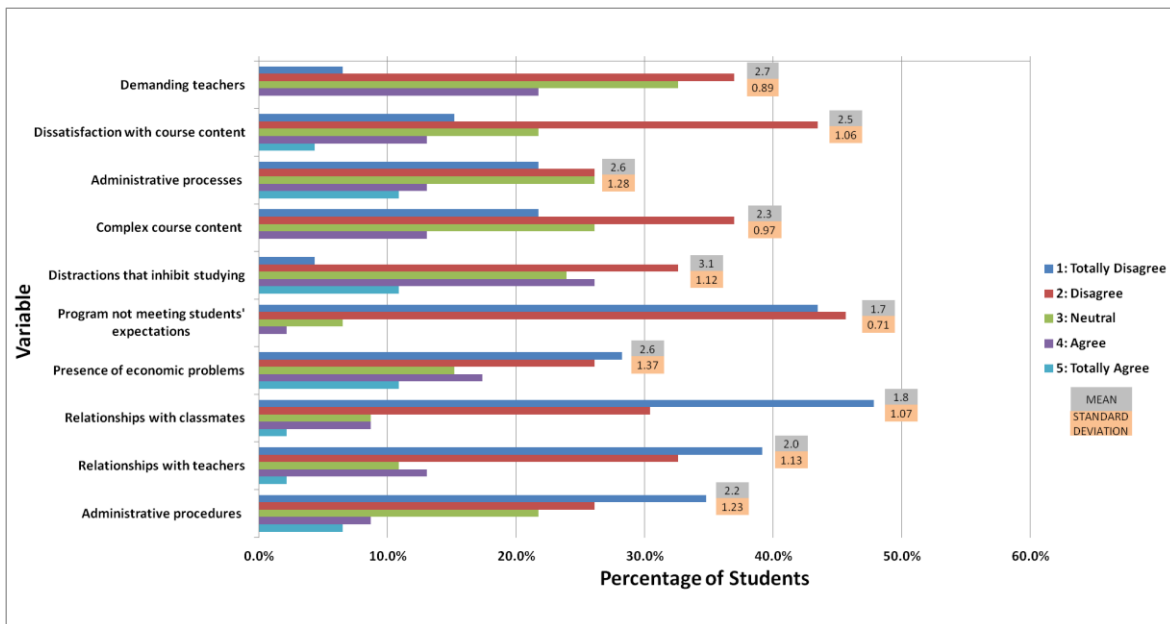


Figure 4 (Factor 4) Students' Perceptions of Academic Difficulties due to External Factors

Figure 5 illustrates responses to Factor 5, *Students' Perceptions of Academic Difficulties due to Personal Factors*. The overall results suggest that few students found personal circumstances to be major contributors to their academic difficulties. The means for the variables are low, between 1.7 and 2.8, reflecting general *disagreement* with the

personal issues identified. The raw data point to specific findings. Only two students signaled *agreement* that a *lack of previous knowledge* contributed to their academic difficulties. Fifteen students (one third of the cohort) chose *agreement* (4 or 5 on the scale) for *lack of stress-management skills* as a contributing factor in their academic problems, and 12 students (slightly more than one fourth of the population) agreed that their *lack of dedication to studies* had a negative impact. Between four and nine students indicated *agreement* for the remaining variables. Paying attention to the *agreement* responses of the five students who have failed courses reveals that at least one of the students responded in the affirmative to all the variables mentioned here. Nevertheless, *lack of stress-management skills* and *personal problems* appear to be the main causes of difficulty for these students. The researchers also note that only students who had failed courses identified the variables *poor study habits* and *problems relating to others* as contributing to their academic difficulties.

