Universidad Veracruzana

FACULTAD DE IDIOMAS

MAESTRÍA EN ENSEÑANZA DEL INGLÉS COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THEIR B.A. IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE GRADUATE PROFILE

TESIS

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AGRADECIMIENTOS

A mi poder superior que siempre me acompaña, me guía y me da fortaleza para realizar mis objetivos. Sin ti nada sería posible.

A mis padres que me dieron la confianza de salir de casa para asistir a la universidad, que creyeron en mí y me dieron ánimo cuando me vieron decaída, a ellos que trabajaron arduamente para demostrarme que lo que se quiere, se puede. Gracias por su amor incondicional, los amo.

A mi familia que nunca ha dejado de creer en mis sueños. Ustedes son mi motivación. Los quiero.

A mi compañero de vida que siempre me ha apoyado y motivado a seguir mis sueños. Gracias por tu paciencia y apoyo incondicional.

A mi asesor de tesis y amigo, Doctor Enrique Vez López, que me guió en este proceso y resolvió todas mis dudas.

A mis lectores que pusieron todo su tiempo y esfuerzo para que este trabajo quedara listo.

INTRODUCTION

Lately, students' perceptions and attitudes have played an important role on research matter because they may help school authorities understand and analyze to what extent students achieve expected outcomes. According to Feast (2001), raising awareness of the importance of skill development in the XXI century has given positive results thanks to student perceptions. Hence, a qualitative approach has played an important role in the students' perceptions. According to Given (2008: 606), "perceptions are interpretations, and for most individuals, interpretations become their truth". Besides that, a quantitative approach can be combined with a qualitative methodology in the research field in order to answer the researcher's questions (Kumar, 2014). Both approaches become functional when the researcher is interested in analyzing combined data.

That is the case of this inquiry, which focuses on students' "truth"; that is, their truth in regard to their professional profile, to be more specific, the achievement of graduate attributes and how often these attributes were encouraged to be achieved. The reason why I decided to choose undergraduate students as participants is because students' perceptions may change based on different life contexts after graduation (Given, 2008). As a result, students may perceive their outcomes differently once they have graduated and started to work, and findings may be influenced by new perceptions. It can be said that the Bachelor Degree in which students are enrolled was designed to support the development of technical and transferable skills, and it has become a priority for this university. Ten years ago, a new educational model was adopted at the school of languages where this study took place to prepare students with an integral profile which focuses on a holistic approach (Nuevo Modelo Educativo para la Universidad Veracruzana). That means students are now expected to achieve knowledge related to their work fields; they will also become competent in the communicative abilities in both their mother tongue and the English Language. Plus, they need to acquire some competencies

and skills required for lifelong learning.

In the context of this study, having an outstanding profile appears to be important for educational institutions and employers. Employers expect their personnel to be smart and have enough qualifications. However, a degree and perfect qualifications do not necessarily guarantee a better position or a high-paying job. There are some other aspects that are taken into consideration before making the decision of whom is an exceptional worker or colleague. In the 1990s, the International Commission of Education for the Twenty-First Century adopted a new vision of education since it was a pioneer regarding high quality education for all individuals (Beelen & Dhert, 2009). As a result, important holistic approaches have been put into practice to lead students to achieve satisfactory outcomes; to teach them to find the way to learn from different environments, and to adapt to them (Delors et al, 1996). Consequently, each undergraduate degree program establishes a profile, which describes expected outcomes, in terms of what graduates should be able to demonstrate by the end of such program. In addition, teachers are expected to provide students with the necessary tools to develop these outcomes, also known as graduate attributes, during their time at college.

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, the transferable skills focus on attitudes, and communicative skills (Hager, P. & Holand, S. 2006). In particular, both may become fundamental in the English teaching field. First of all because the future graduates are service providers that need to satisfy the employment demand. This inquiry focuses on the perception undergraduate students, prior to graduation, have regarding the attributes they have developed; the frequency of which students developed these attributes during university years, is also considered. This study aims to students' perceptions be known.

This research report comprises five sections. Section one describes the context and focus of the study. Section two presents the literature review, followed by the methodology in section three. The analysis and interpretation of the findings are

presented in section four. Finally, limitations of the research as well as conclusions, recommendations for further investigation, and reflections are dealt with in the last part of the paper, section five.

RATIONALE

Based on my experience as a student of this Language School, teachers and students focus on the development of technical skills paying little or no attention to the development of transferable skills. Students may be more concerned with getting a satisfactory grade than with the outcomes they can achieve. The development of these attributes requires commitment from both parties: institution and students. It may be a complex process since teaching activities and assessment tasks need to be redesigned to achieve such outcomes.

My interest arose when I noticed that fellow teachers insisted that graduate students of the B.A in English, which belongs to the new Integrated and Flexible Educational Model (MEIF), were missing important outcomes that graduates from the prior model had. Then, I realized that if I explored the learners' perceptions regarding their graduate profile, their voices would be heard and understood. Letting them express their thoughts and feelings may arise interest in others to research the same topic, in a greater scale, since this study focuses only on a small group of learners. I also realized that, by knowing students' perceptions regarding the importance of technical and transferable skills, the achievement of these outcomes could be influenced by the students' perceptions. Learning how often the institution, and by institution I mean teachers, encourage learners to attain the profile described in their undergraduate B.A program, would give me a wider understanding of learners perceptions.

It should be clear that I do not intend to propose any change in teaching strategies or techniques used to achieve technical and transferable skills. I do intend to describe how learners feel in terms of the profile they have when they are going to graduate and to what extend the university has contributed to the development of

this profile. Although the attainment of technical skills is an easy process that requires studying and reading, the development of transferable skills may not be so easy to attain. Therefore, the institution may need to put into practice different strategies in order to help students achieve the outcomes established in their Graduate Profile: the development of technical and transferable skills.

These skills are believed to be integrated within the classes taught in this school. Yet providing students with technical and transferable skills may take longer than determining whether or not they have these skills. Crosthwaite, Cameron, Lant & Litser (2006) argue that the development of graduate attributes is more likely to happen when students interact in a realistic context that may demand the integration and practice of these skills. Students may wonder how difficult this could be. The truth is that attributes are complex outcomes composed by various elements. As a matter of fact, there may be challenges in teaching and assessing graduate attributes. Moalosi, Oladiran & Uziak (2012) suggest that some of them are lack of time by academics, motivation, resources or skills to improve teaching and assessment approaches, and find the appropriate balance between technical and transferable skills development.

From this view point, finding out about students' feelings regarding their professional profile may let us know how important students believe these skills are in their graduate profile and to what extend the institution promotes the development of technical and transferable skills. This research may influence teachers positively encouraging them to question themselves as to whether the strategies they use work or not. However, the responsibility may not be vested in teachers. Students urgently need to explore and find the strategies that can help them to become more competent. A study published by Moalosi et al. (2012), called students' perspective on the attainment of graduate attributes through a design project, has exposed some of the methods that have been put into practice to develop these competencies. It has been suggested that these skills can be developed through projects and tasks. As a matter of fact, 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).

In this paper, I present the analysis of learners' perspectives in regards to the skills expected in their graduate profile at the B.A in English Language; how important these skills are for them and how often these skills are achieved. The approach taken for this study intends to give answer to the following questions:

Main research question

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

Research sub-questions

- Are students aware of the graduate attributes the university expects them to achieve?
- To what extent have students developed these attributes?
- Which graduate attributes have teachers helped participants develop?
- How have teachers helped participants develop graduate attributes?
- How has awareness of graduate attributes helped participants be more competitive in their academic development or work contexts?

