

Students' Perceptions Regarding their B.A. in English Language Graduate¹

Percepción de estudiantes acerca de su perfil en el programa de licenciatura en inglés

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Abstract

This paper examines the perception undergraduate students have, regarding the attributes they have developed in terms of transferable and communicative skills. The goal was to shed light on how undergraduate students, in the context of this research, perceive their graduate profile. This study was carried out at a university school of foreign languages in southeast Mexico over the course of a year, from August 2016 to July 2017. Thirty male and female students participated in the study. Their ages ranged from 21 to 30 years old. They all were about to complete the last term of the BA program at the time the data were collected. The data collection tools used for this inquiry were interviews and surveys. The interviews were used to get an insight, in general terms, into the participants' perceptions whereas the surveys provided richer information about the students' perceived competences and skills. Content analysis was used to process the data, which were coded classified, summarized. The data suggest that students perceived gains in critical thinking skills, research skills, language skills, autonomy, and motivation as part of the attributes they developed within the program. However, attributes regarding teaching skills, learning strategies, technology skills, teamwork and ability to develop new projects and ideas are perceived as poorly developed or not acquired at all.

Key words: students' perception; English, communicative skills; undergraduate; graduate profile; foreign language; learning strategies

Resumen

Este artículo examina la percepción de estudiantes de licenciatura, previamente a su graduación, con respecto a los atributos que han desarrollado en términos de habilidades transferibles y comunicativas. El objetivo de este estudio fue arrojar luz sobre cómo

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los estudiantes de licenciatura, en el contexto de esta investigación, perciben su perfil de egreso. El estudio se llevó a cabo en una universidad en el sureste de México en el trascurso de un año, de agosto 2016 a julio 2017. Treinta alumnos, entre hombres y mujeres, participaron en él. Sus edades van de los 21 a los 30 años. Todos estaban a punto de concluir el último semestre del programa cuando se recogieron los datos. Las herramientas de colecta de datos fueron encuestas y entrevistas. Las primeras se usaron para conocer, de manera general, las percepciones de los participantes, mientras que las segundas proporcionaron información más precisa sobre cómo los participantes percibían sus habilidades y competencias. Los datos sugieren que los participantes perciben avances en sus habilidades de pensamiento crítico, habilidades de investigación, habilidades lingüísticas, autonomía, y motivación, como parte de los atributos que han logrado desarrollar dentro del programa. Sin embargo, los atributos concernientes a sus habilidades de enseñanza y de aprendizaje, habilidades tecnológicas, de trabajo en equipo, y habilidades para desarrollar nuevos proyectos e ideas, son percibidos como poco desarrollados o no desarrollados en lo absoluto.

Palabras clave: percepción de estudiantes; inglés, habilidades comunicativas; perfil del graduado; idioma extranjero; estrategias de aprendizaje

Resumo

Este artigo examina a percepção de estudantes de licenciatura, previamente a sua graduação, com relação aos atributos que desenvolveram em termos de habilidades transferíveis e comunicativas. O objetivo deste estudo foi dar uma ideia sobre como os estudantes de licenciatura, no contexto desta pesquisa, percebem o seu perfil de formado. O estudo foi realizado em uma universidade no sudeste do México no período de um ano, de agosto de 2016 a julho de 2017. Trinta alunos, entre homens e mulheres, participaram nele. Suas idades vão dos 21 aos 30 anos. Todos estavam a ponto de concluir o último semestre do programa quando se coletaram os dados. As ferramentas de coleta de dados foram enquetes e entrevistas. As primeiras se usaram para conhecer, de maneira geral, as percepções dos participantes, enquanto que as segundas proporcionaram informação mais precisa sobre como os participantes percebiam as suas habilidades e competências. Os dados sugerem que os participantes percebem avanços em suas habilidades de pensamento crítico, habilidades de pesquisa, habilidades linguísticas, autonomia, e motivação, como parte dos atributos que conseguiram desenvolver dentro do programa. Entretanto, os atributos referentes às suas habilidades de ensino e de aprendizagem, habilidades tecnológicas, de trabalho em equipe, e habilidades para desenvolver novos projetos e ideias, são percebidos como pouco desenvolvidos ou não desenvolvidos no absoluto.

