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

Studies of student trajectories in language teaching programs in Mexico

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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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978-970-900-001-8



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(coordinadoras)



Universidad Veracruzana



Primera edición: abril 2016

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Manuel María Contreras núm. 73, col. San Rafael
México, D. F. 06470. Teléfono: 5097 20 70
Editorial@plazayvaldes.com
www.plazayvaldes.com

Plaza y Valdés Editores
Calle Murcia, 2. Colonia de los Ángeles
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28223, Madrid, España.
Teléfono: 91 862 52 89
madrid@plazayvaldes.com
www.plazayvaldes.es

Formación tipográfica: José Luis Castelán Aguilar

ISBN: 978-607-402-876-8

Impreso en México/*Printed in Mexico*

Este libro ha sido publicado con recursos PROFOCIE 2014/2015.

El trabajo de edición de esta obra fue realizado en el Taller de Edición de Plaza y Valdés ubicado en el Reclusorio Preventivo Varonil Norte. Lo anterior es posible gracias al apoyo, confianza y colaboración de todas las autoridades del Sistema Penitenciario del Gobierno de la Ciudad de México, en especial de la Dirección Ejecutiva de Trabajo Penitenciario.

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ACADEMIC TRAJECTORIES OF STUDENTS FROM THE CLASS OF 2013 IN THE FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AT THE AUTONOMOUS UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF MEXICO

Uriel Ruiz Zamora

Introduction

The Autonomous University of the State of Mexico (UAEMex) was created in 1956, although its foundations were laid in 1827, when classes began at the Literary Institute, located in Tlalpan, named San Agustín de las Cuevas at the time, when Tlalpan was the state capital of the state of Mexico (Ortíz, 2006).

According to Estela Ortíz Romo, who has written a brief history of language teaching at UAEMex (n.d.), a program for teaching languages began in 1959 in the Department of Foreign Languages, which was located in the Building of the Office of the President on the upper floor of the Patio de los Naranjos. In 1981, the Department of Foreign Languages gave way to the Center for Foreign Language Instruction (El Centro de Enseñanza de Lenguas, CELe), which changed its name to Center for Language Instruction, in order to include the indigenous languages of Mexico. By the mid-1980s, a curricular assessment of CELe was conducted with the primary aim of analyzing the relevance and feasibility of a School of Foreign Languages. It was not until 1991 that the goals and scope of the project were broadened and the goal of providing university students with language skills for the teaching of foreign languages was raised. The University Council approved this new stage of development in 1992, creating the School of Languages which offered a BA degree in English (López, 2007).

In 1999, due to the increasing demands of an evolving workplace in need of

qualified teachers, the same School of Languages began offering a degree in French Language and Culture (LLyCF). Furthermore, in 2001 postgraduate-level studies were implemented with the creation of a master's degree in Linguistics Applied to Education (MLAE), resulting in the name changing from School of Languages to Faculty of Languages (López, 2007). It is worth mentioning that the MLAE was restructured in 2005 and the degree is now called Master of Applied Linguistics, a name that reflects greater inclusivity within the field of linguistics.

In 2009 the Faculty of Languages restructured its curriculum, resulting in the combination of the BA degree in English and the BA degree in French Language and Culture into a single degree, known as the BA in Languages (Licenciatura en Lenguas, LLE), which is the current curriculum model at the Faculty of Languages (UAEM, 2009).

Since 2009, colleagues at the Faculty have conducted studies related to students' language competence; however a study focusing on students' academic trajectories in the same institution has never been done. Therefore, UAEMex's participation in the current multi-university investigation is especially relevant. The results of the study will offer insight into students' academic realities in higher education and contribute to identifying areas in which the program would benefit from revision. Furthermore, the study findings may suggest further research opportunities for measuring the efficacy of the BA curriculum and the impact of factors such as students' backgrounds and teachers' performance in class on students' overall undergraduate experiences.

The Faculty of Languages decided to pinpoint students' academic trajectories as an area of study in order to gather data on which to base the development of a new curriculum in the near future, a curriculum that considers both students' needs and those of society. It is hoped that the study results will increase the Faculty's awareness of academic directions

and/or orientations for the BA program that ensure the program's evolution remains in close alignment with UAEMex's mission to collaborate with and respond to the needs of society.

