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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.



P Y V

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Studies of student trajectories in language teaching programs in Mexico



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Studies of student trajectories in language teaching programs in Mexico

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A STUDY OF STUDENTS' PATHS IN THE SCHOOL OF LANGUAGES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF COLIMA

*Evangelina Flores Hernández
Alejandro Silvestre Tello Moreno*

Introduction

The activities of any institution depend to a great extent on the pursuits of its various parts. At the University of Colima (UCOL) -- as in many other public universities -- the work of the academic community, the research conducted in a multitude of disciplines, and the spread of knowledge are essential to the life of the institution and its ongoing relevance in society. Through decades of providing an atmosphere for educational inquiry and delivering services conducive to teaching and learning, the university principles remain the same: to contribute to the collective welfare of society by developing its human resources.

One cannot address excellent programs within any university without having in-depth knowledge of those who are most affected: the students. By constantly revising programs, analyzing educational trends, and staying abreast of theories and pedagogy, universities consider a variety of paths in hopes of maximizing students' success. Planners, researchers, and program developers work hand-in-hand, in some cases, in search of mechanisms that will yield practical-use answers that, in turn, lead to meaningful and relevant change for the benefit of students and, eventually, the wider community.

The small research study described in this chapter focuses on the situations of a group of students from the class of 2013. Included are their perspectives on several aspects of the school, its language-teaching program, and themselves. This is the first time a study of this type has been conducted with students in the School of Languages at the University

of Colima. No other cross-sectional study has been done except those related to undergraduate follow-up. The researchers at UCOL entered into this study with the assumption that the research would illuminate how this group of students compares with other students in public universities in Mexico so that similarities and differences presented in these trajectories can be analyzed and at the same time considered as a starting point for further studies.

The University of Colima is located in the central western region of Mexico, offering educational opportunities from high school to postgraduate in various disciplines. UCOL consists of five campuses, serving 26,334 students in the following ways: 10 programs for high school, 66 for higher education, and 38 for postgraduate. In general terms, 57.26% of students in higher education programs complete their studies according to a standard or typical completion timetable (TCT); the graduation rate increases to 64.04% when those students who postponed completing their credits are taken into consideration.

The School of Languages opened in 1985. It is located in Villa de Alvarez, Colima, and is known as Delegation 5 within UCOL. Since its inception, it has offered three programs, all related to language teaching. The current program, a BA in Language Teaching, began in 2001. It has been evaluated and accredited twice by recognized accrediting bodies in Mexico, CIEES (Comités Interinstitucionales de la Evaluación de la Educación Superior) and COAPEHUM (Consejo para la Acreditación de Programas Educativos en Humanidades). Students usually complete the program in eight semesters during which they accumulate 311 credits. The Language Teaching program consists of four areas of study: linguistics, research, methodology, and an area known as *supplementary*, consisting of elective credits to complete the program. The elective courses include Methodologies in Spanish for Foreign Students, Methodologies in French as a

Foreign Language, English and American Literature, and Methodologies for Teaching Children.

UCOL's Language Teaching program aims to prepare students to teach English, French, or Spanish to foreigners. The program has garnered success in these efforts. According to follow-up information obtained from graduates of the BA program as well as undergraduates who are already teaching, most are working professionally in the educational sphere in which they studied, and the index of satisfaction from their employers is high (Valenti and Varela, 1998).

In order to be admitted to any BA program at UCOL, candidates undergo a three-stage selection process. The first stage focuses on students' high school grade point averages (GPAs). To enter the BA program, students must have earned a GPA of at least 8.0 in high school; in the School of Medicine, the minimum GPA for admittance is 9.0. Students with lower averages can still apply for enrollment, but their chances for matriculation are weakened because high school GPAs count for 40% of the total score needed for admittance. The second stage is a national exam, in which students respond to questions related to areas of knowledge covered in high school. The national-exam score carries a value of 50%. The third stage is basically a two-week introductory course in which students are presented with general information pertinent to the philosophy of the university and the subjects they will encounter in the Language Teaching program. The course is weighted as 10% of the total evaluation. On completion of the three-stage process, UCOL tabulates the trio of scores and publishes the list of accepted candidates in the official university newspaper, other local newspapers, and on the UCOL web page. Each school at UCOL accepts a specific number of students annually. The School of Languages invites on average 80 students per year.