Palavras chave: percepção de estudantes; inglês, habilidades comunicativas; perfil do formado; idioma estrangeiro; estratégias de aprendizagem

Introduction

Generally speaking, university students have a variety of expectations regarding their graduate profile and the attributes they expect to develop to get the desired job right after graduation. Graduate attributes refer to a large number of qualities that an individual develops at a certain point of their life and that include attitudes, values, competences, and skills (Barrie, 2006). This is precisely what this study focuses on: the achievement of graduate attributes, how these attributes were achieved, and the students' perceptions of their graduate profile, insofar as in the context of this study, having an outstanding profile appears to be important for educational institutions and employers.

These graduate attributes can be classified into two different categories: technical and transferable skills (Coromillas, 2001). Unlike technical skills, which relate to a specific discipline area of study, transferable skills focus on attitudes and communicative skills (Hager & Holand, 2006). The latter are expected to be integrated within a set of graduate attributes. Crosthwaite, Cameron, Lant, and Litser (2006) argue that the development of graduate attributes is more likely to happen when students interact in a realistic context that demand the integration and practice of these skills. Graduate attributes are complex outcomes composed by various elements and there may be challenges in building and assessing graduate attributes. Moalosi, Oladiran, and Uziak (2012) suggest that some of them are lack of time on the part of teaching staff, motivation, resources or skills needed to improve teaching, assessment approaches, and an appropriate balance between technical and transferable skills development.

Moalosi et al., (2012) explored some of the strategies that have been put into practice to develop these competencies. It has been suggested that these skills can be developed through projects and tasks. Some learner-center approaches seem to guide students through the process of acquiring knowledge and developing these skills. The introduction of projects and tasks in the curriculum may motivate students by demanding higher-level thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, effective communication, and autonomy (Prince & Felder, 2006).

Objectives

The goal of this research study was to analyze students' perceptions of their graduate profile and the academic and professional attributes they had developed prior to graduation, and whether awareness of these attributes had had any significant impact in their academic development. In this paper, we present the analysis of learners' perspectives in regards to the skills expected

in their graduate profile in the context of a B.A. program in English language; how important these skills are for them, and how these skills were developed. The approach taken for this study intended to provide answers to the following questions:

How do undergraduate students in an English BA program perceive their graduate profile?

Are students aware of the graduate attributes the university expects them to achieve?

To what extent have students developed these attributes?

What has been the role of the teachers in helping the participants develop graduate attributes?

How has awareness of graduate attributes helped the participants be more competitive in their academic development?

Literature Review

We live in a world where there is always constant change. Thus, for new businesses or institutions, prospective employees need to meet changing job market expectations (Hadiyanto, 2010). The qualities that may help them succeed should be well-developed competences and attitudes. In the UNESCO report in 1996a, these competences, skills and abilities are categorized as the Four Pillars of Education (UNESCO 1996a; UNESCO 1996b). The UNESCO Commission (Scatolini, Maele, & Bartholomé, 2010) describes the four pillars as follows:

- Learning to know: the basic knowledge a person needs to understand how to live with dignity.
- Learning to do: it involves being creative by developing practical skills, teamwork attitude and willingness to take risks.
- Learning to live together: it means learning to be understanding. People should be able to participate in all human activities with empathy and respect.
- Learning to be: this pillar encloses the three previous ones. It refers to decisions people take, the actions they perform and the way they do these actions.

Students' Learning Outcomes

The four pillars of education are guiding principles that intend to promote skills for lifelong learning. They focus on the development of skills, competences and attitudes, and learning outcomes. These can be defined as the expected results from students enrolled in a higher education program or employees of a company. According to Nygaard, Courtney, and Bartholomew (2013), each institution describes these outcomes mainly for the following reasons: a) to show students the skills and competencies they are expected to develop during university years; b) to allow employers to review what these students are capable of doing; c) to decide whether or not students fit the profile; d) to help teachers become familiar with the objectives students need to achieve in order to take them into consideration while developing the curriculum; e) to advise faculties on which dimensions students' achievements can be measured; f) to facilitate school accreditation when authorities review a bachelor's program.

