

## **Importancia de los foros de egresados en la reestructuración del plan de estudios de la licenciatura en Idiomas de la Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco**

*The Importance of Forums for Graduates in the Curriculum Restructuring  
Process of the BA in Modern Languages at Juarez Autonomous University of  
Tabasco*

*Importância dos fóruns de graduados na reestruturação do currículo do  
curso de Letras da Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco*

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### **Resumen**

El objetivo de la presente investigación fue conocer, a través de foros presenciales, la opinión de un grupo egresados de la licenciatura en Idiomas de la Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco (UJAT) sobre las competencias, habilidades y actitudes que tendrían que dominar los futuros profesionales de esa especialidad para desempeñarse con éxito en el mercado laboral. Para elegir a los participantes se realizó una convocatoria, a la cual acudieron 37 egresados que en ese momento se encontraban trabajando en distintas instituciones de la región. Los resultados demuestran que a muchos aún les cuesta dominar los tres idiomas que conforman su área de estudio (inglés, francés e italiano), por lo que consideran que en la carrera se deben diseñar más actividades prácticas y promover la actualización constante de los docentes de las distintas cátedras.

**Palabras clave:** debilidades, foro de egresados, fortalezas, licenciatura en Idiomas, reestructuración.

## Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the opinion of a group of graduates of the BA in Modern Languages at Juarez Autonomous University of Tabasco (Known in Spanish as UJAT) in relation to the different competencies, skills and attitudes that future graduates in this B.A. programme would have to master in order to perform successfully in their respective labor field. The graduates' opinion was obtained through a number of face-to-face forums at the Department of Educations and Arts. The participants of the study were 37 graduates who responded to a call that was launched in order to select them. The chosen graduates were working in different institutions of the region. The research findings show that many of them still find it difficult to master the three languages that form part of their area of study (English, French and Italian). Consequently, they consider appropriate that more practical activities and the continual teachers updating should be implemented.

**Keywords:** Weaknesses, Graduates Forum, Strengths, BA in Modern Languages, Restructuring.

## Resumo

O objetivo da presente investigação foi conhecer, por meio de fóruns presenciais, a opinião de um grupo de egressos do Bacharelado em Letras da Universidade Autônoma de Tabasco (UJAT) sobre as competências, habilidades e atitudes que os futuros profissionais teriam que dominar. dessa especialidade para atuar com sucesso no mercado de trabalho. Para escolher os participantes, foi feita uma convocação, na qual participaram 37 graduados que trabalhavam em diferentes instituições da região na época. Os resultados mostram que muitos ainda têm dificuldade em dominar as três línguas que compõem sua área de estudo (inglês, francês e italiano), por isso acreditam que na corrida atividades mais práticas devem ser elaboradas e promover a atualização constante do corpo docente. as diferentes cadeiras.

**Palavras-chave:** pontos fracos, fórum de ex-alunos, pontos fortes, diploma de idioma, reestruturação.

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## Introduction

This article arose from the concern to identify, through forums, the strengths and weaknesses with which students had graduated from the 2010 curriculum of the Bachelor of Languages at the Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco. To do this, first, the literature available on this subject was reviewed with the objective of determining to what extent the forums had been used to investigate the training capabilities and limitations of university graduates; however, in that initial exploration it was determined that until now there has not been much in depth on the subject. In fact, as Salas Madriz (2006) points out, the scarce background that can be found has arisen because some universities have proposed to achieve stronger elements of judgment when making curricular changes that guarantee quality and coherent professional training for graduates. with the new demands.