Methodology

This portion of the chapter presents the general framework of the research project established during a RECALE (Red de Cuerpos Académicos en Lenguas) meeting in Colima in May 2014 and provides specific information about how the study was conducted at the Faculty of Languages at UAEMex.

A research questionnaire comprised of three sections was administered to students. Section A of the questionnaire gathered general data including students' socioeconomic conditions, high school history, academic trajectory during their first and second semesters at UAEMex, and information related to tutoring and scholarships. In Section B, students (in their third semester, i.e., at the beginning of their second year at the university) were asked to respond to seven factors that may have affected their academic performance *during their first year* at UAEMex. Students used a Likert scale to record their perceptions of seven factors: *Teachers' Performance*, *Theoretical and Practical Knowledge of the Courses*, *the BA Program in General*, *Academic Difficulties due to External Factors*, *Academic Difficulties due to Personal Factors*, *Vocational Beliefs and Expectations*, and *Tutorial Experience*. Students responded to variables for each of these factors by choosing a number -- from 1 to 5 -- that best reflected their impressions and opinions. Their responses signified the following: 1 meant *Totally Disagree*; 2 indicated *Disagree*; 3 registered *Neutral*; 4 signified *Agree*; and 5 meant *Totally Agree*. Finally, Section C of the questionnaire invited students to comment in their own words on their experience in the BA program.

The research cohort consisted of 77 students randomly selected from the 2013 class of the Faculty of Languages. The students were asked to complete the questionnaire presented to them in the auditorium of the Faculty. The researcher administered the questionnaire and supervised its completion by the study cohort.

Results and Discussion of Results

An overview of the information gathered from Section A of the research instrument is presented in Table 1 and includes data such as sex, marital status, age, place of origin, work status, parents' education, socioeconomic status, and previous studies. Taken together, the data create a demographic profile of the student population being studied. The class of 2013 in the Faculty of Languages consists of more females (70.1%) than males (29.9%). As to the ages of the student-participants, 19 years represented the highest percentage of students (42.9%) at the time of the study, followed by students who were 20 and 18 years old (19.5% and 18.2%, respectively). The average age of this cohort, 20.01, reflects a young population.

The majority of students in the study, in terms of marital status, are single. Only 1.3% said they are married, while 3.9% reported they have children, indicating that a few students are single parents. At the time of the study, no student reported being pregnant; similarly, of students who identified themselves as being in a relationship, none indicated being pregnant.

Table 1 Demographic Profile of the 2013 Cohort

Demographic		LLE Respondents	
Sex		Male (29.9%)	Female (70.1%)
Marital Status		Single (98.70%)	Married (1.30%)
Average Age		20.01	
Origin	State	State of Mexico (80.5%)	
	Locality	Outside of the State of Mexico (19.5%)	
Work		No (88.3%)	
Studies	Father	No higher education (83.1%)	
	Mother	No higher education (84.4%)	
Socioeconomic Status		Lower class (38.9%)	Middle class (61.1%)
Previous Studies		Public system (97.4%)	
GPA in High School		8.0 – 8.9 (24.7%)	

Toluca, the capital city of the state of Mexico, is home to UAEMex which attracts most of the state's university students. UAEMex is the region's leading academic institution, and, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, is where the Faculty of Languages is located. In an effort to increase its presence throughout the state, UAEMex has developed University Centers (CU) that offer many degrees addressing the academic needs and development of society in general in the state of Mexico. The LLE, for instance, is offered at the Texcoco University Center and at the Huehuetoca University Center, in addition to the Faculty of Languages in Toluca. This background is relevant in the discussion of the 2013 cohort's places of origin. The data reveal that 80.5% of the students in the research population are natives of the state of Mexico, with 19.5% coming from elsewhere. The highest percentage of students come from the city of Toluca and surrounding municipalities in the state of Mexico, without reporting students living near the Texcoco CU and the Huehuetoca CU. Students in the Faculty of Languages also come from towns outside the state; in addition, one student is from Venezuela.