Students' learning outcomes refer to cognitive outcomes such as knowledge, competencies, skills, abilities, values, goals, attitudes, identity, personal goals, worldviews, and personal or graduate attributes (Nygaard et al., 2013) that can be seen as the measurement of what a student has actually learnt during their studies.

In general, when people refer to graduate attributes, they refer to a large number of qualities that an individual develops at a certain point of their life that include attitudes, values, competences, and skills (Barrie, 2006). Graduate attributes can be defined as "the qualities, skills and understanding a university agrees its students would desirably develop during their time at the institution and, consequently, shape the contribution they are able to make to their profession and as a citizen." (Bowden, Hart, King, Trigwell & Watts, 2000, as cited in Leibowitz, 2012: 88).

As part of their graduate attributes, students are expected to develop both technical and transferable skills if they are to succeed as proficiency users of their mother tongue and of the target language. Although some educational and work settings may have their own transferable requirements (Pace, 2011), transferable skills provide individuals with the flexibility to adapt to different work settings. Some transferable skills have to do with communication, critical thinking, multitasking, teamwork, creativity, and leadership (Yates, 2006). Hargis (2011) suggests that lack of these skills may cause employers or institutions to not find graduate students joining the job market competent enough. Although graduate students most probably have technical skills, they may lack transferable skills, which may prevent them from keeping their jobs.

In the case of teachers of English, they may have the attributes they need as professionals to provide a good service and the technical skills required for

a specific task, but they may lack transferable skills, which are easily shifted from job to another (Barrie & Prosser, 2004). Teachers may play different roles; each requiring its own set of competences and skills. Therefore, future teachers need to learn to know, to do and to live together. One element to consider for this profession is the pedagogical knowledge they need to have; they need to be aware of different aspects of curriculum planning, assessment, reflective teaching, classroom management, language acquisition, and teaching strategies (Borg, 2006, 2009).

Another attribute is effective communication skills. They are necessary for the accomplishment of certain objectives such as learning to listen, speak, write, and communicate in nonverbal forms (Klein, 2009). They also need language skills; by the time they graduate, language students must have learnt to communicate accurately in both their mother tongue and the target language. A skill that future teachers also need is critical thinking to help them identify issues, provide solutions, make decisions and deal with different situations (Heimler, 2010, as cited in Williams, 2015). Garner and Duckworth (2000) state that critical thinking is one of the skills that employers consider during the recruitment process, along with well-developed transferable skills to succeed in their job performance. Future language teachers might also be expected to know how to work with people from other cultures or with different ideas; that is, they might need interpersonal skills that allow individuals to deal with others, (Heimler, 2010, as cited in Williams, 2015).

Developing Graduate Attributes

There is no specific methodology focusing on developing graduate attributes. Sierra (2011) claims that certain techniques such as presentations, case studies, task-based projects, problem-based projects, learning contracts, and cooperative learning help to develop some attributes. The implementation of graduate attributes may require some changes in the curriculum and that some elements be taken into consideration, such as the strategies used to facilitate their development. The strategies may vary depending on how teachers use them (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999). Boyle (2010) mentions that many universities have decided to review their curriculums to incorporate graduate attributes in their teaching programs so that they foster integration and flexibility.

Tan, Koppi, and Field (2006) consider project-based learning and the design project approach as helpful approaches to develop and acquire generic skills and competences. Transferable skills may be attained by exposure to realistic experiences. Lowe and Marshal (2004, as cited in Moalosi, et al. 2012) point out that students may gain a broader spectrum of graduate attributes by engaging in relevant experiences that demand the integration and practice of

these skills. However, the emphasis of curriculum design is often placed on the skills that focus on the disciplinary area but, quite often, transferable skills are not given enough attention (Moalosi et al., 2012).