Now, when it comes to knowing the challenges faced by university graduates in the work camp, most institutions choose to apply a questionnaire validated by the National Association of Universities and Institutes of Higher Education (ANUIES) (1998). ), which usually only serves to present a general report on the opinions of the graduates, although without documenting whether the information obtained has actually had an impact on the updating and restructuring of the plans and study programs. In other words, the main gaps found in this initial bibliographic exploration were the following:

- Scarce research in Latin America, in Mexico and Tabasco, specifically, on the use of forums as an investigative element of opinion of university graduates regarding their training process.
- The information gathered in the few forums found is not usually used as an argument to encourage the updating and restructuring of curricula.
- Works on forums of graduates do not usually have the rigor or the conventional structure of a research (that is, they do not have an approach to the problem, a theoretical framework, methodology, discussion of results, etc.).
- In the reviewed works, no methodology was found that could accurately identify the way in which the proposed forums were carried out.

- The information collected through the forums is almost the same in all the researches analyzed.

Given the above, it can be said that the present study is significant not only because it seeks to provide useful research on this topic to future research, but also because the results obtained are expected to serve as evidence to raise the awareness of the university community of the inconsistencies that may arise. exist between the profile of the student of Languages that is formed in the university and the demands of the current working world.

## Developing

In the past, the advance of knowledge occurred slowly. However, we are currently witnessing a time in which information can not only be generated and disseminated at a resounding speed, but can even become obsolete while efforts are being made to assimilate it. For this reason, and as noted by the ANUIES (1998), one of the main challenges facing educational institutions of these times is to keep their study programs updated, a task that deserves a huge and constant dedication, because the demands, The technologies and skills that a generation of professionals must master may not be the same as when they began to pursue their university career.

For this reason, Martínez Márquez (2015) considers that it is essential that students now incorporate knowledge in their teaching-learning processes that allow them to respond to the changing demands of society. This opinion is in accordance with what was agreed at the World Conference on Higher Education (Unesco, 1998), where it was suggested that universities should train professionals that can be successfully carried out in different contexts and situations.

To achieve this goal, some authors (Escalona and Fernández, 2007, Guzmán Silva et al., 2008, Sánchez, 2014) consider that inquiries can be made to monitor the activities of university graduates, through different instruments (such as questionnaires or forums) that allow the information obtained to be triangulated, so that more precise interpretations and actions can be obtained.

In this sense, Solís, González and Pacheco (2006) and Valencia Gutiérrez, Alonzo Rivera and Moguel Marin (2015) explain that follow-up studies of graduates are crucial to evaluate, accredit and update educational programs, since their opinion It is essential to know if they are fulfilling the expectations of the working world. In effect, according to Ávila and Aguirre (2005), Gil, García and Santos (2009) and Juárez et al. (2015), only graduates are able to make evaluative judgments about their experiences in the field of work and to assess the level of knowledge and skills acquired throughout their university training process.

For these reasons, the objective of this research has been to know the opinion of the graduates of the 2010 curriculum of the Bachelor of Languages at the Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco (UJAT) on the knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes that they would have to master the future professionals of that specialty to perform successfully in the current job market. The results obtained in this research will serve as a basis for proposing adjustments, evaluations and modifications to the current curriculum of that career.

## **Methodology**

In order to choose the participants of this research, a call was made to the graduates of the 2010 study plan of the aforementioned degree. This call was attended by 37 participants, who at that time were working in the following institutions: Polytechnic University of the Gulf, Champal College, College Mexico, French Alliance, Hotel Quality Inn Cencali, Center for Scientific and Technological Studies, Teaching Center of Languages of the UJAT, Language Teaching Center UTT (Technological University of Tabasco), American School, Tabasco Institute, Harmon Hall, Oxford Institute, English School, Liberty College, Linguatec Language Center Villahermosa, University of Mexico Valley Villahermosa Campus, Hilton Hotel Villahermosa, Fiesta Inn Villahermosa Hotel, Crown Plaza Hotel, Creatur Travel Agency, as well as some companies that work for Pemex.

The forums developed to collect the information were carried out in the Academic Division of Education and Arts of the UJAT, through the Graduate Monitoring Program. These forums were based mainly on the guidelines of the ANUIES (1998), the Institutional Program for Monitoring Graduates of the UJAT (Directorate of Studies and Educational

Services [DESE], 2004) and the technical-administrative provisions for the follow-up of graduates from the Ministry of Public Education (SEP) (2008).