Because students come from different municipalities and states, it is important to consider not only their previous academic knowledges but also their world knowledge as this will have an impact when they start following a BA program. The data in Table 1 show students' socioeconomic level is either lower or middle class. They have moved mainly to the city of Toluca to attend classes on the main campus of UAEMex, a situation that poses a potential economic challenge – i.e., the students must pay rent for housing and buy food and household staples. The stress of having to manage their finances may have an unfavorable impact on their studies. Another possible challenge for students rests with the fact that those who have moved to Toluca to attend the university return to their hometowns and families every weekend. Therefore, they do not attend weekend cultural events (plays and concerts, for instance) organized by UAEMex and the Faculty of Languages. Even during the week, the students seem to prefer to stay at home when they finish their classes rather than engage in academic and cultural activities. Because they spend little extra time on the university campus, it could be difficult for them to develop an institutional identity that, in turn, could interfere with their academic performance.

The data indicate that the majority of the students (88.3%) devote their time to being full-time students; only a small group (11.7%) are employed. With reference to their parents' education levels, it can be seen that most mothers and fathers (84% and 83%, respectively) have no higher education experience. As indicated earlier, students' responses related to economic status suggest that 38.9% belong to a lower socioeconomic class while the remainder of the students (61.1%) would be considered middle class.

The vast majority (97.4%) of the 2013 cohort completed their upper secondary education at state schools, while the remaining students indicated they had studied at private schools. The high percentage of students who attended state schools seems in

keeping with their reported family-income levels that suggest private-school tuitions would be a significant expense or economic hardship.

Students' academic history may sometimes forecast their future academic performance. In high school, 27.2% of students in this cohort earned GPAs between 6.9 and 7.9 while 72.8% of students graduated with GPAs between 8.0 and 9.8. These data suppose that the Faculty of Languages has established an appropriate selection process for the BA program, a process aimed at supporting and, perhaps, predicting that most of the accepted students are likely to find success along their academic trajectory and in the BA program.

The next section of this chapter presents data and summary analyses of students' impressions of seven factors and related variables affecting their academic life. Means and standard deviations of the results obtained from Section B of the research questionnaire are presented in tables with corresponding discussion.

For Factor 1, *Students' Perceptions of Teachers' Performance*, the data show that students' responses were positive. The majority of respondents chose one of the *agreement* responses for variables addressing the feedback they receive from teachers, teachers' efforts to motivate and offer suggestions for improvement, and their clear explanations of the course content, as well as their encouragement of student participation, discussion, and critical thinking. Only a small percentage of students expressed neutrality on the variables for Factor 1.

Two variables, however -- *identify students' strengths and identify students' limitations* -- registered as solidly *neutral* in the students' point of view, which could suggest some measure of apathy on the part of teachers. If a teacher is somehow detached or disengaged from knowing his or her students, the classroom environment could negatively affect students' academic development. If students feel teachers are not attuned to or do not

recognize students' limitations, they may deduce that the teachers are not willing or able to offer substantive help for how to deal with limitations that can interfere with learning. In the same way, if students feel teachers are not aware of students' strengths, they may feel their work is not recognized.

Students' responses to the variables in Factor 1 ranged across the five-point rating scale. As shown in Table 2 and indicated earlier, the mean of most variables hovered near 4.0. The two variables discussed above, *identify students' strengths and identify students' limitations*, had the lowest means in the Factor 1 summary, 3.3 and 3.0, respectively, with standard deviations above 1.0. This contrasts with the other variables that had standard deviations below 1.0, suggesting more consistency in the students' responses.