Students who develop technical and transferable skills are able to function efficiently in a changing work environment. They are also able to use critical thinking skills, solve problems, communicate effectively, work in groups, and use ICT-related skills (Nettleton, Litchfield, & Taylor, 2008). Thus, students might have a lot of specific discipline knowledge, but if they do not know how to communicate, how to approach people, and work in teams, they may be seen as incompetent (Hargis, 2011).

Cooperative Learning (CL) can also help students to develop some attributes as it allows them to work together in order to accomplish shared goals (Cohen, 1994, as cited in Vermette & Kline, 2017). This approach promotes cooperation, if well guided, as it focuses on effort, cooperation, and active participation to solve issues or achieve goals as the most important basis of motivation (Snowman & McCown, 2014). Johnson and Johnson (2009, as cited in Lovat, Toomey, & Clement, 2010) claim that the best way to succeed and obtain positive interaction is by helping each other and exchanging ideas and information, and by engaging in mutual communication, influence, and trust.

Problem-based Learning (Major & Palmer, 2001; Edwards, 2005), often called Task-based or Project-based learning, can also support the development of a wide range of graduate attributes. According to Yusuf, Gambari, and Olumorin (2012), students tend to develop significant skills and competences if collaborative learning and projects in education are implemented. Moalosi et al. (2012) and Boyle (2010) carried out research based on project based learning and discovered that it enabled students to develop most of the graduate attributes desired.

Estrada, Narváez, and Núñez, (2016), highlight that students—in the context of the Bachelor's Degree in English where this study was carried out—hope to embark on a career as English teachers in the future. The students believe that the B.A program will enhance their teaching career and hope to earn a good income as a result of getting their bachelor's degree. In other words, they expect to be better off after completing their degree; once they have done so, they expect that opportunities of a better life will arise. Nevertheless, it is not clear whether or not they will be able to develop the outcomes the university expects them to achieve.

Methodology

Previous studies (Barrie, 2006; Barrie & Prosser, 2004; Corominas, 2001; Hager & Holland, 2007). have analyzed and evaluated the attributes developed by students at the end of the university years giving priority to the quantitative part only. However, in the case of the present study, knowing what students feel or think about the subject was also relevant. Therefore, it seemed adequate to analyze data obtained of a quantitative and qualitative nature (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The qualitative design of this exploratory study aimed to understand how the participants perceive their actual graduate profile, explore their experiences and perceptions whereas the quantitative design aimed at understanding what outcomes seem to be more important for the participants and to what extent these outcomes were fostered by the university throughout the years of study. The idea was to analyze combined data obtained from both perspectives, a quantitative and a qualitative methodology in the research field, in order to answer the research questions (Kumar, 2014).

The sequence of this study consists in describing the quantitative data first, followed by the description and analysis of the qualitative data in order to connect the results. This particular study relies on a follow-up explanation model where the researcher needs qualitative data to explain or expand on quantitative results (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hatson, 2003).

Data Collection Instruments

The main instruments used for data collection for this research study were interviews and surveys. Interviews offered several advantages: they can be flexible, they can be opened-ended, and they can help the researcher to understand the participants' point of view, situation, experiences, hopes and dreams (Kvale, 1996: 1). The survey, on the other hand, was devised with the purpose of analyzing the students' competences and skills.

For the interview, open-ended questions were used in order to gain access to in-depth information about the participants' perceptions regarding the skills and competences they have acquired and the graduate attributes teachers have helped the participants develop. Because of the flexibility of this type of qualitative semi-structured interview, it was possible to focus on the participant's actual experiences more than their general beliefs and opinions (King & Horrocks, 2010). The interview guide was designed keeping in mind some important concepts such as value, trust, objectivity, accuracy, honesty, and meaning.

The survey was designed using a Likert scale technique; a scale often used in research making use of questionnaires. When using this tool, the participants have to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement on an agree/disagree

scale dealing with several statements. In this case, it presented participants with a series of 27 statements, for each of which the participants were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the statements by using one of a number of positions on a four-point scale designed by the researcher.