The forums were organized in working groups, where moderators and rapporteurs participated, who raised the following questions to know the opinion of the participants:

1. Do you consider that the career allowed you to adequately develop the necessary skills to perform in your work field?
2. What do you consider the most and least developed competences in the university?
3. Did the training received in the career correspond to the work activities you currently perform? What elements justify this response?
4. In addition to the work field in which you currently work, do you know which others work in this career?
5. Do you know any graduate who is currently unemployed? What could be the reasons for that situation?
6. What is your opinion about updating the career curricula?
7. What components of the curriculum do you consider should be updated?
8. What is your opinion about teachers' competences about the updating, the teaching methodology, the availability to attend the students and the evaluation systems used in the subjects?
9. What is your opinion regarding the usefulness of the teaching evaluation for the qualification of the career?
10. What is your opinion regarding the incidence of the program in the academic community for the development of educational policy?
11. What is your opinion about the administration, as well as the organizational and academic climate in which the career took place?
12. What are your suggestions for change to improve the career (eg, in areas such as study plans, admissions processes, schedules and the teaching staff)?
13. In what aspects do you think the program is better compared to similar ones?

## **Results**

Next, the information provided by the graduates is presented, which has been classified according to these nine categories:

### **1. Development of adequate skills to perform in the labor field**

In this aspect, the majority of the graduates considered that the career allowed them to develop the necessary competences to perform in the labor field. They also mentioned that the most consolidated strengths were learning to learn, language proficiency, cultural knowledge of the language, grammar, development of projects, pedagogical and psychological aspects, linguistic communication competence, basic competence in technology, competence of sense of initiative, writing and reading. In particular, they assured that the education received was good, although they also commented that some aspects could be improved.

### **2. Competencies that were left to develop**

The competencies that were left to develop were the following: development of the four linguistic skills of the English language, development of communicative competence, use of a second language in grammar, reading, speaking, listening skills (they even emphasized that the last two were the least developed). They also stressed that they required more pedagogical tools for teaching the English language and more methodological activities of language learning. Also, more knowledge of phonetics, phonology and syntax, skills for the management and understanding of ICT functions in the learning of a language, teamwork and tools to perform an evaluation.

### **3. Link between the training received and the work activities performed**

The majority of the graduates considered that the received training did not correspond to the activities they were doing at present. Some, for example, indicated that they were working in the field of teaching because it was the place where there was more work, although their training had been other areas, such as translation and interpretation.

#### **4. Labor field where the graduates considered that they could perform**

The graduates felt that they could act as teachers, bilingual secretaries, translators and interpreters, and also in positions related to administration, tourism, writing, literature, the publishing industry, hotels, foreign companies and even in the field tanker or in customs companies that work for Pemex. They also stated that the best paid positions were those in the area of translation and teaching.

#### **5. Causes of unemployment of some graduates**

From the opinions it was possible to determine that the following were some of the causes for which certain graduates were unemployed: not being certified, lack of labor supply, disinterest for exercising the career, little pedagogical knowledge, illness, little perception of salary, insufficient experience as teachers and shortcomings in the command of English, French and Italian.

#### **6. Opinion of the graduates about the update of the curriculum**

The comments of the graduates about the study plan were ambiguous: for example, there were some who confessed that they did not know the current curriculum, while others pointed out that it was necessary to update it. Also, there were some who approved it because it offered the opportunity to study three languages from the beginning of the race, although others indicated that it should be changed because it was counterproductive to learn several languages at the same time.

#### **7. Elements of the curriculum that needed to be updated**

The graduates stressed that they should add subjects that would allow them to do internships in their area of interest. Also, that the content of the subjects will be explained in English, and not in Spanish. Likewise, they requested more chairs related to the communicative aspect, more semesters of English language and more subjects related to ICT management. They also suggested that other optional languages (such as German or



Portuguese) could be included and offer subjects in applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, semiotics, etc. Likewise, they considered that they should offer the subject of improvement of French and add subjects of morphology and phonetics of Italian and French. Finally, they commented that the curriculum should be more practical.