Table 2 (Factor 1) **Students' Perceptions of Teachers' Performance**

Variable – Teachers...	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Provide feedback on students' participation	77	1	5	3.8	0.95
Motivate students to improve	77	1	5	3.9	0.82
Offer suggestions for improvement	77	1	5	3.8	0.99
Identify students' strengths	77	1	5	3.3	1.08
Identify students' limitations	77	1	5	3.0	1.18
Stimulate critical thinking	77	1	5	4.1	0.82
Have positive expectations of students	77	1	5	3.8	0.77
Explain content clearly	77	1	5	3.9	0.80
Adhere to the syllabus	77	1	5	3.9	0.82
Encourage academic discussion	77	1	5	3.8	0.92
Observe students' performance	77	1	5	3.6	0.73
Are mindful of students' previous knowledge	77	1	5	3.6	0.89

Notwithstanding that their choices spanned the range of 1 to 5 options, the students appeared to be nearly of the same mind in terms of their perceptions of Factor 2, *Theoretical and Practical Knowledge of the Courses*. The data summarized in Table 3 reveal that students perceived both the theory and the practice in their courses to be useful, current, and applicable to their vocational training and the linguistic knowledge helpful for

problem solving they anticipate in the future. The mean of every variable in Factor 2 was 4.0 or higher – clearly on the *agreement* side of the scale -- and the standard deviations were below 1.0, supporting this analysis of the students’ perceptions.

Table 3 (Factor 2) **Students’ Perceptions of the Theoretical and Practical Knowledge of the Courses**

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Knowledge in courses is useful	77	1	5	4.4	0.71
Planned activities contribute to learning	77	1	5	4.2	0.70
Knowledge provided is up-to-date	77	1	5	4.2	0.73
Knowledge can be used in daily life	77	1	5	4.0	0.92
Courses improve critical-thinking skills	77	1	5	4.3	0.60
Courses contribute to problem solving	77	1	5	4.3	0.71

The results for Factor 3, *Students Perceptions of the BA Program in General*, suggest that most students in the cohort agree that the BA in Languages is excellent, that they perceive the program is developing their collaborative working skills, and that the content they are studying is relevant and current. This interpretation is supported by the fact that the means for students’ responses to most variables clustered around 4.0. (Two variables, as seen in Table 4, had standard deviations higher than 1.0, indicating a wider dispersion from the mean.) The variable *hours allotted for courses are adequate to cover course content* had the lowest mean, 3.4, closer to *neutral* than *agree*. The researcher believes that students’ noncommittal perception of this variable affecting their academic trajectory is important and warrants further analysis. This piece of data points to a possible need to review the number of hours currently assigned to various subjects in the curriculum with an eye to considering whether an increase in the hours for certain courses would benefit students. In addition, and in spite of students’ general agreement about the content of their courses, an ongoing assessment of the subject matter of the courses may also be a valid response to

students' neutral response to the aspect of how much time is allotted to cover course content. Furthermore, the substance of the courses may be strengthened and improved, in terms of relevance and scope, from additional analysis by experts in the field.

Table 4 (Factor 3) **Students' Perceptions of the BA Program in General**

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Program has high standards	77	1	5	3.7	0.82
Courses foster the development of students' skills in group work	77	1	5	3.8	0.76
Content of courses is relevant	77	1	5	4.0	0.79
Content of courses is up-to-date	77	1	5	4.0	0.78
Content of courses needs updating	77	1	5	3.7	1.03
Hours allotted for courses are adequate to cover course content	77	1	5	3.4	1.19
Teachers work collaboratively to design program materials	77	1	5	3.5	0.82

The fourth item identified as affecting students' academic trajectories was the impact of external factors. Students' perceptions of difficulties due to outside influences approached *neutral* on the Likert scale, with all the means except one falling in the *disagreement* category. Subtle variations occurred, however, and the data are summarized in Table 5. Responses to variables such as *demanding teachers*, *students' dissatisfaction with course content*, and *administrative processes* affecting academic performance tended in the direction of *neutral*. On the other hand, variables related to students' perceptions of their relationships with peers and teachers had means closer to 2.0, on the *disagreement* side of the scale. This suggests that relationship issues had little negative impact on many students in the cohort. At the same time, since the standard deviations for all the variables in Factor 4 were greater than 1.0 (and *relationships with teachers* had the highest standard deviation, 1.38), the researcher recognizes there is notable variability in students' responses. It can be

stated that there is a need for further monitoring of these variables in an effort to reduce difficulties caused by external elements in the students' academic experience.