Using this scale, students were to indicate to what extent they considered important the skills and abilities the university expects them to acquire, and whether or not they had developed them throughout their degree. The four-point scale survey combined two elements: the written narrative and the Likert approach. Behavioral anchored numerical scales measure behavioral performance of others and they can provide qualitative and quantitative data.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using content analysis procedures. After collecting the data, it was categorized and coded in order to classify it for further presentation. In order to do this, the information was scanned carefully to identify the repetition of ideas, similar opinions and emotions, and shared expressions repetitions used by the participants. As a first step, the data was organized into different sets having to do with the interview questions. As a second step, the different sets of data were linked to connect patterns; this was done by establishing comparisons of the findings focusing on similarities and differences. Then, through the connection of the different categories, a sensible flow of information to support the objectives and research questions of the study emerged. As a final step, the data were prepared for presentation. All the coding and processing of the data were done manually; that is, no soft wear such as Atlas Ti, was used.

Research Context

This research was carried out in a public university in Mexico that offers a Bachelor's Degree in English Language. This institution relies on a flexible education curriculum (Beltrán Casanova, 2005) which aims at fostering autonomous learning. There is also a Research Centre and a Self-Access Centre where students can use different materials to practice their language skills by themselves.

Ten years ago, a new educational model was adopted at the school of languages where this study took place to prepare students following holistic approach (Universidad Veracruzana, 1999). Students are now expected to achieve knowledge related to their work fields; they are also expected to be competent in the communicative abilities in both their mother tongue and the English Language and acquire some competencies and skills required for

lifelong learning. In order to be competitive in the job market, the program aims to develop autonomy, adaptability, responsibility, and a sense of professional growth in the students (Facultad de Idiomas de la Universidad Veracruzana, 2009).

The curriculum was designed to train individuals so that they achieve a sound command of English; develop skills in order to perform effectively in different work areas where English is required; and to develop language skills that will enhance their teaching skills (Facultad de Idiomas de la Universidad Veracruzana, 2009).

Research Participants

The sample presented here is part of the 2012 cohort. The study focused on those students who were about to complete the last term of the BA program. All participants were attending classes at the time of the study. Thirty students participated in the survey. From these 30, ten students were subsequently interviewed. There were four males and six females with ages ranging from 21 to 30. The study was carried out with students who had already been studying for almost 4 years and were more likely to enrich the findings of the study. All the participants were fully informed that the data provided would be used for research purposes and written consent was obtained from all of them.

Results

The presentation of results is divided into two main sections: skills and competencies developed by students, and students' skills that need improvement.

Skills and competencies developed by students

This section analyses the outcomes students have achieved; it also reports whether this university school enhanced these outcomes or not, from the point of view of the students.

Critical thinking skills. Critical thinking can be seen as an important outcome that helps the student to analyze and evaluate the contents of a specific subject. All the participants considered critical thinking relevant to their professional development: 77% of them marked this skill as very important while 23 % of them marked it as important, but not very.

Some of the participants expressed that they feel more confident and able to defend their points of view and make their own assumptions as well.

This echoes with Crossier's (2011) claim that students can easily develop critical thinking skills if they engage in self-reflection on the responses and actions to different situations. One of the participants expressed that one of her professors had taught her to always question authors' ideas, what they say in books, and decide whether she agreed with, or thought differently about, the subject being discussed

It can be inferred from the participant's words that the school fosters this attribute. In addition, the graduate profile specifications of this bachelor's degree program state that critical thinking is a skill that students need to develop in order to complete this program successfully.

Research skills. Research skills are thought to prepare students for the labor market; prospective graduates are expected to develop these skills by the end of the bachelor's program. Early in the program, when students are in second semester, they take classes to learn how to investigate educational issues. Likewise, at the end of the program and they have to write a final paper if they are to graduate. Due to this, 70 % of students believe that developing research skills is very important. They know that they need to put into practice what they have learned by writing a research paper. The program requires that students develop their research skills in different areas of study.

63% of the participants pointed out that research skills picked up at university would be of help when looking for resources for future assignments and projects. One participant stated that the school helped him develop research skills, to go deeper in his search for information, to find himself answers to burning questions, and not to be contented with the first thing he found.