Chapter One: Students' Perceptions of their Graduate Profile

This chapter mainly contributes to the understanding of how students perceive their graduate profile. The main concepts that support the development of this study are reviewed in four different subsections: (1) *New Education Model in the 21st Century,* which includes a basic definition of how education is constituted; (2) *Students' learning outcomes,* which describes a set of outcomes students must achieve by the

end of the Degree; (3) *Students perceptions regarding their graduate profile.* This subsection briefly describes how graduate students feel regarding the outcomes achieved; (4) *A successful achievement on the Graduate Profile*, which reports on the results of some studies that seem to encourage the use of different approaches that contribute to the development of some outcomes.

1. New Education Model in the 21st Century

Economic changes in society may have influenced the educational system to find the means to fulfill the economic and market demands. People live in a world where there is always constant change. Thus, for new businesses or institutions, prospective employees need to meet the 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". They were set by the International Commission of Education for the Twenty-First Century in the Delors Commission report (Delors 1996a & Delors 1996b) these are: *learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be*. These four elements are all related because they compile an integrated whole, even though people sometimes focus on one or two more than the others (Scatolini, 2010). The UNESCO Commission (Scatolini, Maele and Bartholomé, 2010) describes the four pillars as follows:

- Learning to know: the basic knowledge a person needs in order to understand how to live with dignity. It also involves combining enough education with the knowledge of specific subjects. Learning to know means gaining knowledge by developing critical thinking and memory skills.
- Learning to do: it involves being creative by developing practical skills, teamwork attitude and willingness to take risks.
- Learning to live together: this one is often marked as the most important

pillar by the UNESCO Commission; 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.

In connection with the four pillars of education, formal education is often based on acquiring knowledge, which leads to lack of real practice (Barrie, 2006). Therefore, having a school program promoting the development of these four principles equally will probably broaden students' opportunities. The promotion of these four principles allows students to successfully achieve important outcomes established in the schools' programs. Sharma (2005) considers that education should be regarded as a total experience which focuses on the individual and the individuals' context. In the 1990s, the holistic approach started because it was believed that the traditional system allowed students to be passive participants, neglecting students' creativity and autonomy.

The four pillars of education are four principles that intend to promote skills for lifelong learning. They focus on the development of skills, competences and attitudes in order to produce successful professionals able to adapt themselves in different contexts (Caudron, 1999; Kemper, 1999; McMurchie, 1998). This was seen as an innovative education system, and indeed it still is. Nonetheless, depending on the social context, implementing this educational model could demand a lot of research, testing, and assessment.

1.1 Higher Education in Mexico

After completing upper-secondary education students who have the opportunity to study may continue their studies in the public or private sector. Some students go to a university, technical school, technological university or a university specialized in teaching training. Public universities and technological institutes of higher education offer affordable education. Even though, tuition is free in public universities, some fees are applied because of administrative issues. Unfortunately, these fees become unaffordable for people who belong to the lower class (Bayón,2009). This could influence parents' decisions to support their children's effort to enroll in a higher education institution. Ocegueda, Miramontes and Moctezuma (2012) mention that Elementary School Education in Mexico has reached almost 100% coverage, while in Higher Education only 28% of the population is literate. It is very discouraging because it means that the youth miss the opportunity of self-development and contribution to the country.

The government needs to continue with social programs in which students, who have already graduated from high school, have the opportunity to study higher education. If not, our youth will still be in the lower class, with few or none objectives and without the desire of success. Professionals are needed to have a prosperous country (Morduchowicz, 2006). Therefore, higher education should be supported in order to have people contributing to the development of the country. Bravo (1998, cited in Rodriguez, 2005) states that in Mexico there are not enough graduates to take up a job, and for the few professionals that exist, there is a lack of professional practice and knowledge.

2. Students' Learning Outcomes

Learning outcome can be defined as the expected outcomes from students enrolled in a program of Higher Education or employees of a company. According to Nygaard, Holtham, and Courtney (2014), each institution describes these outcomes mainly for the following reasons: 1) to show students the skills and competencies they are expected to develop during university years; 2) it allows employers to review what these students are capable of and to decide whether or not students fit the profile; 3) it helps teachers become familiar with the objectives students need to achieve in order to take them into consideration while developing the curriculum; 4) it advises faculties on which dimensions students' achievements can be measured; 5) It may facilitate school accreditation when authorities review a bachelor's program.

Being focused on students' learning outcomes is extremely important because it could tell school faculties and school authorities whether students will be able to apply these outcomes in the job market or not. Students' learning outcomes refer to cognitive outcomes such as knowledge, personal attributes, competencies, skills, abilities, values, goals, attitudes, identity, personal goals, and world views (Nygaard, Holtham, and Courtney, 2014). The so called "learning outcome" can be seen as the measurement of what a student has actually learnt during their studies.

3. Defining Attributes

The incorporation of graduate attributes in higher education is not a recent movement. Ballard and Clanchy (1995) claim that the origin of the movement started in higher education around the early 1990s with a call to be concerned with outcomes, instead of focusing on input. 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). Therefore, universities need to get students surrounded by an environment that may enhance students' capability to understand their own cognitive and metacognitive processes. Consequently, graduates will have the abilities to

carry out these processes.

These attributes seem to be attained during different life periods (Rainsbury & Lay, 2002). However, this study focuses on the attributes developed while students attend university. There is a variety of definitions given by different authors, and the most cited authors and quotations are quoted in this inquiry. Nevertheless, some of the definitions given for attributes seem to be ambiguous. Roman (2005) points out that sometimes researchers refer to attributes as the abilities a student might have, and some others to curriculum features. Bowden, et al. (2000 in Leibowitz, 2012: 88) define graduate attributes 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."

This definition shows that generic attributes may vary from one university to another, and within different B.A. programs. For example, in Australia, graduate attributes are believed to "go beyond the disciplinary expertise or technical knowledge that has traditionally formed the core of most university courses. They are qualities that also prepare graduates as agents of social good in an unknown future." (Bowden et al. 2000 cited in Barrie, 2007:440).

Graduate attributes are highlighted in the curriculum for the bachelor's degree that is the subject of study. Barrie and Prosser (2004) argue that Graduate Attributes focus on describing the core outcomes of higher education. In the research context of this study, graduate attributes play an important role since the university community agreed to include core outcomes that seem crucial for students while studying languages. Students are expected to develop technical and transferable skills so as to succeed as proficiency users of their mother tongue and of the target language. Hence, it is important to have a clear idea of what technical and transferable skills are. They are:

> *Technical skills are a little bit more focused on learning to know,*

learning to do and guide the knowing of other people; while transferable skills focus on learning to be and learning to live together. They are transferable because their development works in different professional areas.

(Coromillas, 2005. p. 307)

Transferable skills are those that provide an individual with the flexibility to adapt to different work settings, given that they can be used in different contexts (Chan, 2010). For instance, university students learn to use computer programs such as Power Point, Word and Excel. This might be useful years later when giving a class or a conference. Some of the transferable skills are communication, critical thinking, multitasking, teamwork, creativity, and leadership (Yates, 2006). In contrast, technical skills provide students with the knowledge needed for a specific job and they are not easily transferable from job to job (Barrie, 2004). For example, a teacher might not know how to build houses. The technical skills used as a teacher are not the same required to work as a doctor. In fact, it is easier to develop transferable skills than technical skills; however, when they are combined, there are more opportunities in different work fields.

3.1 Importance of Attributes in an English Language Program

It is important for English graduate students to fulfill their own expectations. On the one hand, undergraduate students may think that once they finish a Bachelor's Degree they might be able to find a job easily. For instance, they may also believe that holding certain credentials may be enough to obtain a job. However, the findings of a study carried out by Hargis (2011) suggest that employers or institutions believe students are not competent enough, according to the standards of 21st century education. On the other hand, Graduate students seem to have technical skills but lack transferable skills which may prevent them from keeping their jobs, although each company or industry has its own transferable requirements (Pace, 2011).