Table 5 (Factor 4) **Students' Perceptions of Academic Difficulties due to External Factors**

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Demanding teachers	77	1	5	2.7	1.11
Dissatisfaction with course content	77	1	5	2.8	1.22
Administrative processes	77	1	5	2.7	1.18
Complex course content	77	1	5	2.7	1.20
Distractions that inhibit studying	77	1	5	3.2	1.21
Program not meeting students' expectations	77	1	5	2.2	1.33
Presence of economic problems	77	1	5	2.7	1.29
Relationships with classmates	77	1	5	2.2	1.36
Relationships with teachers	77	1	5	2.4	1.38
Administrative procedures	77	1	5	2.2	1.25

Table 6 summarizes data on students' perceptions of their academic difficulties arising from internal or personal factors, identified as Factor 5 in the research instrument. The means for the variables *lack of dedication to studies*, *lack of stress-management skills*, *personal problems*, and *poor study habits* were 2.7, 2.5, 2.6, and 2.5, respectively. This suggests that students did not consider these factors as major contributors to whatever difficulties they had in their first year of study at UAEMex. However, it is important to scrutinize the results in a deeper way and even to speculate that students' expressions of *disagreement* about personal factors playing a part in their academic difficulties may be an underestimation of what actually affects their performance. Other variables in Factor 5 had lower means, indicating more solid *disagreement*. To better understand students' interpretations of the variables and considering that all the standard deviations were greater than 1.0, the researcher proposes that students' perceptions of the variables should be analyzed further using a qualitative method that could bring to light both their cognitive

grasp of the variables addressed and the underlying elements that contributed to the varied distribution of their perceptions.

Table 6 (Factor 5) **Students' Perceptions of Academic Difficulties due to Personal Factors**

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Lack of previous knowledge	77	1	5	2.3	1.26
Lack of dedication to studies	77	1	5	2.7	1.26
Problems relating to others	77	1	5	2.3	1.33
Lack of interest in content	77	1	5	2.4	1.27
Lack of stress-management skills	77	1	5	2.5	1.51
Personal problems	77	1	5	2.6	1.35
Poor study habits	77	1	5	2.5	1.31
Family problems	77	1	5	2.1	1.26

With respect to students' vocational beliefs and expectations, most of the participants reported a positive attitude about their future as language teachers. The data are summarized in Table 7. It can be said that the students appear to envision themselves as teachers and that they believe that finishing their BA and working as teachers will improve their economic status. Further, they expect to develop professionally and would consider working and studying abroad. These variables in Factor 6 had means that fell within the *agreement* range or at a *neutral-leaning-toward-agreement* point on the scale. The mean for the variable *expect to earn a good teaching salary in the future* was a bit lower, 3.5 This response may well reflect students' knowledge and awareness of how much teachers earn in Mexico. Recent articles in Forbes (2015) and a report from the American Chamber of Commerce in Mexico published in *Universia: Mexico* (2011) attest to the fact that teachers are poorly paid in the Mexican republic. Nevertheless, students seem to have a great affinity for their BA. Despite some variables showing a wide dispersion of ratings (standard deviations higher than 1.0), the variable focusing on whether they would consider changing

their academic program if that were possible had a mean of 2.3, on the *disagreement* side of the rating scale.

Table 7 (Factor 6) **Students' Vocational Beliefs and Expectations**

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Envision themselves as English teachers in the future	77	1	5	3.6	1.38
Believe that the BA will allow them to have a teaching career	77	1	5	4.2	1.02
Believe that completing the BA is a factor in improving their economic status	77	1	5	4.1	0.93
Committed to studying in the BA program	77	1	5	4.2	1.12
Would consider changing their BA, if possible	77	1	5	2.3	1.37
Expect to develop professionally	77	1	5	4.0	0.99
Would consider the possibility of working or studying abroad	77	1	5	4.2	1.08
Expect to earn a good teaching salary in the future	77	1	5	3.5	0.97
Believe good job opportunities exist for graduates	77	1	5	3.7	0.91

Factor 7 in Section B of the research questionnaire measured students' perceptions of the tutorial process at UAEMex. The means for the various tutor-related aspects indicate that students rated many variables with either *agreement* or *neutral-leaning-toward-agreement* responses. In general, it appears they perceive tutors in a favorable light. The data show that respondents agreed that their tutors treat them ethically and respectfully, supervise their academic trajectory, and communicate well. Students' positive impressions may be due to the fact that all teachers who serve as tutors and engage in tutoring activities have taken at least one tutoring course (Ampudia, 2013). The other variables in this Factor (summarized in Table 8) had means slightly above and below the *neutral* rating.