However, 37% of the participants perceived that they did not practice research skills very often. For instance, one of the participants pointed out that professors tended to concentrate heavily on having students finish their research paper rather than on the process of doing research, which reflects Eilks and Byers's (2009) point that a research-led curriculum often focuses on the product.

Autonomy. All those who graduate from this program must develop some degree of autonomy by the time they finish university. 67% of the participants reported that they became more autonomous in university. They considered being autonomous as a very important outcome that they must reach. It appears that the professors have contributed to the development of this skill. As one of the participants shared: "I would say that 80% of the work has to be done by ourselves". This resonates with Benson (2013), who asserts that students must be encouraged to become independent and be given the freedom to act and work as they chose. Then again, some of the participants considered that they had become autonomous because the professors did not explain things well enough and they had to look for information on their own.

English Language Skills. Some of the participants referred to English Language skills for communication as a very important outcome as it will provide them with more job opportunities. The participants seem to believe that their language skills developed considerably in the program. During the interviews, they claimed they feel happy with the knowledge acquired and mentioned that they were satisfied with the language skills they had now. They even mentioned their interest in the English culture had increased as they learnt about it.

The surveys also revealed that the participants felt confident with what they had learnt. This is something positive because language proficiency can be seen as the main attribute in their graduate profile. Students with a sound command of English are more likely to feel confident when applying for a job position. It might even mean a higher income if they get certified.

Motivation for professional development. Students often feel motivated to keep on studying, attend courses, or do something else in order to grow professionally once they finish their bachelor's degree; some others just want to get a job. The truth is that some job positions require that prospective staff have specific qualifications such as an MA or a PhD, which can motivate students to further their academic development. Some of the participants shared their desire to take up a Master's. They see it as a stepping stone leading to a deeper knowledge of the field and a better command of English. It would also allow them to further engage in research and the possibility of publishing, or even travel abroad as part of a student exchange program

Richards and Burns (2012) suggest that this kind of motivation is dynamic as it grows while we develop different mental processes. 64% of the participants agreed on the importance of developing professional motivation. During the interviews, they mentioned that they would like to continue to grow professionally by taking up a Master's or signing up for training courses for certification purposes.

Students' skills requiring improvement

This second section reports on the different outcomes students did not successfully achieve during their time at university.

Teamwork. Students' abilities to work in teams are an outcome that was not achieved successfully. In this study, some participants pointed out that they did not have enough opportunities to do teamwork and when they did, they preferred to work alone. The participants mentioned that it was difficult to agree when making decisions or that responsibilities were not shared equitably. Although, people often fail to collaborate due to lack of tolerance, commitment,

time, or because of their personality, Zoogah and Beugré (2012) suggest that working on group goals increases commitment and willingness to cooperate.

In spite of the advantages, interpersonal and communication problems often arise. One of the participants complained that when there was group work to do, some of his classmates did not even bother to show up, and it was usually one or two students who ended up doing all the work. Another one shared that she wanted to do her research project with a classmate but that it did not work because they could not agree on anything. Because of these issues, the participants expressed that they preferred to do their work alone as they thought they were more likely to do a better job that way than working with others. They also shared that their professors rarely encouraged teamwork and that they just did not seem to care about it. However, not being able to work in teams may be a challenge once students graduate, as teamwork skills are often highly valued by some employers.

Ability to develop new projects and ideas. The B.A. Program in English establishes that students must develop the skills to create new projects or ideas. Some of the skills involved might be innovation and creativity to be successful. Such skills are highly valued by the students. However, the participants perceive a lack of creativity and innovation in their professional development to the point that 75% of them believe neither of them is very important.

The data show that students do not feel confident in regard to creativity and innovation and they noted that some teachers at this language department are not creative when teaching a class. Perhaps, this is one of the reasons why students do not work enough to achieve this outcome. Several participants said that their teachers were a little old-fashioned in terms of teaching strategies. Creativity and innovation play an important role in lesson planning; developing these skills must be a life-long commitment, not only during university years. This can be done if the teacher is willing to be a role model for creativity (Tan et al., 2006)

Technology skills in pedagogy. This B.A program seems to have a commitment to the usage of technology as a means of learning. However, students shared that only few teachers make use of technology. Their perception is that their teachers, on the whole, seem to have very little experience regarding the use of technology in class. For instance, one of the participants said that there was an interactive whiteboard in his classroom but it was never used.

