

# Studies of student trajectories in language teaching programs in Mexico

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## Foreword

No sé si la instrucción puede salvarnos,  
pero no sé de nada mejor.

JORGE LUIS BORGES

In his 2012 TEDx presentation, Edgar Barroso, Mexican-born musician and composer, went public with his idea for a social movement calling on Mexican citizens to donate an hour of their time each week to a social cause. His idea was to cultivate a movement founded on collaborative energy. He called the initiative, Sixty Minutes for Mexico, and he launched the effort by asking a simple question: En qué te puedo ayudar?

Barroso's TEDx presentation came to mind as we began writing the Foreword for the book you hold in your hands, a book that represents the collaborative energy of teacher-researchers at eight public universities in Mexico. This book affirms that there are many ways to help. Eight teams of educators with countless academic obligations pooled their time and talents to do something beyond their assigned duties, to do something for *education* —perhaps the most far-reaching social movement human beings have yet devised.

From universities in Hidalgo, Veracruz, the state of Mexico, Aguascalientes, Colima, Tlaxcala, Tamaulipas, and Puebla, the researchers set out on an ambitious undertaking: to obtain an in-depth profile of students based on their perceptions of their learning experience at an early point in their academic trajectories in order to use this information to assess, revise, and further develop the BA in language-teaching programs at their institutions. This book is the result of their collaboration; it is the initial installment of what is hoped will be a longitudinal study of students' trajectories in tertiary language-teaching programs in Mexico.

As Mexico's involvement in global concerns continues to expand, the profile of Mexican higher education increases and with it, the scrutiny of its language-teaching programs which intersect every academic discipline. The need for quality language-teaching programs in Mexican higher education is not new. What is new is a growing awareness in the university community that meaningful improvements in teacher-training programs cannot happen in an academic vacuum.

This book presents research that both broadens and deepens this awareness with an eye toward meaningful action that can positively affect institutional yardsticks of success (retention and graduation rates), as well as professional (language-teacher preparedness and confidence) and personal (life skills and attitudes toward learning) measures of achievement. It is clear that the researchers recognize that program decisions can no longer be made without considering the voices of the programs' beneficiaries, the future teachers who will impact generations of Mexican students whose linguistic and communicative competence, especially *English-language* competence, will be paramount in an increasingly connected world.

The research reflects the authors' understanding of the value of ongoing evaluations of tertiary language-teaching programs and of the complexity of their design. In this research, undergraduates were asked questions about their BA programs, courses, teachers' performance, and factors that affect their learning. On one level, then, the results of the studies conducted at the participating universities may be seen as a kind of up-close-and-personal feedback on how language-teaching programs are doing.

The composite of students' responses tells a story. What you find in these pages—their perceptions and the researchers' analyses of the data—will contribute to your understanding of whether and how language-teacher-education programs in Mexico are responding not only to students' expressed needs but to Paulo Freire's observation that “what a teacher does in teaching is to make it possible for the students to become themselves.”

On a complementary level, this book acknowledges the researchers' engagement and the commitment of their teacher-education departments and public institutions to examine the roles of all those who play a part in students' learning and contribute to their overall university experience. By seeking students' appraisals of their language-teaching programs, the researchers validate students' contributions to a particular facet of the education movement for society: the delivery of quality language teaching across Mexico's learning landscape.

This approach is groundbreaking territory. Indeed, this book gives credence to the value of a chorus of participatory voices that includes students as a way to address the real-world foreign-language needs of Mexican teachers and other



communication professionals in increasingly bilingual workplaces. The research is also noteworthy for the trends and patterns the authors have identified in students' quantitative responses and qualitative comments. *What is it really like to be enrolled in a teacher-training program in Mexico?* Students' responses become pivotal for institutional and departmental action plans that affirm what is being done well, and redirect, refine, and even transform the design of language-teacher-training programs to increase their effectiveness, to make them better and more relevant.

At a philosophical level, this book represents an important step in the continuing professionalization of the language-teaching discipline in Mexico that began with academic research in the field and the forming of professional associations in the 1990s.

In their "mapping of the territory" of foreign-language teaching in Mexico between 2005 and 2007, Ramírez-Romero and Pamplón (2012)<sup>1</sup> cited the work of Murillo Ruiz (2004) that noted administrators and teachers often have different perspectives on the goals and benefits of language-teacher-education programs. The fact that the research teams who authored *this* book were comprised of teachers and department administrators suggests an evolution toward a more informed and unified approach to improving the quality of language-teaching programs.

As you read the chapters from each university, you will intuit that language-teacher-education programs seem poised to think and reach beyond the confines of geographical borders, standardized tests, and proficiency levels to educate the "whole" student and facilitate meaningful linguistic, especially English-language, experiences for the multicultural and pluralinguistic challenges their graduates will face in formal and informal classroom and cross-cultural exchanges.

The good news is that the teacher-researchers who wrote this book are not the only members of the university community interested in engaging collaboratively in an *education* movement that affects Mexican students and society at large. Following a recent professional-development course we facilitated for university English teachers in the state of Hidalgo, we invited participants to give us feedback on their experience. "Collaborating as a team allowed me to appreciate my colleagues' efforts," one teacher wrote. Another commented, "We need to work as a team, as a whole, so we can have...community." A third teacher wrote, "I am hungry to know more about dialogues on learning."

<sup>1</sup>Ramírez-Romero, J.L. y Pamplón, Nora. (2012). Research on FLT in Mexico: Main findings. In Ruth Roux, Alberto Mora & Paulina Trejo (eds.) *Research in English Language Teaching: Mexican Perspectives*. Palibrio, Bloomington, IN.

Their words, we expect, would please Edgar Barroso immensely. Their words, in fact, are not so different from the collaborative spirit that led the authors of this book to join forces to make a significant contribution to the professional literature on student trajectories in language-teacher-education programs in Mexico. The results of and calls for action emerging from this first step of a longitudinal research study will spur self-evaluations of teacher-training programs at other universities in Mexico. Who knows how far the subsequent ripple effects can reach? Who knows where an education movement for quality foreign-language teaching can lead? May the collaborations continue.

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