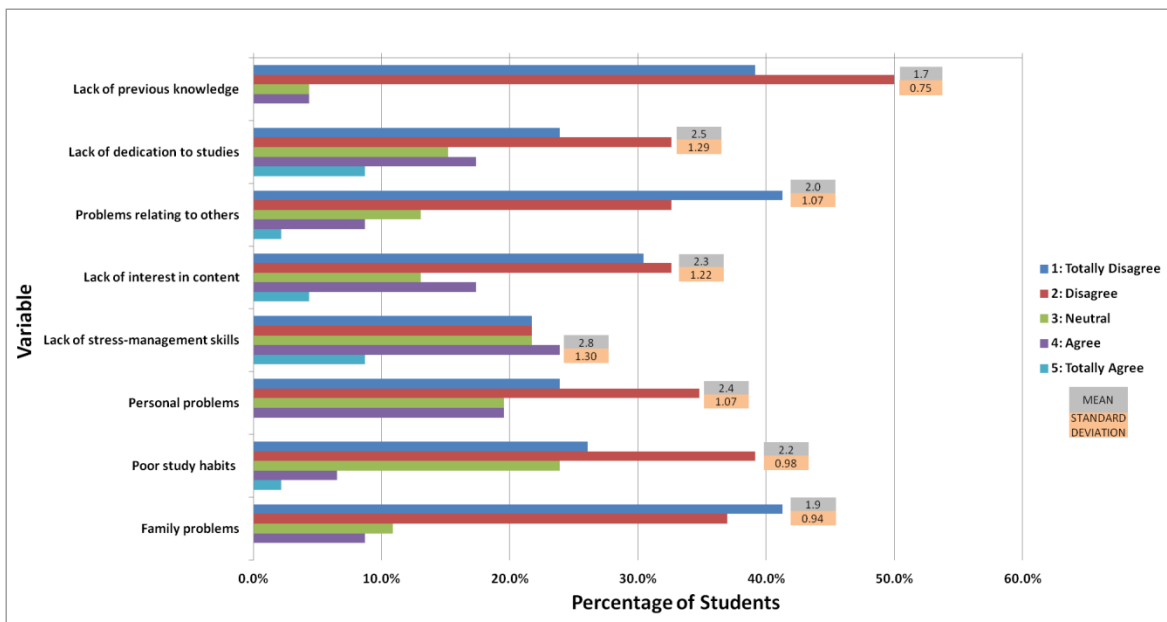


Figure 5 (Factor 5) Students' Perceptions of Academic Difficulties due to Personal Factors

As Figure 6 shows, students have positive expectations about their future teaching career. Responses to Factor 6, *Students' Vocational Beliefs and Expectations*, suggest perhaps the strongest agreement among the research participants. The data indicate that between 91% and 98% of the students chose one of the *agreement* responses for the six affirmative variables in this factor. A parallel finding shows that four variables showed no *disagreement* responses. In keeping with students' positive expectations, the variable *would consider changing their BA, if possible*, received the highest *disagreement* percentage (76%) when combining the *Disagree* and *Totally Disagree* options. Notwithstanding students' overall positive perceptions of their future work life and professional development, the researchers note that the highest percentage of *neutral* responses was for the variable addressing their expectations about receiving a good teaching salary. It could be argued that students' expectations about earning a sizable income did not influence their decision to pursue this BA. Also worthy of reflection is the fact that the five students who had failed courses had, nevertheless, a high positive response to many of the variables this factor measured. Additionally, researchers detected that these five students were not considering changing their BA.