Currently, the School of Languages, Licenciatura en Enseñanza en Lenguas (LEL), enrolls 269 students. The path toward graduation requires students to follow the university's academic rules that stipulate successful completion of 80% of their first-semester courses; in other words, they must earn passing grades in six of the eight first-semester courses. Students are given one additional chance to pass the two remaining courses. Those who are unable to meet this requirement cannot continue in the BA program (UCOL, 2006). Those who complete the Language Teaching program at UCOL experience a variety of learning approaches including problem-based learning, work-competencies-based learning, task-based learning, and other techniques and methods that integrate student development with learning (Hernández, 2013). The most recent data for completion of the Language Teaching program after four years of study (the TCT for a BA) reveal a 58.4% graduation rate, which means students have fulfilled the graduation requirements by presenting a thesis, earning a high GPA, or passing the CENEVAL (Centro Nacional de Evaluación para la Educación Superior) exam.

Methodology

Because this study at UCOL is part of an extensive research project that includes other public universities in Mexico, the format of the database is consistent with the other participating institutions. It reflects quantitative values, a non-experimental design, and cross-sectional (transversal) and explanatory aspects, as the data were collected in a single moment in a natural context. A non-experimental study is characterized by the observation of a phenomenon in its natural context in order to be analyzed with no manipulation of variables. Hernández, Fernández, and Baptista (2010) in García Robelo (2014), identify such a study as *transversal* because data are collected in one single moment and

explanatory because it sheds light on the reason why a phenomenon happens in relation to two or more variables.

All third-semester students from the class of 2013 were selected to participate in the study. A questionnaire, developed and adapted (Garcia and Barrón, 2011) as well as piloted and validated, was given to and completed by 60 students. The first portion of the instrument, Section A, addressed students' demographic particulars, previous school history and records, and their socioeconomic conditions. The second part of the questionnaire, Section B, asked students to respond to seven factors that research in higher education indicates affect university students' experiences. They recorded their perceptions of such factors as their teachers' performance, the theoretical and practical knowledge in the BA courses, UCOL's Language Teaching program in general, the internal and external considerations that could have contributed to whatever academic difficulties they had, and their tutorial experiences. Students were also asked to share their beliefs and expectations about the future based on their studies in the BA program. Section B of the questionnaire used a rating format in which students chose numbered options on a Likert scale that most closely reflected their beliefs or perceptions. Their responses to variables that defined the factors mentioned above ranged from 1 to 5, with 1 meaning *Totally Disagree* and 5 signifying *Totally Agree*. The number 3 indicated a *Neutral* response. Finally, Section C of the questionnaire asked students for qualitative information: They responded, in their own words, to an open-ended question about their experience in the first year of the BA program.

The questionnaire in this study was first presented at a RECALE (Red de Cuerpos Académicos en Lenguas) meeting in Manzanillo, Colima; later, a follow-up meeting was held in Pachuca, Hidalgo, to define and agree on a final product. The definitive version of

the questionnaire was received electronically and then printed and distributed to third-semester students (the 2013 cohort) in their UCOL classrooms. The researchers carefully explained the questionnaire to students and monitored their completion of it to ensure there was no misunderstanding as to the study's format or intent.

Results and Discussion of Results

It is important to mention at the outset of this discussion of the results of the study that some students in the class of 2013 were not invited to respond to the questionnaire. These students were following an atypical completion timetable (ACT) for their BA; in other words, they had begun the program earlier than the typical third-semester student in the 2013 cohort. (The atypical-timetable students ordinarily are grouped with the typical completion timetable (TCT) students because they need to repeat one or several courses, in hopes of earning a passing grade.) For this research study, only students following a TCT (eight semesters) for the BA – i.e., they are not taking courses for a second time – were invited to participate. In short, the study's participants have successfully completed the necessary credits for the first and second semesters.