3.2 English Language Teacher Competencies

Undergraduate students of the English Language program may work in different areas; the most common may be teaching and the attributes they need as teachers are crucial to provide a good service. Teachers may play different roles; each of them might require its own set of competences and skills. Therefore, these future teachers need to learn to know, to do and to live together. One element future teachers should consider for this profession is the pedagogical knowledge they need to have; they need to be aware of different aspects such as curriculum planning, assessment, reflective teaching, classroom management, language acquisition, and teaching strategies (Borg, 2006, 2009).

There are a couple of attributes that teachers may need in their career. For instance, what teachers may need in order to understand and be understood is effective communication skills. This competence is necessary for English teachers because they may want their students to fulfill certain objectives such as learning to listen, speak, write, and communicate in nonverbal forms (Klein, 2009). By the time students graduate they must have learnt to communicate in their mother tongue and the target language. A skill that future teachers may need is critical thinking skills. In the teaching context teachers may face different situations in which they would have to identify issues, provide solutions, and make decisions (Heimler, 2010 in Williams 2015). For instance, in a study carried out by Garner & Duckworth (2000) with design engineering graduates and their employers, it was revealed that critical thinking is one of the skills that employers consider during the recruitment process. However, employers also consider that graduates need to improve their transferable skills to succeed in their job performance. Graduate students may be required to know how to work with other individuals and how to deal with people from other cultures or with different ideas. Heimler (2010, in Williams 2015) calls interpersonal skills those which allow individuals to live with others.

4. Approaches and Techniques to Develop Graduate Attributes

There might not be a specific methodology that focuses on developing graduate attributes. However, there are some techniques and methods that may be implemented in order to develop these attributes. For instance, 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 following chart presents information provided by Sierra (2011), based on Villa and Poblete (2007) and De Miguel's (2006) previous studies, in order to illustrate how these techniques promote attributes development:

Methodologies	Attributes
Presentation	Critical thinking, self-management skills, autonomy, planning, Life Long Learning, communicative skills and ethical attitudes.
Case study	Problem solving, team work, motivation, decision making and time management
Task-based project	Autonomous learning, teamwork, motivation, planning, decision making, ethical attitudes and leadership
Problem-based project	Analysis, synthesis, problem solving, communication skills, teamwork and leadership
Cooperative learning	Analytical thinking, problem solving, flexibility, leadership, and time management.
Learning contract	Autonomy, self-motivation, decision making, self-confidence, communicative skills, TIC use, Effective spoken and written communication skills

Table 1. Methodologies and its GAs.

The implementation of graduate attributes does not necessarily need an additional curriculum because some of the expected outcomes may be acquired in higher education. However, some elements need to be taken into consideration, such as the strategies used to facilitate the development of these graduate attributes and

they may vary depending on the strategies teachers use (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999). Relevant literature (Boyle, 2010) mentions that many universities have decided to review their curriculum to incorporate graduate attributes in teaching programs. This review of the curriculum promotes integration and flexibility. The results found in Tan (2006) support project-based learning and the design project approach as helpful approaches to develop and acquire generic skills and competences. Moalosi, et al. (2012) claim that when designing curriculum, the emphasis is often placed on the skills that focus on the disciplinary area, but transferable skills are not given enough attention very often. Therefore, more emphasis has to be placed on the development of these attributes in the curriculum by integrating both technical and transferable skills in order to broaden students' knowledge and attributes.

Taking into consideration previous studies, it can be considered that transferable skills may be attained by the exposure to realistic experiences. Lowe, et al. (2004, as cited in Moalosi, et al. 2012) claim that students may have a broader spectrum of graduate attributes by being engaged in relevant experiences that demand the integration and practice of these skills. While some teachers may argue that graduate attributes are not as important as technical skills, these graduate attributes bring some benefits with them. Barrie, (2006); Holmes, (2002); and Bowden, Hart, King, Trigwell, & Watts, (2000) believe that some of the benefits include the following:

- Universities will help students possess a broad number of abilities that will satisfy employers' needs.

- Students will know how to adapt to a changing work environment. Students will acquire a broad range of skills such as effective communication, problem-solving, critical thinking and teamwork skills (Nettleton, Litchfield & Taylor, 2008).

- Considering graduate attributes in curriculum planning, implementation and evaluation helps students to achieve graduate attributes, as well

as discipline-related knowledge and skills in an integral way.

Basically, when a student develops technical and transferable skills, they are able to function efficiently in a changing work environment. By developing transferable skills, students are expected to use their critical thinking, solve problems, communicate effectively, work in groups, and attain well-developed technology skills (Nettleton, Litchfield & Taylor, 2008). 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).

Universities often describe the attributes that graduates should attain if exposed to a high quality education system, (Australian Higher Education Council, 1992). Moreover, in the "Graduate Profile" some universities mention the attributes a graduate needs. Marriott, Moore & Spence-Brown (2007, p. 56) provide a list of attributes created at their institution:

- Effective spoken and written communication skills for proficient interpersonal and professional interactions
- Enthusiasm and capacity for inquiry and research
- Capacity to articulate a sound argument
- Insight to identify a problem and introduce innovative solutions
- Effective problem solving skills
- Capacity for critical thought, analysis and synthesis
- Ability to work collaboratively and to assume appropriate leadership roles
- Literacy
- Socially responsible and ethical attitudes
- International outlook, cultural sensitivity and inclusive approach to differences

Comparing the attributes listed above to the four pillars of education, it can be noticed that they are related. The purpose of these attributes is to have graduates with a high level of competence not only in their academic environment, but also in

their work. These students are expected to work in teams; analyze, develop communication skills, be leaders and be able to develop critical thinking

4.1 Cooperative learning

In the history of language teaching, a variety of methods and approaches have emerged. In fact, some of them seem to be very successful and outstanding because of the promotion of different skills such as effective written and spoken communicative skills, teamwork, problem solving, critical and analytical thinking and ethical attitudes. Cooperative learning (CL) can be seen as an important approach that allows students to work together in order to accomplish shared goals (Cohen, 1994 in Vermette & Kline, 2017). In spite of the controversy that CL may have caused for promoting competitive individualism rather than cooperation, this approach seems to foster critical thinking when students are motivated to debate and work in groups (Gillies, Ashman & Terwel, 2008); (Sullivan, 1996) . Thus, CL can also promote cooperation if it is guided.

Cooperative learning makes students focus on effort and cooperation as the most important basis of motivation (Snowman, & McCown, 2014). When a curriculum is based on a cooperative learning approach, students must work together, in order to develop different attributes such as effective problem-solving skills, and the ability to work collaboratively. According to Brown (2007), cooperative learning focuses on having students exchange information to help each other and achieve their objectives. Students need to participate actively when solving issues or achieving goals.

Stevenson (2002, in Crawford, 2007) claims that outcomes such as team learning, expert groups, communicative skills and ethical attitudes can be determined by the nature of interaction. For instance, Storey & Hesbol, (2016:24) claim that the theory of social interdependence was founded by Kafka in the 1900s when he proposed that "*groups were dynamic wholes, that is, that the actions of each member are*

reflected in the achievement of goals as a group". Interdependence can be classified as positive, negative, or lack of interdependence. Positive interdependence promotes interaction and in most cases students discover how to share, help and support. However, in negative interdependence individuals create oppositional interaction and act only when they know that the rest of the group cannot attain their goals. Finally, no interdependence occurs when individuals compete with each other to achieve their own goals (Gillies et. al., 2008).

Cooperative learning involves four phases: the first one includes pre-cooperation, instructions and activities; the second one focuses on being cooperative; the third one is about post-cooperation activities and last, but not least, outcome assessment (Bunt, Beun, & Borghuis, 1998). The development of graduate attributes seems to be observed during the third phase, usually called promotive interaction. This phase leads to productive activities in which students are expected to help each other, give assistance, exchange experiences, and give and receive feedback. Promotive interaction can be perceived as positive actions undertaken to complete a task. Johnson and Johnson (in Lovat, Toomey & Clement, 2010) claim that the best way to succeed and obtain positive interaction is by helping each other, exchanging ideas and information, and mutual communication, influence and trust.