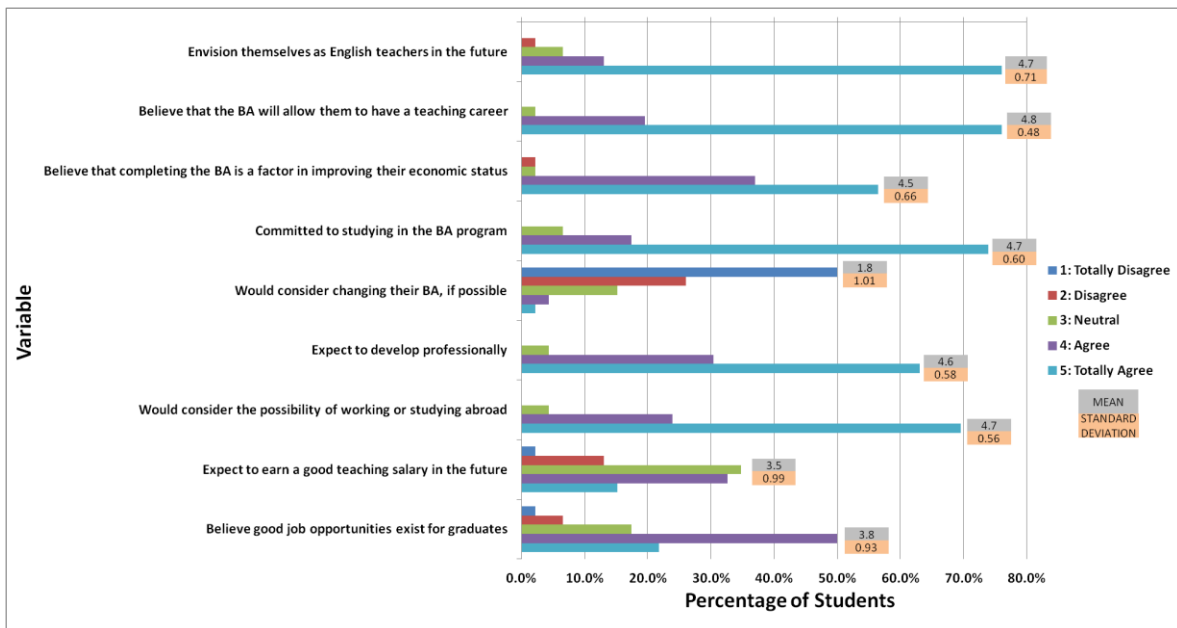


Figure 6 (Factor 6) **Students' Vocational Beliefs and Expectations**

The last factor in Section B of the research instrument focused on *Students' Perceptions of the Tutorial Experience*. To better understand their responses to this factor -- summarized in Figure 7 -- some historical information is necessary. Aguilas State University established a formal Tutoring Program in 1997 under the guidelines of the National Association of Universities and Institutions of Higher Education (ANUIES). The program has evolved in response to state, national, and international standards, as well as dynamic changes within the institution. In 2013, the Institutional Program of Tutorship experienced a period of organizational and operational change. As a result, tutoring activities in the BA in ELT program were irregular during this time. In fact, the August-December 2013 cohort did not have designated tutors during their first and second semesters. It was not until August 2014 that this cohort, in the third semester of their studies, received designated tutors and had an established tutorial schedule. Because the students completed the research questionnaire during the second week of the third semester,

they had had only minimal contact, only an initial encounter, with their tutors. The students who had completed an introductory year *did* have a tutorial experience to draw from while students who entered the BA program directly did not. Consequently, the researchers decided that only the responses of 31 students -- those who had studied in the introductory year -- would be considered in analyzing the results for Factor 7.

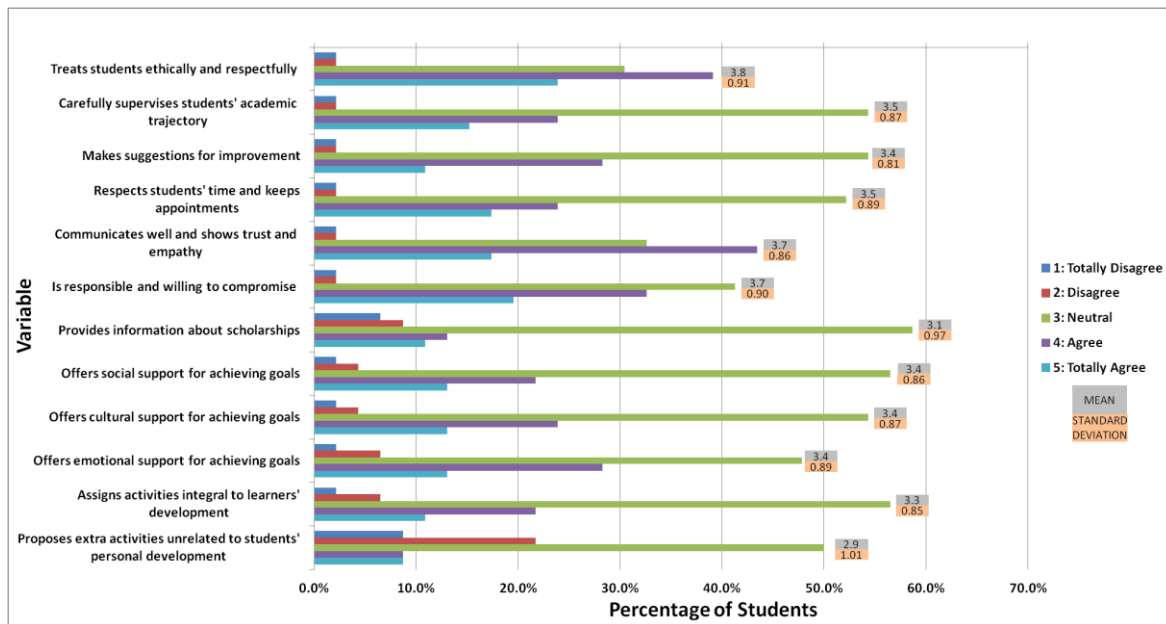


Figure 7 (Factor 7) **Students' Perceptions of the Tutorial Experience**

A review of the summary data in Figure 7 illustrates a large number of *Neutral* responses. In the raw data, the researchers note that half of the students (16) showed a tendency to be neutral in their perceptions of their tutors. Specifically, 50% or more of the students chose *Neutral* for eight of the variables in this factor; the remaining four variables registered the same for between 31% and 49% of the students. Looking to the *agreement* side of the scale, 15 students chose *Agree* or *Totally Agree* for most aspects of the tutorial experience with a 30% or more combined *agreement* rating for each variable. Students

showed a parallel *disagreement* tally of 28% for the variable about tutors proposing extra activities apart from those related to students' personal development.