To begin the discussion of the study results, it is helpful to have a summary portrait of the 60 students in the cohort. A digest of general information about the students, obtained from their responses in Section A of the questionnaire, appears in Figure 1.

Demographic		August 2013 Cohort of the BA in Language Teaching	
Sex		Male (38.3%)	Female (61.7%)
Marital Status		Single (98.3%)	
Age		19 (45.0%)	
Origin	State	State of Colima (78.3%)	
	Locality	Outside of Colima (21.7%)	

Work		No (83.3%)
Studies	Father	Higher education (28.3 %)
	Mother	No higher education (43.3 %)
Social Status		Middle class (63.3%)
Previous Studies		Public system (90.0%)
GPA in High School		8.3 - 8.9 (55.0%)

Figure 1 Demographic Profile of the Research Population

The group of participating students entered the School of Languages at the University of Colima in August 2013; they have now completed their first academic year. More than three fourths of the students (47) are from the state of Colima and graduated either from a high school belonging to UCOL or some other public or private school in the state. The remaining 13 students (21.7%) graduated from high schools outside Colima. As mentioned earlier, the minimum GPA to enter the program is 8.0. During the selection process, researchers learned that the span of high school GPAs for students entering the program ranged from 8.3 to 8.9.

The students' ages varied from 18 to 36, with 19 being the *mean* age; the group was comprised of more females (61.7%) than males (38.3%). The vast majority (98.3%) reported their marital status as *single*. The students' parents' education levels spanned the educational gamut from elementary school to postgraduate studies. The most often cited level of education for fathers was *higher education* (28%) and for mothers, *no higher education* (43%).

Thirty-eight students in this study reported they have the means to cover their tuition fees and living expenses, either because they are supported by their parents, by siblings who work and assist them with paying for food and rent, or because they receive money from other members of their family. (Within this group, three students indicated they receive some money but did not mention the source.) Those who live under more

restrictive economic situations, 22 students, usually look to scholarships to finance their education. Funds for their university study come from various sources, including the federal government, state government, private organizations, and UCOL.

Continuing with the summary overview of students' demographic information, 41 students live in their parents' house and 17 students pay rent to live elsewhere. The remaining two students indicated they live with relatives. All 60 students have had tutoring experience, either individually or in a group. Thirty-three said they are entitled to have a tutor; 27 responded that they feel forced to work with a tutor, as it is an institutional policy. According UCOL guidelines, students are assigned to a tutoring program that requires systematic follow-up, evaluation by students themselves, and monitoring by university authorities through a virtual system called SAESTUC (Sistema Automatizado para la Evaluación y Seguimiento de la Tutoría en la Universidad de Colima).

Keeping the students' demographic particulars in mind, discussion of the study's findings now turns to Section B of the questionnaire in which participants responded to items that focused on seven factors affecting their university experience. As mentioned earlier, the students recorded their responses on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 meaning *Totally Disagree* and 5, *Totally Agree*.

In Table 1, *Students' Perceptions of Teachers' Performance*, the mean scores all registered above 3 (*Neutral*) indicating that students perceived their teachers' performance as "better than average," taking into account the students' general knowledge and how they interpreted the usefulness of classroom activities for their professional development. Their responses ranged from 2 to 5. Given that teachers' practice can always be improved and realizing that the respondents are still in an early phase of the teacher-preparation process, it is difficult to determine whether students were consciously assessing what they observed

in the classroom and received from their teachers or perhaps appraising their *own* performance in the classroom.