The variable *proposes extra activities unrelated to students' personal development* registered the lowest *disagreement* mean, 2.4, a finding that invites further analysis. The researcher posits that this result is understandable in that students look to their tutor mostly for help with academic development, leaving aspects or difficulties unrelated to academic

performance to those trained in the fields of psychology and counseling. It may be further proposed that because the variables in Factor 7 had the highest dispersion of responses (all the standard deviations were greater than 1.0) of any factor measured by the questionnaire, the variables chosen to measure Tutorial Experience may need to be reviewed and revised in a future investigation.

Table 8 (Factor 7) **Students' Perceptions of the Tutorial Experience**

Variable – A Tutor...	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Treats students ethically and respectfully	77	1	5	4.2	1.02
Carefully supervises students' academic trajectory	77	1	5	3.7	1.16
Makes suggestions for improvement	77	1	5	3.5	1.24
Respects students' time and keeps appointments	77	1	5	3.7	1.35
Communicates well and shows trust and empathy	77	1	5	4.0	1.11
Is responsible and willing to compromise	77	1	5	3.7	1.21
Provides information about scholarships	77	1	5	3.2	1.22
Offers social support for achieving goals	77	1	5	3.4	1.23
Offers cultural support for achieving goals	77	1	5	3.4	1.17
Offers emotional support for achieving goals	77	1	5	3.3	1.29
Assigns activities integral to learners' development	77	1	5	2.7	1.26
Proposes extra activities unrelated to students' personal development	77	1	5	2.4	1.31

In Section C of the research instrument, students were asked to express how they felt about their studies during their first year at the university. The question was an open one, and students' responses were individual and varied. To analyze this portion of the results, the researcher considered the main idea of each student's response. In this section of the questionnaire, 67 students responded; 10 students did not answer the question. The results are shown in Figure 1.

The most common "summary" response indicating how students felt at this stage of the BA could be described as *good*. This was reflected in the answers of 26 students, or 33.77% of the population. Nine students wrote that they were *comfortable* during the first

year of study. Seven students felt *at ease* finishing their first year; seven others wrote that they were *happy*. Four students described being *satisfied*, three students used the word *animated*, and three used the term *content* in their responses to the question. Two students expressed that they were *confused*. The remaining responses, identified in Figure 1, were given by six individual students. The researcher found it remarkable that two students despite writing that they felt *good* during the first year at UAEMex also expressed that the