4.2 Project based learning approach and Problem-based Learning

Some researchers claim that problem-based learning supports the development of a wide range of graduate attributes such as problem solving, critical thinking, teamwork and communication skills (Major & Palmer 2001; Edwards, 2005). This educational model focuses on three main approaches: cognitive learning, contents and collaborative learning, which allow students to learn from different experiences through the connection of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes. According to Yusuf, Gambari & Olumorin (2012), students tend to develop significant skills and competences if collaborative learning and projects in education are implemented. Furthermore, project based learning can be adapted for different ages, but is

commonly used within children's contexts; however, it is being implemented at university level too.

Moalosi, et al. (2012) carried out research to understand the students' perceptions regarding the graduate attributes that students developed through the use of projects. This study includes the skills that students attained during their years at university. Students commented that the quality of learning and the development of other skills were improved as a result of teamwork and the contribution of various ideas from team members. The following is a quotation provided by one of the students that was interviewed in Tan, Koppi, & Field (2006:60) "As I mentioned, I usually prefer to tackle assignments individually. Yet this co-operative approach was an enriching new learning experience".

Boyle (2010) carried out a study that involved different case studies that describe how research practices help engineering students develop graduate attributes. These studies were carried out in order to identify the main practices that help to develop graduate attributes, as well as students' feelings regarding these practices. The outcomes gathered from these studies are the following:

- The students learn in a new mode by investigating open-ended problems themselves.
- Students reported that they were motivated to get hands-on experience early in their course.
- Students become better at determining if facts are relevant or correct.
- Students develop teamwork skills, acquire time management and communication skills and build self-confidence.
- Students learn to overcome challenges and they embrace written communication skills.
- Students develop critical thinking

In addition, Moalosi et. al (2012:44) carried out research based on project based learning and discovered that it had enabled students to develop most of the graduate attributes desired. The following extracts from this study illustrate how a student

perceived the project-based activities: "The project tested my problem-solving and innovation skills…" From the presented projects, there was a lot of originality and innovation displayed…" I learnt a lot on creativity and innovation…"

The findings from these prior studies inspired me to discover what students perceive regarding their own competencies and how the development of these attributes helped them to be more successful. In Tan et al. (2006) it can be appreciated that the development of graduate competences may have been achieved through the use of certain strategies that promote team work, analytic thinking and communications skills. These techniques might be taken into consideration by teaching practitioners and students as well. It is true some students expect teachers to provide them with knowledge; however, knowledge does not seem to be enough when developing tasks.

5. Students perceptions regarding the graduate profile

Generally speaking, students have a variety of expectations before enrolling in university. They usually dream of getting enough qualifications in order to get the desired job right after graduation. Reality might differ from what students expect, few students may achieve this dream while others might have to wait a little bit longer. This could depend on the competencies, knowledge, practice and experience the graduate has. This section of the research aims to understand what students expect about their graduate profile.

Álvarez, Garcia, Gil, Romero and Correa (2002) highlight some of the expectations students have about their degree. These are: 1) students expect their teachers to be knowledgeable in regard to the subjects they teach; 2) students believe teachers are not very demanding about other aspects such as autonomy or researching skills. Professors are perceived as people who teach only about their subject; 3) students are not encouraged to develop or practice certain skills that are necessary in the labor market. However, graduate students should be able to develop the attributes

that every professional need in order to have a successful career. Graduates must possess knowledge, skills, values, and positive attitudes.

To be more specific, a previous research carried out in ta school of languages in Veracruz allows us to have a clearer idea of what students of a Bachelor Degree in English hope to achieve upon completion of their BA. Estrada, Narváez & Núñez, (2016) report that a) students have hope on having a career as English teachers in the future; b) they believe that their B.A program will enhance their teaching career; c) They have hope on having a better economic status after the degree completion; d) Finally, they expect to earn good money with their bachelor degree. Students expect that once they have completed their Bachelor Degree opportunities of growing will arise. However, students do not mention whether or not they will be able to develop the outcomes university expects them to achieve.

Chapter two: Methodology

This chapter is divided into four sections. The "Research method" section attempts to describe the type of research carried out in this investigation and the reason why I chose a mixed method exploratory case study. It outlines what mixed methods research is and it also supports its use. The second section, Data collection methods, describes the methods used that helped to carry out this investigation. The Research context section specifies the place where the research was carried out. The Participants section provides detailed information about how participants were selected and it includes the informants' general background. The Data collection methods explain the reasons for using interviews and questionnaires as the means of gathering information. Finally, the last section describes the procedure used in this study.

2.1 Research method

This inquiry aims to find out how students perceive their graduate attributes and to what extent the university has promoted them. Previous studies have analyzed and

evaluated the attributes developed by students at the end of the university years through a Likert scale giving priority to the quantitative part only. However, knowing what students feel or think about the subject is also relevant. Therefore, it is adequate to analyze data obtained from both perspectives quantitative and qualitative. Mixed methods are used to answer to a question or a series of questions that involves the collection of quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). It allows the researcher to have a total understanding of the issue because it provides the statistics and the experiences of the participants. On the one hand, the qualitative design in this paper aims to understand how students perceive their actual graduate profile; the researcher tries to explore students' experiences and perceptions. On the other hand, the quantitative design is aimed at understanding what outcomes seem to be more important for students and to what extent these outcomes were promoted by the university throughout the years of study. Creswell and Plano (2007) state that:

> Mixed methods research is a research design with philosophical assumptions as well as methods of inquiry. As a methodology, it involves philosophical assumptions that guide the direction of the collection and analysis of data and the mixture of qualitative and quantitative data in a single study or series of studies. Its central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems that either approach alone. (p. 5)

The intention of the researchers is to find a link between the two forms of data combining them in order to increase the reliability of the study. Creswell, Plano, et al., (2003) states that the *Explanatory Design* is a two-phase mixed methods design. The aim of this design is to explain initial quantitative with the help of qualitative data. *Explanatory* means explanation and in this research paper I attempt to explain quantitative results. The weight in the explanatory case study is placed on quantitative data since the results represent the major aspects of the study.

The sequence of this study is to describe the quantitative data first, followed by the description of the qualitative data and analysis in order to connect the results of the

quantitative phase. There are two varieties of the explanatory design, this particular study relies on a follow-up explanation model. This particular variant uses the follow-up explanations model because the researcher needs qualitative data to explain or expand on quantitative results (Creswell, Plano, Gutmann & Hatson, 2003). I intend to identify the competencies and skills students consider important to develop and how the university, in particular teachers, has helped to achieve these outcomes. It is important to find out how students feel in regard to the competencies they have or have not developed. Qualitative data helps to explain these findings. Creswell, Plano Clark, et al., (2003) state that this design is considered the most straightforward methods because:

- Its two-phase structure makes it straightforward to implement, because the researcher conducts the two methods in separate phases and collects only one type of data at a time. This means that single researchers can conduct this design; a research team is not required to carry out the design.
- The final report can be written in two phases, making it straightforward to write and providing a clear delineation for readers.
- This design lends itself to multiphase investigations, as well as single mixed methods studies.
- This design appeals to quantitative researchers, because it often begins with a strong quantitative orientation. (p. 83)

This study aims to explore students' perceptions regarding the importance of the competencies they believe they have developed and how they have developed them. Due to the fact that students had to grade in a Likert scale the importance of these skills and how they were encouraged to develop them, the researcher had to implement semi-structured in-depth interview.