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

Variable – Teachers...	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Provide feedback on students' participation	60	2.00	5.00	3.8	.79
Motivate students to improve	60	2.00	5.00	3.8	.70
Offer suggestions for improvement	60	2.00	5.00	3.8	.83
Identify students' strengths	60	2.00	5.00	3.4	.90
Identify students' limitations	60	2.00	5.00	3.3	.88
Stimulate critical thinking	60	2.00	5.00	4.1	.83
Have positive expectations of students	60	2.00	5.00	3.7	.80
Explain content clearly	60	2.00	5.00	3.8	.81
Adhere to the syllabus	60	2.00	5.00	3.8	1.04
Encourage academic discussion	60	2.00	5.00	3.8	.85
Observe students' performance	60	2.00	5.00	3.7	.79
Are mindful of students' previous knowledge	60	2.00	5.00	3.8	.70

In Table 2, which summarizes *Students' Perceptions of the Theoretical and Practical Knowledge of the Courses*, it is clear that they consider the knowledge they are acquiring to be quite acceptable. The mean for five of the six positive variables related to course content registered *agreement* (4 on the Likert scale) from the respondents. One could say that students see the subject matter they are studying as meaningful and relevant for solving real-life problems in the future. After one year in the Language Teaching program, they seem to recognize the essential value of foreign languages in their preparation as future teachers. From their responses, one could surmise that they plan to put their language-teaching education to use when they graduate. It appears these students are conscious of the fact that teaching-and-learning theory and practice should be linked in relevant ways in order for students to develop a strong base -- an authentic foundation -- for their future in the classroom. This realization seems especially important for students who

are beginning the third semester of the BA, a term in which they will have the opportunity to practice, from planning lessons to delivering knowledge, in actual school environments.

Table 2 (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	60	2.00	5.00	4.2	.85
Planned activities contribute to learning	60	2.00	5.00	4.1	.84
Knowledge provided is up-to-date	60	2.00	5.00	4.0	.84
Knowledge can be used in daily life	60	2.00	5.00	3.9	.77
Courses improve critical-thinking skills	60	2.00	5.00	4.1	.83
Courses contribute to problem solving	60	2.00	5.00	4.0	.82

The data summarized in Table 3, *Students' Perceptions of the BA Program in General*, suggest that students perceive the Language Teaching program at UCOL to be more than acceptable. They appear to be aware of their abilities and what the program offers. The *means* of students' responses to course content, preparations of materials, and group work clustered just below *agreement* (4 on the scale) suggesting that they view these aspects of the program as valuable. The variable that addressed teachers working collaboratively registered the highest mean score (~3.97). The students' responses reflect the researchers' belief that the BA program must continue to evolve according to students' current needs and what they will encounter in their chosen profession. The relevance of the content of the university courses lies in how well the subject matter prepares students to be effective English-language teachers. The researchers note that students showed a degree of satisfaction with their courses at this point, the start of the second year of a four-year program. They are equally aware that students' perceptions may change as they face other necessities and realities in their training and practice.

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

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Program has high standards	60	2.00	5.00	3.6	.76
Courses foster the development of students' skills in group work	60	2.00	5.00	3.8	.83
Content of courses is relevant	60	2.00	5.00	3.9	.87
Content of courses is up-to-date	60	2.00	5.00	3.9	.80
Content of courses needs updating	60	2.00	5.00	3.5	1.06
Hours allotted for courses are adequate to cover course content	60	2.00	5.00	3.7	.95
Teachers work collaboratively to design program materials	60	2.00	5.00	3.9	.97

The data in Table 4 show responses to Factor 4, *Students' Perceptions of Academic Difficulties due to External Factors*, and indicate that external aspects of university life may have adverse effects on academic performance. It appears that students' stress or anxiety caused by administrative issues, economic problems, the content of the program, or the fact that the program itself may not be what they expected, can have a negative impact on their experience in the Language Teaching program.