### **8. Aspects in which the program of the degree in Languages was better than similar ones**

The graduates pointed out the following aspects in which the program of the degree in Languages was better than similar ones:

- It was the only language course taught in the state.
- Many teachers dominated the teaching of the language.
- The race was free.
- Although the curriculum was good, it should be more competitive, compared to other universities in the country offering the degree.
- Although a wide range of knowledge was not offered in all areas, what was provided was excellent.
- The curriculum and job offers.
- The large number of students who went on international mobility and scientific summer.
- Scholarships awarded as Pronabes (National Scholarship Program for Higher Education).
- Other careers only focused on teaching English.

### **9. Proposals of the graduates for the improvement of the career**

Below are the proposals suggested by the graduates:

- At the advanced level, classes must be taught by native teachers.
- In the area of translation and interpretation, there must be more exercises so that students can practice in the interpretations.

- Take advantage of the skills of advanced students.
- Actively employ mentors to advise students with low grades.
- Create more practical subjects, mainly for the teaching area.
- Offer in two semesters the subjects of morphosyntax and phonetics.
- Teachers must be more strict.
- Students must be certified, since most companies and institutions request this requirement.
- Make agreements with other institutions so that students can practice in them.
- Induction courses must be taught by graduates.
- Raise the level of demand in English.
- Update and train teachers.
- Have teachers with more experience in the languages of the race.
- Review some "stuff" materials.
- Teachers really should teach.
- Many teachers have the knowledge, but not the vocation.
- Some teachers establish a barrier between them and the students.
- Improve the form of teacher-student interaction.
- Improve the teacher's treatment of students.
- Greater commitment to the teaching task.
- The teacher must know how to identify his role and carry it out.
- The teacher's goal should be for the student to learn, so he or she should do what is possible to make that happen.
- The teacher should leave their problems outside the classroom.
- Work must be done on the constant updating of the study programs.
- New students must have at least an intermediate level of English.
- Students should be kept informed about the use of new educational trends and the requirements of the labor field.
- Learn from avant-garde institutions regarding the design of study plans.

- Graduates should not focus so much on how difficult it is to establish themselves in the workplace.
- The teacher must be certified to practice.
- Further improve the process of re-enrolling students.
- The schedules must be more flexible.
- Increase the number of cultural events to develop communication skills.
- Search for more options for social service.
- The student's certification must be mandatory.
- Improve the profile of professional training.
- Expand methodological and technical contents, as well as professional practices, digital skills and language teaching.

## Conclusions

*The professional career begins when you want, but for this you have to have the tools that allow it to be successful.*

Anonymous

The alumni forums allowed to detect the strengths and weaknesses of the 2010 educational program of the degree in Languages of the Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco. In this sense, the most significant results show that many still find it difficult to master the three languages that make up their area of study (English, French and Italian), hence why they recommend not only that more practical activities are carried out, but also that the professors of the different chairs are constantly updated.

Likewise, the importance of students being certified in the languages they study is evident, as this is an essential requirement to be accepted in the institutions where they apply for employment. In fact, the graduates also believe that it is essential that the teachers of the race be certified.

On the other hand, the participants consider that some subjects that they could not attend or that were not taught with the required depth should be incorporated into the curriculum. They also believe that scenarios should be created to facilitate dialogue between the university community, society and companies, which should openly express what are the competencies required of future professionals.

All the information presented in this article, finally, was offered to the Commission of Plans and Programs of Study to be taken into account in the restructuring of the 2017 study plan. The objective is to ensure that future graduates can enhance the competencies that his predecessors could not develop due to different factors, which have already been discussed. In this regard, so far it can be said that a certification process has been initiated for teachers in the languages they teach and even motivated students to complete this task. Finally, in other inquiries, the impact of these forums on the restructuring of the aforementioned plan must be evaluated, as that way the changes implemented can be followed up based on the information presented.

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