2.2 Data collection methods

The main instruments used for data collection for this research study were interviews and surveys. Interviews were chosen considering that they are flexible because they

allow you to formulate opened-ended questions which help you to get the participants point of view, situation, experiences, hopes and dreams (Kvale 1996: 1). The survey was devised with the purpose of analyzing the students' competences and skills. By means of using different methods for data collection, it is possible to triangulate and so verify the findings.

2.2.1 Interviews

The best reason to choose the interview as an instrument of data collection is because it is one of the most common methods used in qualitative research. It allows the researchers to obtain valuable information from the participants, who tend to speak up about their thoughts, and experiences. In this study, finding out what the participants perceive is the main objective and for that reason, open-ended questions were used. Schostak, (2006: 54) adds that an ¨interview is an extendable conversation between partners that aims at having an 'in-depth information' about a certain topic or subject, and through which a phenomenon could be interpreted in terms of the meanings interviewees bring to it¨. Interviews can be administered in various ways. For instance, one-on-one are the most common ones and focus groups interviewing is also popular (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Following this further, King and Horrocks (2010) suggest that the following are characteristics of the generic qualitative interview:

- it is flexible and open ended in style

- it tends to focus on people´s actual experiences more than general beliefs and opinions

- The relationship between the interviewer and interviewee is crucial to the method.

Regarding the last characteristic, the interviewer needs to focus on establishing an appropriate atmosphere, and it might make the interviewee feel free to talk. Besides, Barbour and Schostak (2005) believe that the key concepts that they have identified will guide you through a successful interview. These concepts are:

a) Value: this needs to answer the question "How valuable the interview and interviewee's words are?"

b) Trust: It refers to the objectivity, accuracy and honesty the research guarantees.

c) Meaning: It refers to the meaning the interviewer needs to convey. However, the information can be misled.

d) Wording: Barbour and Schostak (2005: 43) justly remark that "the shorter the interviewer's questions and the longer the subject's answers, the better an interview is".

However, interviews might be useless if the questions are not correctly formulated. For that reason, it is crucial to develop an interview guide which will allow the researcher to outline the main topics to cover.

This study aims to avoid the risk of interviewer bias through the use of a semi-structured interview format. The interview consisted of 6 questions which focused on gaining access to the participants' perceptions. The questions aimed to explore students' perceptions regarding a) the skills and competences they have developed; b) the graduate attributes teachers have helped the participants develop. The semi-structured interview gives the researcher the opportunity to ask follow up questions.

2.2.2 Survey

In order to find out the participants' perceived level of attainment, a five-point behavioral anchored survey was handed out to them. The participant survey was designed using a Likert scale technique. 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. These statements were written according to the description in the Graduate Profile of the outcomes that students have to achieve before graduation. Using the four-point scale, students were to indicate to what extent they

(i) considered important the skills/abilities university expects them to possess; (ii) whether or not they developed them in university. The survey was quick and easy to administer, and it provided participants' opinions. The four- point scale survey combined two elements: the written narrative and the Likert survey approach. Behavioral anchored numerical scales measure behavioral performance of others and they can provide qualitative and quantitative data. The survey used in this study required open-ended questions which might contribute to this study with qualitative or quantitative results.

Chapter 3

3. Research Procedure

The process conducted in this research was a quantitative analysis of a survey followed by an analysis of qualitative data from the interviews. That is, a Likert-type survey was administered to thirty students. After that, the quantitative data were analyzed; the interview questions emerged from information gathered from the survey. Students who participated voluntarily in the survey were also asked to participate in future interviews. The students willing to participate in the interviews wrote down their phone number and name in the survey.

Interview questions aimed to understand some information that was not very clear in the quantitative data. In addition, the semi structure interviews looked into the participants insights and the perspectives they have in regard to the achievement of their graduate profile. Once all the information from the interviews was gathered, it was analyzed.

3.1 Gaining Entry

Before the study started, the idea was discussed in the classroom. The proposal had to be approved by the head teacher of the subject and the thesis advisor. They both

approved the researched project. After that, the researcher negotiated entry into the research context. She asked the head of the school for permission to carry out this research. Then, the researcher visited participants in their classrooms, commented on the purpose of the study and invited them to participate. The researcher tried to develop a sense of trust among the participants. According to Jankowicz (2013) the way you approach and enter the setting is very important because it can influence the relationship between researcher and participant. If the researcher gives a negative impression, it can influence negatively the students' willingness to cooperate.

3.2 Ethical issues

Every time a person participates in a research study they should be fully informed about the procedures and risks involved in research and must give their consent to participate. Researchers must take care of the anonymity of her participants since they cannot be put in a situation where they might be at risk as a result of their participation. Participants were aware of the consent form, they were told that the information provided would be confidential. Therefore, nicknames were used in the interviews. The researcher guaranteed the participants confidentiality by not letting anybody else read their real names and the information provided.

3.3 Research Context

This research was carried out in a public university in Mexico. This institution offers three BA programs, one in French, the other one in English, and another in English Teaching.   It also counts with an MA in Teaching English as a Foreign Language, an MA in French Didactics, and a PhD in Language Studies and Applied Linguistics. The BA in English was designed to be completed in ten terms as a maximum and five as minimum.

The new educational model, (MEIF), is focused on a Flexible and Integral education

(Beltrán, 2005). For that reason, the School of Languages promotes participants' autonomous learning. For instance, there is a Research Centre as well as a Self-Access Centre where students can go through new material and practice the four language skills.

3.3.1 The B.A in English

This Educational Program, MEIF, was adopted in 2008 by this B.A. The main objective was to help students develop certain skills and competencies that will help them to solve social issues; there are some other important characteristics that stand out such as autonomy, adaptability, responsibility, qualification upgrade and professional growth so as to be competitive within the labor market. The curriculum design was designed: a) to train individuals with a broad command of the foreign language; b) to develop skills in order to have a successful performance in different work areas where the English language is the main component; c) to develop language skills that will enhance the teaching of languages in the different educational fields and translation (Plan de desarrollo de la facultad de idiomas 2009-2013).

Students must complete all areas of study in order to graduate from university: basic training area, introduction to the disciplinary area, disciplinary area, graduation efficiency area and elective area. The time to complete the BA varies according to the number of subjects and credits students take per semester; 318 are the credits students have to fulfill. The curriculum aims at forming competitive professionals in the public or private sector.

The B.A program gives students the opportunity to acquire knowledge from five areas which are: basic training area, introduction to the disciplinary area, disciplinary area, graduation efficiency area and elective area. All these areas enhance the students' technical and transferable skills, also called graduate attributes, such as learning another language to become more competitive in the labor field. One of the

skills students should develop by the end of the program is being able to communicate effectively and fluently in the mother tongue and in English. Therefore, one subject that is also taught during the program is linguistics which covers phonetics, phonology, morphology, and morphosyntax.

3.4 Research Participants

The sample presented here is part of the 2012 cohort; that is, the study focused on those students who were about to complete the last term of the BA program. These students come from different towns in Veracruz and southern states. They belong to different social classes and have a different economical status. All participants were attending to this term were three groups taking Research workshop class. The students who participated in the survey were the ones that were in the classrooms since some students did not attend classes because they were working on their research projects. Only 30 students participated and answered to the survey. From these thirty students, only ten students volunteered with the interviews. Four of them were males and six were females. The participants' ages range from 21 to 30 years old. I decided to carry out this research with the last term students because they had already been almost for 4 years at this university and they were more likely to enrich the findings of the study.

Chapter Four: The results

This chapter is divided into two main sections, the first one called: *Skills and Competencies Developed by Students*, which analyses the outcomes students have achieved; this section also reports whether this university school enhanced these outcomes or not, from the point of view of the students. The second section called: *Students' skills requiring improvement* reports on the different outcomes students did not successfully achieve during their time at university.