One clear example of an external factor that may cause difficulties involves administrative procedures that exacerbate students' concerns about time, effort, and money. (The means for the *administrative procedures* and the "supporting" *administrative processes* variables are 3.6 and 3.5, respectively.) UCOL's course-payment system in which all payments are handled through a unique bank account serving every university department can be used to illustrate how administrative systems can adversely affect students. All students at UCOL (more than 10,000) must make their payments essentially at the same time, within two or three days. Consequently, students waste an inordinate amount of time waiting for a clerk to attend them. Another administrative element students consider a burden is the virtual system for grades within the university, a system that all university students and teachers must deal with.

Other variables in Factor 4 indicate that students' social interactions or lack thereof can put a strain on their academic life. Responses indicated that infrequent or limited contact with their classmates and interaction with teachers who do not adequately respond to their questions had negative impacts. The means for these variables, 3.7 and 3.6, respectively, tended toward *agreement*, as seen in Table 4. The researchers acknowledge that the academic environment is varied and that any number of external factors may contribute additional stress to students' lives. For example, students who live a great distance from each other or students who have jobs may have difficulty finding a time and place to complete group tasks for their courses. The researchers recognize that exploring solutions addressing the problematic areas students identified in the questionnaire can lead to positive steps toward avoiding future difficulties related to these external factors.

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

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Demanding teachers	60	1.00	5.00	2.7	1.11
Dissatisfaction with course content	60	1.00	5.00	3.0	1.11
Administrative processes	60	1.00	5.00	3.5	.94
Complex course content	60	1.00	5.00	3.2	.95
Distractions that inhibit studying	60	1.00	5.00	2.9	1.14
Program not meeting students' expectations	60	1.00	5.00	3.5	1.03
Presence of economic problems	60	1.00	5.00	3.2	1.30
Relationships with classmates	60	1.00	5.00	3.7	1.22
Relationships with teachers	60	1.00	5.00	3.6	1.16
Administrative procedures	60	1.00	5.00	3.6	1.20

In the next factor in the research questionnaire, students were asked to consider what personal elements contributed to academic difficulties they faced during their first year of study at the university. A summary of their responses appears in Table 5. The *family problems* and *problems relating to others* variables registered the highest means, 3.7 – near the *Agree* level. The data suggest that for some students, dealing with family

problems and relating to others in addition to tending to the demands of their studies contributed to academic challenges in their first year at UCOL. The participants also noted *personal problems* (a mean of 3.4) and *lack of previous knowledge* (a mean of 3.3) as having some negative influence. The *family problems* aspect had the highest standard deviation (1.25) of all the variables in Factor 5. This reflects not only the wide range of responses but the highly individual psychological needs and personalities of the students. Further interpretation of the data is difficult without additional follow-up questions intended to illuminate whether or how the BA program could respond to lessen the adverse effects of such personal factors. As intimated in the discussion of Factor 4 results, the BA program administrators and teachers must consider and carefully interpret students' responses to mitigate their personal anxieties through informed interventions that contribute in an integral way to their academic and personal growth.

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

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Lack of previous knowledge	60	1.00	5.00	3.3	1.19
Lack of dedication to studies	60	1.00	5.00	3.2	1.07
Problems relating to others	60	2.00	5.00	3.7	1.03
Lack of interest in content	60	1.00	5.00	3.3	1.12
Lack of stress-management skills	60	1.00	5.00	3.2	1.16
Personal problems	60	1.00	5.00	3.4	1.06
Poor study habits	60	2.00	5.00	3.1	1.06
Family problems	60	1.00	5.00	3.7	1.25

Factor 6 focused on students' beliefs and expectations related to their completing the BA and their future as language teachers. Looking at the means of the variables in Table 6, it could be said that students have a great deal in common concerning vocational beliefs and expectations about their future as teaching professionals. Believing that this BA will allow them to have a teaching career registered the highest mean of *agreement*, 4.2, among the variables. The other two means in the *Agree* category were for the variables

envision themselves as English teachers and would consider the possibility of working or studying abroad; both had means of 4.0. Further supporting their positive expectations is the response to the variable *would consider changing their BA, if possible* which had the lowest mean, 2.7, expressing *disagreement*. One could infer that these third-semester students recognize the value of a teaching career.