It is important to consider that students' perceptions of their tutorial experience a year *after* the experience could be vague and imprecise and/or their impressions could be quite different from their current participation. Such realities may have influenced students' responses and even led to the frequent selection of the *Neutral* option. Students gave the "highest marks" to tutors' attitudes toward tutorship. It could be argued that *tutor shows empathy, he/she treats students respectfully, and is willing to compromise* are variables more easily remembered than the specific actions of a tutor, such as whether he/she provided information about scholarships or proposed activities integral to learners' development, variables that received the highest percentages (59% and 56%, respectively) of *Neutral* responses.

The next part of the analysis and discussion of results addresses Section C of the research questionnaire where students described in their own words how they felt about their experiences in the BA in ELT program at UAA. Forty of the 45 students in the cohort expressed being satisfied with the program because, to this point, it has fulfilled their expectations, and they recognize they have learned a great deal. Specific comments included the belief that they had good teachers who were well prepared to teach their subjects. In addition, students mentioned that the program has provided them a positive learning environment in which they feel supported not only by their classmates but also by their teachers.

There were other responses, decidedly more mixed. Two students who said that they liked the BA in ELT very much also shared opinions that it would be important to improve some of the syllabi of the courses and some teaching staff, as well. That is to say, two

students believed that some teachers should be replaced. Two other students had negative opinions of the program. One expressed that teachers lacked the knowledge needed to teach their courses, that some subjects/courses should be eliminated from the curriculum, that the number of students in a class was very large, and that the furniture needed repair. The other student with critical comments explained that the teachers did not motivate him to learn and that he believed the teaching profession was not well paid. In addition, two students responded to the open-ended question in Section C by identifying personal problems related to being shy and having economic concerns. Overall, in spite of the few negative aspects that deserve review and attention, it can be said that most of the students are pleased with the BA in ELT.

Conclusions

The cohort under study – third-semester students in the BA in ELT program at Aguascalientes State University -- comprises more female than male students. They are mainly from Aguascalientes and have studied in public high schools. Most of them are satisfied with their decision to study in this BA program at UAA.

In general, it can be seen that the student-participants have positive perceptions of the various factors that may affect a university learning experience; this implies that students do not perceive academic problems being due to the identified factors. Students' perceptions of teachers' performance and the theoretical and practical knowledge their courses offer registered the most positive scores among the seven factors. In both cases, the respondents agreed with the affirmative variables defining these two factors. In other words, they see the quality of their teachers' performance, and they believe that the theoretical and practical knowledge gained through the BA is useful and appropriate for

their professional development. The respondents' perception of their professional development in the BA is also positive. One could say, therefore, that students consider this academic program relevant for their professional development.

Although the general perception of the cohort is that academic difficulties are not due to either external or personal factors, the students who have failed courses indicated that some of the variables contributed to their academic problems. Nevertheless, most students expressed satisfaction with the program, and their responses reflect positive expectations about the teaching profession. They see themselves as future professionals with characteristics that reflect skills, knowledge, and attitudes in line with the graduate profile stated in the BA in ELT program at UAA. These attributes include being able to teach English as a foreign language at different school levels, being able to design courses and materials that foster English-language learning, having knowledge of ELT approaches and learning theories, and having a positive attitude toward the diverse cultural, social, and ideological contexts they may face as teachers. It appears that the students believe they are in a BA program that fulfills their vision of the future.

Finally, it is important to mention that this research was developed as an initial descriptive study. In order to establish the influence of the various factors affecting students' academic trajectories, the teacher-researchers conclude that further investigation is needed. It is advisable to continue studying the trajectory of these students by means of nourished longitudinal research using a qualitative approach to enhance researchers', teachers', and administrators' understanding of the different factors affecting students' university experiences. The information gathered and analyzed beginning with this study and proceeding to subsequent studies of the research population will be invaluable in

designing appropriate strategies to address students' academic difficulties and facilitate a positive and fruitful environment for learning.

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