4.1 Skills and Competencies Developed by Students

4.1.1 Critical thinking

According to Halpern, (cited in Flateby, 2010) critical thinking can be defined as a cognitive skill that increases the potential of a desired outcome while being logical and deliberate. In education, it can be seen as an important outcome that helps the student to analyze and evaluate the contents of a specific subject. It is also needed throughout individuals' lives since they will eventually face situations where they will have to analyze every specific detail of a problem in order to make a decision. 77% of the participants marked that this skill is very important as part of their professional development. Only 23 % of them considered that critical thinking was important, but not very important. Lucia, a girl who comes from a small town from the north of Veracruz, considers that having the language knowledge is more important than being critical:

> *"Pues...si es importante yo digo…ahm pero es más importante hablar el inglés..este…porque pues, por ejemplo yo que quiero dar clases, es más importante mi nivel de inglés, si no no me dan clases. "*

The achievement of graduate attributes will also depend on the importance the student gives to them. Nemesio, another participant, said that he put his critical thinking skills into practice in the literature and teaching classes.

> *"…es súper necesario en cualquier profesión…no se trata de leer nada más, hay que analizar y comparar…primero se piensa, después se actúa".*

Critical thinking can be considered an important attribute owing to the fact that sometimes it helps us in decision making. Julieta's words exemplify this:

> *"Creo que soy más cuidadosa en lo que hago y lo que digo…ahora pienso más antes de tomar una decisión…este..y..por ejemplo para dar clases y enseñar… "*

This extract shows that this informant considers herself a better critical thinker than before. This person is concerned about the consequences that not being critical may have. Beatriz, another participant expressed that she feels more confident and able to defend her points of view, as well as create her own assumptions. It is said that students can easily develop critical thinking skills if they self-reflect on the responses and actions to different situations (Crossier, 2011). Iveth claimed that:

> *"Bueno, creo que ser crítica no es algo negativo…algunos compañeros te critican si discutes mucho en clase…ahm a mí me gusta mucho participar y cuando tenía que leer siempre hacía anotaciones. Un maestro que me dio clases de Enseñanza del aprendizaje me enseñó a…ahm utilizar diferentes colores para diferenciar las ideas y cuestionar siempre…sí…cuestionar lo que el autor dice…porque igual, y pues tal vez yo pienso diferente."*

Developing critical thinking skills seems to allow students to enhance their outcomes (Mackight, 2000; Gokhale, 1995 cited in Cano & Ion, 2016). This university school apparently empowers students to develop this attribute. According to the Graduate Profile specifications of this Bachelor degree program, critical thinking is a requirement that candidates need to have in order to enter in this program. Critical thinking is an attribute that students will put into practice; and most participants have admitted that it is really important to be a critical thinker.

4.1.2 Research Skills

As mentioned in chapter two, methods such as project-based learning and task-

based learning promote the development of research skills. Lately, these methods have become popular among higher educational systems. This implementation has emerged due to employers' demand for graduates with particular skill sets (Eilks,I & Byers, B., 2009). These methods promote a variety of outcomes; one of them is research skills which prepares students for the labor market. Graduate students are expected to develop research skills by the end of the bachelor's program. Students in second semester take classes where they are supposed to learn how to research and investigate about educational issues. This subject is part of the Bachelor Program and students need it to graduate.

70 % of students believe that developing research skills is very important since they have to work on a research paper by the end of the B.A program. In the last semester, students need to put into practice what they have learned by writing a research paper that is a requirement to obtain their degree certificate. These subjects require that students develop their research skills in different areas of study. For instance, Luis Angel mentions the following:

> *"Puedo buscar e investigar temas fáciles…este ahm.. como punto gramaticales o expresiones en inglés que a veces no sé".*

Clanchy & Ballard (1995) suggest that research skills should not be taught in separate courses. They should be rather integrated within all the subjects because they may differ from one subject to another one. It seems that students have the need to developed research skills because of three reasons: 1) the program requires them to write a paper; 2) they receive instruction in a subject called Introduction to research; 3) they have questions about a specific topic. For instance, Angel stated that he developed research skills:

> *"La licenciatura me ayudó a buscar un material más profundo.. como decirlo de una forma… en cuanto no solo quedarme con lo primero pero sino a… buscar más para ayudar a mis alumnos. Tal vez con*

cosas que yo no pude aprender en el momento pero aprendí a buscar

e indagar para no quedarme con la incertidumbre."

It can be safely assumed on the basis of the data available that this B.A program has contributed to his professional development. Perhaps, he acquired this skill unconsciously while working on assignments, projects or doubts. Now he believes, it is essential to help future students. However, 37% of the participants perceived that they did not practice research skills very often. Karina, one of the students who participated in the interview, mentioned:

"Bueno como te digo.. a mí me gusta mucho investigar, no creo que

sea de mi pero el maestro que me tocó no explicó muy bien como

tenía que llevar a cabo una investigación. Porque ya ves que para

llevarla hay que seguir varios métodos o pasos y así. "

Karina considers that she is not well prepared to carry out research because there are different methodologies that are used when doing research. She also mentions that the teacher did not explain well enough, and she might be making up an excuse. Eilks,I & Byers, B., (2009) point out that a research-led curriculum focuses on the product. That means, it focuses on having students finish their research paper by giving less weight to the process of doing research. Teachers can overcome this problem by engaging students to become autonomous, creative, curious and engaged.

4.1.3 Autonomy and Students

All these who graduate must develop some degree of autonomy by the time they finish university. The new educational system places emphasis on students' independent learning and decision making. As a matter of fact, it is the students who decide the number of subjects to take, their schedule, and with whom to take classes. 67% of the sample reported that they became more autonomous in

university. They also consider being autonomous as a very important outcome that they must reach.

Students believe that MEIF promotes autonomy in the first place. Angel, a participant, said that MEIF has made him change the way he works. He states:

"I would say that 80% of the work has to be done by ourselves".

It seems that teachers could have contributed to the promotion of this skill. Experts state that autonomy can be seen as a goal in education. Autonomy can be understood as the capacity and discipline that students have regarding their own learning (Benson, 2013). The school has a self-access center (a.k.a. CAAFI) that promotes autonomy. Students practice, study and work on different skills. The main objective is to help students learn on their own. However, some students consider that they have become autonomous because of extrinsic factors. For instance, Jacinta mentions:

"If the teacher didn't explain well I had to go to the CAAFI and look for information there. I didn't like to have doubts so I used to look for a more clear explanation."

This extract suggests that the teacher's lack of explanation triggered the student's autonomy. Nemesio agrees with Jacinta on this :

"Te puedo decir que aprendí que si no sabes algo hay que…no sé… buscar e investigar. Por ejemplo, la maestra que me daba inglés en cuarto semestre, cuando daba la clase, algunas veces como que no le entendía, le hacía preguntas de grammar y luego se contradecía ..entonces buscaba en tutoriales de Youtube."

No matter the reason, these students developed this quality by means of their

intrinsic or extrinsic motivation. Dearden, (1975 ,as cited in Boud, 2012) mentions some of the qualities which can be observed in a person that is developing autonomy skills; these are: wondering or asking for various things that can be taken for granted, defining what they really want, or what interests they have, choosing among alternatives and forming his own opinions. Apparently, Jacinta was not conscious of the quality she had developed until now. It seems that going to the CAAFI was one of the strategies she used to learn English and to develop autonomy.

4.1.4 English Language Skills

Students marked English Language skills for communication as a very important outcome they must reach. They consider that reaching this outcome will provide them with more job opportunities. In fact, there are some institutions that require teachers to be certificated in order to demonstrate their language proficiency. If students fulfill most of the requirements, they are more likely to get a job that suits them.