What is noteworthy is that their responses, which tend to be more optimistic than for other factors addressed in the research questionnaire, raise questions about why some students do not seem to have positive expectations about their future as teachers. It could be that affirmative expectations cannot fully be realized until students have completed the program and are teaching in classrooms of their own, according to their academic timetable, as early as July 2017. One must consider that the students completed the questionnaire after only one year of study; it is understandable that they have uncertainties about their future as teachers. When students have more contact with real-world situations - during their practicum or social service, for instance - they likely will perceive and/or be better able to understand the relationship between aspects of the BA program and real-life conditions in the world of work and subsequently be able to more accurately describe their expectations for the future.

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

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Envision themselves as English teachers in the future	60	2.00	5.00	4.0	.92
Believe that the BA will allow them to have a teaching career	60	2.00	5.00	4.2	.85
Believe that completing the BA is a factor in improving their economic status	60	1.00	5.00	3.8	.90
Committed to studying in the BA program	60	1.00	5.00	3.7	1.18
Would consider changing their BA, if possible	60	1.00	5.00	2.7	1.32
Expect to develop professionally	60	1.00	5.00	3.7	.99
Would consider the possibility of working or studying abroad	60	1.00	5.00	4.0	1.02

Expect to earn a good teaching salary in the future	60	1.00	5.00	3.1	1.04
Believe good job opportunities exist for graduates	60	1.00	5.00	3.2	1.02

Factor 7, *Students' Perceptions of the Tutorial Experience*, was the last factor measured in Section B of the questionnaire. The data presented in Table 7 suggest that some students are non-committal toward the tutoring process. The highest mean among the variables was 3.6, leaning slightly toward the *Agree* category, but still lower than would be expected or desired for students' perceptions of whether their tutors treat them ethically and respectfully. Although all the students have a tutor and they have been presented with explanations of the activities that characterize the tutoring process at UCOL, their impressions of the tutoring system do not seem conducive to having a favorable experience. The lackluster data suggest a need for review and/or renewal of UCOL's efforts related to tutorial activities and building an atmosphere of collaboration between tutors and tutees. This research study can serve as an impetus for increasing awareness on the part of both students and tutors of the value of nurturing and supporting positive tutoring environments which contribute to students' academic performance and their well-being.

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

Variable – A Tutor...	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Treats students ethically and respectfully	60	1.00	5.00	3.6	1.02
Carefully supervises students' academic trajectory	60	1.00	5.00	3.4	1.07
Makes suggestions for improvement	60	1.00	5.00	3.2	1.07
Respects students' time and keeps appointments	60	1.00	5.00	3.3	1.04
Communicates well and shows trust and empathy	60	1.00	5.00	3.3	1.04
Is responsible and willing to compromise	60	1.00	5.00	3.5	.99
Provides information about scholarships	60	1.00	5.00	3.4	.99
Offers social support for achieving goals	60	1.00	5.00	3.4	.96
Offers cultural support for achieving goals	60	1.00	5.00	3.3	1.01
Offers emotional support for achieving goals	60	1.00	5.00	3.1	1.06
Assigns activities integral to learners'	60	1.00	5.00	2.9	1.12

development					
Proposes extra activities unrelated to students' personal development	60	1.00	5.00	2.9	1.27

For the last segment of this chapter's discussion of the study's results, the focus turns to qualitative information gathered from Section C of the questionnaire. The information summarized in Figure 2 reflects students' responses. They were asked an open-ended question about their feelings toward their recently completed first year in the BA program and the School of Languages itself. The numbers demonstrate that most students are satisfied, happy, and motivated because of their performance and growth.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Satisfied	17	28.3
Happy	16	26.7
Motivated	16	26.7
Indifferent	6	10.0
Demotivated	1	1.7
Stressed	4	6.7

Figure 2 Students' Overall Impressions of Their First Year at UCOL

Students' responses indicate their comments are both personal and reflective. Excerpts from the students' remarks follow, with student numbers assigned to safeguard confidentiality.