Learning strategies. The use of learning strategies may vary according to students' learning styles or the purpose each learner has: some students learn through the use of visuals, others learn by listening to songs, people, or the radio; some strategies work through a specific cognitive process, others focus on the affective or psychological areas. One of the objectives the BA in

English is that students to develop learning strategies to enhance their learning outcomes.

The data point out that the participants do not believe the school has helped them develop learning strategies. The participants shared they remember answering questionnaires that would help them and their teachers determine their learning styles and the appropriate learning strategies. However, they also remember not taking these surveys very seriously and answering them carelessly. They hardly recall any strategies suggested by teachers in class, and those they do remember, such as speaking English with their classmates and teachers even outside the classroom, were ignored. The data suggest that the participants tend to rely more on their own preferences to learn English.

Teaching skills. The B.A. Program in English gives students the opportunity to enroll in different educational experiences that contribute to developing soft and hard skills. Those participants who enrolled in subjects related to language and language acquisition consider that developing teaching skills definitely enhances their teaching practice. However, some of the participants reported feeling overwhelmed while doing their social service as English teachers. One of the participants admitted lacking teaching skills; another one shared that that he recalled often feeling nervous, afraid of making mistakes, and not very well-prepared to guide his students.

The majority of the students who choose this BA often pursue a teaching career. Their perception is that the program should put greater emphasis in guiding and providing advice regarding extracurricular activities that may help them succeed in the process of becoming a teacher. Teaching is quite a challenge and teachers need a repertoire of techniques and routines, including routines and procedures for such things as opening the lesson, introducing and explaining tasks, setting up learning arrangements, checking students' understanding, guiding student practice, making transitions from one task to another, and ending the lesson (Richards & Burns, 2012).

Conclusion

The data suggest that the participants perceive critical thinking, research skills, autonomy English Language Skills, and motivation for professional development as the attributes they developed within the program. For this group of students, it was very rewarding to develop critical thinking skills that help them analyze a situation, act and behave according to the circumstances, and develop their potential.

In addition, the participants also seemed to feel satisfied with having developed research skills that allow them to work on small research problems, which in turn helps them get their foot in the door of the research community

and thus become more competent. Autonomy and language skills are also perceived as valuable gains made in the course of the BA program;

In contrast, the participants pointed out that they believed they had not made significant achievements in terms of teaching skills development, learning strategies, technology skills, teamwork and ability to develop new projects and ideas.

These outcomes are not to be overlooked. Awareness needs to be raised among all the stakeholders of the importance of enhancing these students' attributes since the labor market requires that they have these skills which enrich their graduate profile.

We hope that the results of this inquiry may provide valuable information that could help teaching professionals implement strategies to help students develop the graduate attributes the current job market finds desirable.

Limitations

Several limitations may have impacted the results and conclusions of this research study. The first is that, given that this is a case study and that all the participants belong to a single cohort, the findings cannot be generalized. Another limitation is that not all the targeted students from the BA program participated in the interviews. However, the participant sample was sufficient as it represents a significant part of the BA student population close to finishing their studies. One more limitation was that the results represent only the students' perceptions; the fact that the data are self-reported means that they could not be independently verified; we had to take what the participants said at face value. Their views could not be corroborated by other sources of data, such as the teaching staff or administration. Nevertheless, analyzing the opinions of teachers or administrators was never the objective of the study.

Implications for Future Research

In this study, only students belonging to the 2012 cohort participated. When carrying out further research, students from subsequent generations may be surveyed and interviewed to corroborate the findings and assess the possibility of a definite trend in students' perceptions of their graduate attribute, or dismiss them due to lack of consistency in the results. It would be meaningful for future studies to examine the views of professors and gain access to school documents, such as exams and students' products, to cross-examine data obtained from the interviews and surveys. Finally, focus groups that foster the discussion of student's views would be likely to enrich the findings by providing additional data.

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