Apparently, the participants believe that even though they did not work on their language skills very often, they acquired some knowledge. In order to explore what participants perceived about their language skills, some of them were interviewed. During the interviews, they claimed that they feel happy with the knowledge acquired. For instance, Iveth stated:

> " *La verdad sí aprendí mucho, creo que como muchos algunos que quieran ingresar a la licenciatura en lengua inglesa llegamos en blanco…conocemos palabras sueltas, como la típica palabra Apple, la music".*

Three more participants mentioned that they are satisfied with the language skills they had acquired. They even mentioned their interest in the English culture and how much they had learnt about it.

The International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature describes that EFL teachers must work on their langue skills because not all teachers have the same Language Proficiency. A study carried out in Saudi Arabia hints that there is a lack of motivation that influences EFL teachers' language proficiency. Mike, another participant, explains that:

> ¨…como te digo, el primer semestre casi repruebo por…porque solo entré a la carrera porque no quedé en mecatronica …ahm no quería…y bueno ahmm…luego me empezó a gustar y aprendí bastante, sí..ahja además como que las clases de literatura me gustaban y leía en inglés casi siempre..ahm y sé..como que se me pegaban muchas palabras…sí me siento bien con lo que sé.¨

The surveys revealed that students seem to feel confident with what they learnt. This is something positive because language proficiency can be seen as the main factor a student must develop. Students with a better command of the English language are more likely to feel confident when applying for a job position. It is possible that the language proficiency determines the income they may have because some private institutions pay their employees according to what they know.

4.1.5 Motivation for professional development

Once students finish their Bachelor Degree some of them feel motivated to keep on studying, attend courses or something else in order to grow professionally; some others just want to graduate and get a job. The truth is that some job positions require the candidate to have specific qualifications. Requirements like this can help motivate students to continue preparing themselves academically. Dörnyei (2001 cited in Hattie, 2008) discusses whether students feel motivated to learn because of a cause or an effect. One of the participants, Gabriela, claimed that she desires to start a master's degree because of the advantages it carries:

"…ahmm actualización professional? Sí, claro! Tiene muchas ventajas…voy a hacer examen para entrar a la maestría. En la licenciatura no hice intercambio pero igual y si quedo en la maestría me voy y mejoro el inglés".

It can be appreciated that this participants' motivation was triggered because she wants to be updated, improve her English and maybe get to travel by an M.A program.

However, Richards and Burns (2012) suggest that some people experience motivation not simply as a cause-and-effect process. They say that motivation could be dynamic, since it grows while we develop different mental processes. Students cannot be motivated but they might be able to work on it through time depending on internal or external factors. For example, Karina, one of the interviewed participants, shared that:

¨En primer o segundo semestre llevé una clase de investigación y se me complicó, eso de investigar y escribir casi no me latía, pero ahora creo que si escribo, un artículo…el artículo…bueno quizá me ayude como escalón para seguir investigando y viajando como una maestra de aquí de la fac.¨

64 % of the participants agreed on the importance of developing professional motivation. During the interviews, most of the participants mentioned that they would like to carry out activities which could help them to grow professionally, and not necessarily an M.A. Program. Some of them mentioned training courses for certification exams or other certificates. One of the interviewed participants mentioned that he would do something that did not involve reading because he does not like reading papers or articles:

"haría igual y un examen de certificación creo que es importante, pero nada más porque si hago una maestría yo creo que hay que leer

bastante y no me gusta por lo tedioso".

Even this participant is not a motivated reader, the information he provided is important because it allows us to compare different types of students. Teachers could use different strategies to motivate them and become successful.

4.2 Students' skills requiring improvement

4.2.1 Teamwork

Students' abilities to work in teams are an outcome that was not achieved successfully. While doing teamwork students need to put into practice a variety of skills that help them to solve a problem or achieve a goal. Some of the skills involved are interpersonal, problem solving and communication skills. Zoogah & Beugré (2012) suggest that one of the group goals is to increase commitment and willingness to cooperate in order to focus on the main purpose of the team, that is, achieve a goal or a task. However, some people fail to collaborate because of the lack of tolerance, commitment, time or even their personality.

In this study, some participants shared 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 problematic and difficult to agree when making decisions or responsibilities were not equitable. For instance, Miguel said:

… llegan a haber muchos cambios de personalidades en cuanto a los compañeros. Hay unos que si se integran, hay otros que llegan a apartarse demasiado y eso obviamente repercute al trabajo colectivo. Luego nos tocaba hacer trabajo en equipo y unos ni se aparecían y terminábamos haciendo el trabajo de los otros.

Thoughts in regard to teamwork seem to be similar to those of Jacinta's:

> *Trabajo en equipo…[pausa larga]…si he hecho trabajos en equipo pero casi no me gusta…ahmm luego piensas que es fácil y termina complicándose...intenté hacer la tesis con mi amiga pero…ahm..no coincidíamos…casi no nos poníamos de acuerdo…como que las personalidades chocan y no..no era fácil.*

It can be said that, because of the circumstances, the participants preferred to do their work alone. A participant mentioned that he was more likely to do a better job if she worked by herself. His ideas seemed to be ignored even if they were better than those suggested by other team members. Nemesio affirmed that teamwork was rarely empowered during university:

> *Pues trabajo en equipo fue casi todo individual en toda la carrera…pues si tuve uno que otro maestro que nos ponían a trabajar en equipo y los demás eran como que les daba igual y con tal de que trabajaras, pues trabajaras tú sólo y era lo mejor porque a veces ni te tomaban en cuenta.*

These comments help us to realize that students might not have been properly guided or motivated to achieve common goals successfully. It is important to teach students some of the advantages of team work such as: maximizing their potential, creating better ideas, solving problems and a high self-esteem. However, students need to be taught to commit to their team goals and responsibilities, to be tolerant and support each other. In a case study carried out by Hager and Holland (2007), participants concluded that they key to productive teamwork is open communication and joint decision making.

Once students graduate, they may become employees and they may need to have teamwork skills which are highly valued by some employers. In the article published by Harvey, Moon, Geall, & Bower *(1997)*, report employers' opinions about the

importance of these skills since they believe that teamwork is extremely important for them, and they can hire one or two introverted teachers but they need people with teamwork skills.

4.2.2 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, specifically for the students of the B.A. Program in English are highly valued. These students could possibly be teachers, translator or interpreters. The participants perceived a lack of creativity in their professional development. They pointed out that in fact, they believe creativity is neither important nor a matter to be concerned about.

75% of the participants rated the ability to develop new projects and ideas as not very important. Later on, the interview data showed 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. During the interviews, Lucy said that her teacher was a little old-fashion in regard to teaching strategies:

> "Hay muchos maestros que se limitan y son muy tradicionales y no quieren usar otros materiales o estrategías".

It seems that Nemesio agrees with her when he states that:

> ¨No todos pero algunos maestros que según son buenos como que no planean, ahmm algunas veces me quedaba dormido en clase…me aburría porque nada más era de abrir el libro y ya hagan los ejercicios…no es que sea malo el maestro sólo que como le faltaba hacer algunas actividades...no sé un juego o algo.¨

Tan et. al (2006), suggest that creativity and innovative skills can be fostered if teachers provide an environment where they can be developed or copied by role modeling creativity. Therefore, possessing the skills to innovate or come up with new ideas is important because we are living in a world that it is constantly changing. For instance, teachers need to cope with children or teenagers that do not easily become surprised. Creativity and innovation play an important role in lesson planning. Developing these skills must be a life-long commitment, not only during university years.