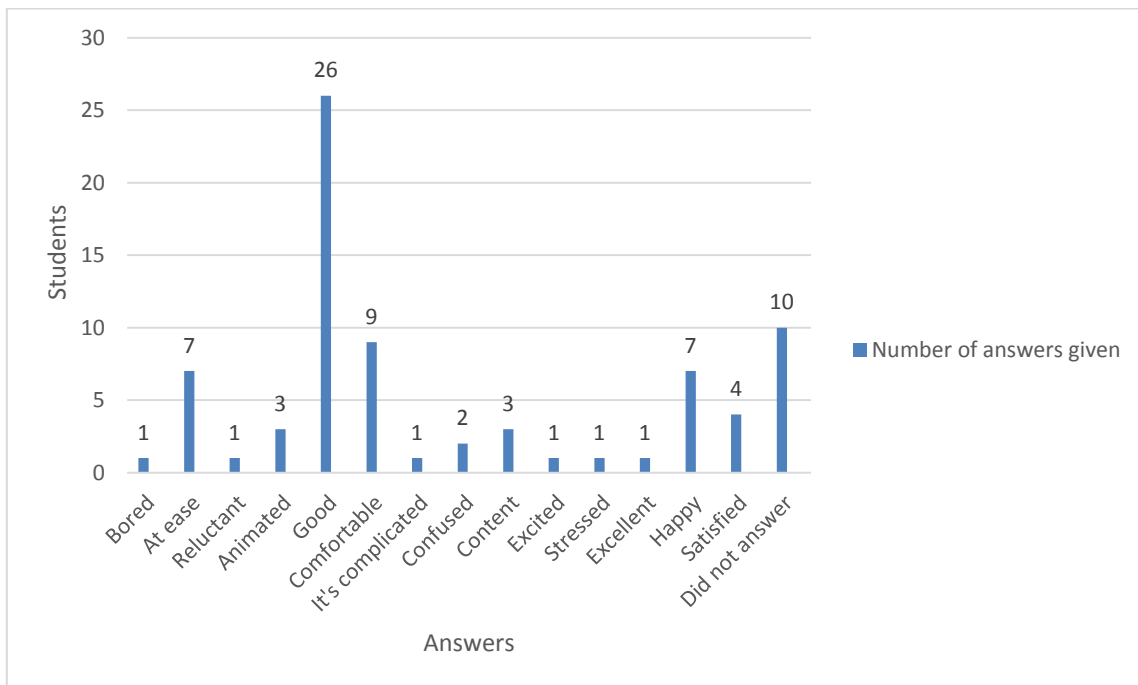


Figure 1 Students' Feelings about Their First Year in the BA Program

English classes in the BA program were not as good as they believed they should be. Their responses indicated that the classes were a review of what they had studied in high school.

Conclusions

The research results and subsequent analysis of the results of this study on academic performance and trajectory in the BA in Languages program at UAEMex provide a good foundation for taking both specific and general steps to develop and improve the 2009

curriculum at the Faculty of Languages. The rationale and motivation for action going forward may now include consideration of students' perceptions and views of their academic experience and the requirements for their professional development.

From the data, the composition of the 2013 cohort of 77 students may be described generally as a homogeneous community of learners: They are young and the great majority are unmarried. At same time, there is heterogeneity in terms of the students' places of origin, their upper secondary school history, family makeup, household income, etc. The demographic information gathered presents an opportunity for us to educate members of the "languages community" in terms of the need for inclusion, respect for different customs and backgrounds, and the acceptance of diversity among university faculty and staff. Efforts at openness and tolerance emerging from an understanding of the research results will serve to strengthen the collaborative work that is essential today and in the future in order to continue the kind of success that has long characterized the Faculty of Languages.

It can be established that a high percentage of students in the research cohort exhibit a level of excellence in their academic performance, but a small percentage of students have difficulties with their studies. With this data in mind, the Faculty of Languages must look for administrative, academic, and staff-development strategies that will positively influence students to achieve the levels of academic excellence that they and the institution seek.

The researcher concludes that red flags exist related to students' perceptions of the factors and variables affecting academic trajectories and that these should be further investigated. Students' perceptions of teachers' apathy is one such variable needing attention. Administrators and teachers in the BA program need to pose questions apropos of this concern, e.g., How can constructive empathy in the classroom be encouraged in order

to create an environment in which teachers identify students' strengths and limitations, and students, in turn, feel they are being guided in their learning?

Another area of concern related to students' academic trajectories are the hours allotted to the courses, i.e., the time required to develop and effectively present the content of the curriculum. Teachers and administrators of the BA program can use students' perceptions of the content and timeline of the courses to further study how the program could be better tailored not only to present the knowledge students need but to help them acquire the knowledge in meaningful ways.

The data also suggest that the BA in Languages program ought to monitor administrative procedures that students perceive as contributing to their academic difficulties. Additionally, the Languages program would benefit from establishing collaborative agreements with various private companies, state and national government agencies and departments, other departments at UAEMex, and other public and private universities to provide activities that contribute to students' personal development. Addressing how best the BA program can respond to and create action plans for these areas of concern emerging from the analysis of the study data fulfills the purpose of this research.

Finally, the study conducted on the academic performance and trajectory of students in the 2013 cohort in the Bachelor of Languages program at the Faculty of Languages has made it possible to obtain data of great importance to the institution itself. The information gathered and the subsequent examination of the data will influence future research on academic trajectories in higher education. Such research will, in turn, affect local, regional, national, and international dialogue related to how universities serve students and their communities in an ever-connected world.

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