S1 -- *I feel happy with myself and my results in final exams*

S2 -- *I am satisfied with my development in English and French*

S3 -- *I understand much better my teachers than when I started a year ago*

S4 -- *I felt a bit stressed because my lack of knowledge and practice in English, but now I feel a bit more relief*

S5 -- *I still feel confused about I will get this through and I am not sure whether I can improve my linguistic competence*

Notwithstanding the generally positive comments above, six students expressed that they felt totally indifferent about their first two semesters and did not elaborate on their feelings. The researchers' analysis and subsequent interpretation of the students' responses

to the Language Teaching program support the opinion that the program meets the needs of most students.

Conclusions

The results obtained from students' responses to the questionnaire used in this research study indicate that the academic trajectory of students in the Language Teaching program at UCOL can be affected by a variety of factors, including their previous knowledge of languages, socioeconomic situation, level or quality of school and family support, availability of scholarships, and the support of and socialization with others.

Students' previous knowledge of languages is determined by the results of a placement test they take at the beginning of the school year. Based on the test results, students decide what steps to take, what learning paths to follow. The School of Languages offers learning opportunities for its students to reinforce or increase fluency and accuracy levels mainly in English or French as foreign languages. As students develop their language skills, they consequently increase their knowledge and feel more secure as foreign-language users. Students' responses in the questionnaire make clear that they believe previous knowledge is important upon entering the program and that a lack of knowledge can cause difficulties in their efforts to progress. When such situations arise, students must take extra lessons outside the BA program to increase their knowledge to a point where they are better able to succeed in the program.

The researchers acknowledge that economic problems students face present issues not easily dealt with. The economic support they receive by applying for funding is often inadequate, especially when the resources are used not only to pay for their education, but to help their families as well. It seems clear that when their families or relatives support them, students are freed up to concentrate on academic pursuits and their performance

improves. If, in addition, they have positive social interactions, their experience in a classroom environment also improves.

Our research team concludes that students who completed the questionnaire perceive the Language Teaching program, their teachers, and the knowledge learned in the first year in a positive light, in general terms. At the same time, it seems clear students recognize that both personal and external factors can affect their academic life in negative and/or challenging ways and that they cannot always resolve the issues themselves. Further, we believe that students need to become aware of the importance of working with a tutor to whom they can bring their questions and go to for support and guidance during their university experience.

We further conclude that the major finding and/or concern emerging from the results of the research study rests with the tutoring program. Students seem not to have adequate understanding of the tutoring process and its benefits. Because both tutors and tutees may have insights into how UCOL can encourage meaningful tutorial interactions and define a tutoring program where all participants have beneficial experiences, their input should be sought. The Language School and its teachers need to keep in mind that the tutoring process is a series of tutor-tutee encounters and activities that address both academic and personal problems. On the one hand, students must be better equipped (with guidance from tutors) to understand the challenges of their future work as teachers and what they need to do to find success beyond graduation. On the other hand, students must be encouraged to reflect on their own situations and consider their behaviors and attitudes during their professional development in the BA program in order to take advantage of UCOL's resources and support services (such as tutoring) as they work and study to achieve their personal goals.

Finally, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, we began our work with expectations that the study would shed light on how this cohort of students in the BA program for language teaching compares with other students enrolled in similar programs in Mexico's public universities. As the comparative analyses unfold, patterns and areas of concern will likely emerge among public universities and from there, future collaborative research can be conducted. UCOL's language-teaching program will benefit both in terms of efforts to reinforce why and how the current BA works well and to respond appropriately to the areas this study has identified as needing improvement. Ongoing attention to and careful evaluation of the program's effectiveness and its impact on students' academic trajectory serves not only students in the BA but also *their* future students in language classrooms across Mexico.

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