4.2.3 Technology skills in pedagogy

Integrated e-learning is a term used to refer to the integration of technology in the classroom, which it supposed to enhance learning. E-learning tries to combine new technology with conventional teaching methods. It combines face-to-face teaching, distance education and training on the job (Jochems, Merriënboer, and Koper, 2004). This B.A program seems to have a commitment to the usage of technology as a means of learning-acquisition. However, students have perceived that only a few teachers make use of technology. Gabriela affirmed:

> ¨*Por ejemplo me toco un maestro que nos…bueno se enfocó más en traducción audiovisual y fue ahí donde aprendí algo realmente nuevo porque tuvimos que usar tecnología. Igual un maestro de enseñanza, bueno teníamos que crear materiales usando la compu y eso…y son las únicas materias que te puedo decir que realmente aprendí algo nuevo, con ayuda del uso de la tecnología. De todos los maestros que tuve sólo dos…sí sólo dos nos hicieron realizar trabajos en la compu que…que valieran la pena.*¨

Teachers should make an effort to plan lessons that meet the educational goals and, help students develop technology skills. Technology provides teachers and

students with a variety of materials to engage them in the classroom. Hence, there are some professors teaching in this B.A program that seem to have little experience in regard to the use of technology. As part of their continuous training and development, teachers must attend workshop where they can learn how to use technology as a tool for teaching.

Some teacher may feel overwhelmed thinking that they are not capable of using technology, or maybe that it is too late for using it. For instance, Nemesio said that there was an interactive whiteboard in his classroom but it was never used:

> " ¡Huy, no! los maestros más…los más viejitos casi no usan tecnología en sus clases. Tuve una maestra que se espantaba si la compu hacía...o sonaba…[risas] era muy chistoso".

If teachers were not afraid of the use of technology, they would probably be enhancing students' creativity and critical thinking skills, and of course it could make teachers' lives easier when planning and designing teaching material.

4.2.4 Learning strategies

One of the objectives the BA in English has is to teach its students to develop learning strategies to enhance their learning outcomes. These strategies are put into practice in order to process information. The use of learning strategies may vary according to learning styles or the purpose each learner has. Some strategies worked through a specific cognitive process, others focused on the affective or psychological areas. For instance, some students learn through the use of visuals, others learn by listening to songs, people, or the radio. However, it is not easy to run some tests in each class to find out what learning style a student has, and consequently find strategies for each student. This could be overwhelming for some teachers, although tests can help determine to some extent the strategies to be employed in language processing (Cohen, 1998; Fan, 2003; Oxford, 2005).

Besides, students often do not seem to like to answer questionnaires or surveys that help determine learning styles and the appropriate learning strategies. Mike admitted that:

¨…estrategías..[pausa]…sí creo que sí! en primer o segundo semestre…la verdad no recuerdo bien, a veces ni entraba a la clase…uhmm…una vez, el maestro llevó un cuestionario para ver como aprendíamos…no recuerdo cuales eran las preguntas pero …uhm…lo hice de prisa y, estee…no recuerdo bien creo que salió que era usando images y así.¨

Learning a second language implies learning strategies that will facilitate the acquisition process. Therefore, students must be aware of how to use these strategies to succeed. Rubin (1975) carried out a study to identify the strategies of successful learners, and then share them with less successful learners; among the factors considered were psychological, communication, social and cognitive strategies. Lucia mentioned:

" Algunas estrategias…ah pues recuerdo que…ahmm el maestro nos decía que habláramos en inglés con nuestros compañeros en las clases…y afuera..y…bueno como…como soy media seria pues…ahm me da pena y sí sé pero pss no lo hago.¨

Ricky, who took the same class as Claudia, has a different point of view:

¨…sí aprendí varias cosas en la clase de estrategias del conocimiento o aprendizaje creo que así se llamaba la clase...ahm este..ahm…aprendí algo de cómo crear palabras de una palabra…no sé si me entiendas [pausa] por ejemplo friend…ahm frienship ó friendly. El maestro nos decía que con música o películas, pero a mi no me gusta eso casi..creo

que ahm, no sé…aprendo más cosas cuando leo mis comics. ¨

This participant seems to believe that the strategies he learnt have helped him to acquire the language. Oxford (2005) suggests that strategies can be grouped in two categories which are direct and indirect. Direct strategies are made up of memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies while indirect strategies comprise social, affective, and metacognitive strategies. What Ricky does is an example of affective and metacognitive strategies. He does something he likes and, also, thinks about how to come up with new vocabulary that will help him to improve his language.

4.2.5 Teaching skills

The B.A. Program in English gives students the opportunity to enroll in different educational experiences that will contribute to develop soft and hard skills, such as teaching skills. Those participants who enrolled in (EE) related to language and language acquisition consider that developing teaching skills will definitely enhance their teaching practices. It is important to mention that some of the participants felt overwhelmed while doing their social service as English teachers. Iveth admitted to lacking teaching skills and she was very concerned about it:

> *¨¡Uy, no!...[risas] el primer día me espanté un buen porque estoy haciendo mi servicio en una técnica y tenía …ahm tenía como 40 alumnos. Ahm además les hablaba y ni caso me hacían, yo creo que no sé, tal vez..no sé …la edad. Casi siempre me pongo de malas cuando no me hacen caso…creo pues que..necesito aprender más todavía, hasta me duele la cabeza. ¨*

Some novice teachers experience a big challenge since some of them lack classroom skills that do not allow them to have a good performance as teacher. Richards and Burns (2012: 48) affirm that 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. Something that can be done about it is to observe classes, take notes, write reflexions, or assist teachers in service and doing internships. Once students have gathered enough experience they might be more likely to develop confidence while teaching. Regarding this point, Luis commented:

> ¨Me ayudó mucho la licenciatura a la planificación. Ahora que ya estoy ejerciendo como maestro me ayudó mucho a planificar lo que son las clases. A buscar un material un más profundo pero para ser honesto, todavía no mucho...aún me falta. Como apenas estoy empezando pues apenas estoy aprendiendo infinidad de cosas que tengo que aprender en toda mi carrera. Estoy sujeto al nerviosismo, tal vez a equivocarme en algunas cosas, no dar la suficiente información a mis alumnos…diferentes tipos de aspectos que apenas estoy empezando a conocer.¨

Richards and Burns (2012) point out that it is natural for a novice teacher to be worried when they first start teaching. For novice teachers, it is hard to try to communicate a sense of confidence, competence, and skill. Farrell (2009) mentions that after a year of experience teachers usually experience a transition from a survival stage to a focused stage. Therefore, students who usually choose a teaching career should be guided and receive advice regarding some extracurricular activities that may help them overcome the process of becoming a teacher.

5 Conclusions and Implications

The present study had the aim to discover students' perceptions in regard to their graduate profile. The results of this inquiry may provide valuable information that could possibly make teachers evaluate the techniques and strategies used to help students achieve their graduate attributes. Furthermore, the findings of this study may help other researches interested in the same topic. It may also contribute to

further research focused on teachers' perception or employer's perceptions regarding students' graduate profile.

Two main categories emerged from the data: 1. Achieved outcomes and graduate attributes enhanced by university, 2. Students' skills requiring improvement. On the one hand, the data obtained from both the surveys and the interviews shows that students perceived 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 which will help them to analyze a situation, act and behave according to the circumstances, and develop their potential.

In terms of academics, graduate attributes are the bridge to learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be (Delors, 1996). In addition, having the basis of research skills will allow them to work on small research problems, which helps as practice to get into a research community and then, hopefully, graduates will become more competent. Autonomy and language skills also emerged from the coding process. The participants' perceptions on autonomy seem to be positive; most of them believed that it is one of the attributes they have always worked on.

In contrast to these perspectives, participants also mentioned the outcomes they believe they did not achieve such as teaching skills, learning strategies, technology skills, teamwork and ability to develop new projects and ideas.

To conclude, teachers, students and school authorities must pay attention to these outcomes; teachers may need to evaluate the strategies used to enhance students' attributes; students need to be conscious about the importance of these skills since the labor market requires them to have them. Students have to be encouraged to pay more attention to the development of these attributes which enhance their graduate profile, and enroll in other classes or activities that support the development

of these attributes.

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