

**UNIVERSITY OF EL SALVADOR
SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
FOREIGN LANGUAGES DEPARTMENT**



UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH:

On how students of the first year at the Foreign Languages Department chose which major to study at the University of El Salvador

IN ORDER TO OBTAIN THE DEGREE OF:

LICENCIATURA EN IDIOMA INGLES OPCION ENSEÑANZA

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INTRODUCTION

This study delves deeply into the decisions made by students when choosing to study a major in English language teaching and explores the reasoning behind them. We answer how students resolved to study this major, and what kind of information they received in order to understand how educated, suitable and informed their decision may have been.

By any definition, professional success is what most students aspire upon enrolling to pursue a degree in university. Needless to say, students may experience various difficulties throughout their journey towards completing their studies in a major.

Most students would often struggle to identify the relevant factors that may prevent them from performing as required. Some students may develop poorly due to various elements related specifically to the demands and characteristics of the major they chose (Cupani et al, 2004). In these sort of instances is when fields such as career election may prove to be a wider and more thorough process than most students seem to perceive when making the decision to enroll to a major.

There are specific fields of research endeavored to understand why students choose a major and in turn help them identify which major may be more suitable or adequate for them. Areas such as that of career choice and students' early development are sometimes overlooked due to a wide array of aspects. These aspects can go from simply not being aware

Even though most students seem to be somewhat cautious when it comes to choosing a major, we need to realize that most of the process derives from the student's perception of not only the major and its curriculum but also the implications that both may have towards his or her personal aspirations.

We also need to present the issue of capabilities which in tandem with aspirations may become students' pivotal characteristics to a good and well defined choice. Students who enroll into a major without being completely aware of the implications of choosing a career which is not entirely according to their capabilities, may often experience feelings of uneasiness and what they call "second thoughts" during their year as freshmen (Luis Porta, 2002).

We are positive that the students who chose to pursue a major in the Foreign Language Department of El Salvador made the decision to study there based on all the previously mentioned points and taking them into account whether being aware of it or not.

Studying students' decision to choose this specific degree, implicates approaching some areas that encompass their academic lives from beginning to end. Areas such as student profiling, and professional development are relevant and explored in this study.

As a final note, we need to mention that in order to explore how students came to such decision, it is necessary the use of a dependable instrument that help us gather reliable

information. Limitations presented are due to the fact that freshmen have a very limited schedule and demanding workload, we have designed an adequate and precise instrument to collect the required data.

OBJECTIVES:

General.

Explain how students decide to enroll to study the English major at the Foreign Languages Department of the University of El Salvador.

Specific:

-Identify what sources of information were helpful so students could decide what major to study.

-Detect the motives that students may have to enroll in the Foreign Languages Department at the University of El Salvador, whereas this being the major that they chose as their first option or not.

-Recognize which students are willing to start a career in language teaching after graduating in order to observe their professional expectations.

JUSTIFICATION

Career choice itself is an already very difficult task. Yet, in the case of pursuing a degree oriented towards education the task becomes more complex. In the particular case of a degree in language teaching, almost immediately a profile surfaces in which a particular sort of candidate may fit. This may also bring about some relevant questions such as why some students choose which degree to study in spite of being qualified to study something else? or why students choose to study a major which is not entirely of their liking? or even why students choose career path in which they may not feel they can thrive as professionals?

The purpose of this study is to find the means through which first year students at the English language teaching major of the Foreign Languages Department, of the University of El Salvador came to choose such career path.

This major is highly specific and deeply connected to the field of language teaching. It becomes obviously necessary then, to know if all the students enrolled to pursue this degree are conscious about this characteristic and effectively want to persevere in this major. Succeeding in an academic field and later in working life, means to take advantage of the time and the aptitudes students have, and performing in the most comfortable, effective and contributing way, satisfying not only institutional requirements but also the people involved in the process.

Failure in pursuing this major due to an unsteady decision or expecting to fit a profile as time progresses, can bring baffling consequences for students. When a person choose a major to study, he or she is making a decision as important as his choice of close friends, or a wife or a way of living (Vaughan 1970).

Nonconformity and loss of interest at the beginning of their studies, as well as poor performance, are just some of the consequences of a hasty decision. Therefore, if students expect to fit in the major until they have to perform as professionals, they must be aware that forbearance and dedication are not only outstanding elements of a well defined personality but also necessary traits to perform in this profession.

As a wise man once said “the key to a happy life is to find something you like doing and then find some way of getting people to pay you for doing it”. This study looks into the students’ decision on why to study this major, both at the academic level as well as the moment to perform in the real world.

THESIS STATEMENT

Since almost a decade ago, the number of students enrolled in the English language teaching major at the Foreign Languages Department in the University of El Salvador, has increased on a yearly basis.

Every year, candidate students who manage to enroll, begin a process that will last for a period of five years in order to become professionally trained English language teachers. However, is here where a big question moves towards their choice and the elements involved in it:

Were all those students provided with the correct information about this major before making the decision to enroll in it?

If we go deeper in this issue, we realize that not all of the students enrolling in this major have the correct information of what the purpose of studying this major is exactly about.

The ever increasing necessity to learn English as a second or foreign language, is a blatant reality in our society. This may be one of the many reasons that have driven so many students to make the decision of enrolling in this career.

Our research therefore emerges due to the necessity to delve deeper in students' choice to study a degree in English language teaching. We mean to grasp the different factors within the process of career choice directed towards this specific degree.

In the particular case of a degree oriented towards education, vocation is one of the most relevant aspects and must be one to keep in mind in order to be successful in both the academic field, as a remarkable student, and at the workplace, as a dedicated and motivated professional that finds joy and satisfaction in performing his occupation. These ideas take relevance upon realizing that being a teacher means as well being patient, dedicated, creative, and much more qualities that are not always acquired at the university while pursuing a degree.

Though, vocation is needed not only while and after obtaining a teaching degree, but also in any major in which candidates are aspiring to study and become successful professionals in the future, vocational and personal interests are widely regarded as some of the most elusive and yet significant areas in career choice, during a compulsory higher learning education stage (Holland 1997). It is necessary to mention the vocational and professional counseling as important aspects regarded in career election, especially in a major related to language teaching.

In the stage when students face the moment to make the decision about what career to study, they become influenced by many factors such as: family, friends, economic possibilities, etc. Such factors can influence what students' want, can or must study as a degree at the university. However, while this moment arrives, students must be prepared or at least have a clear idea about what they would like to study.

Since the aim towards this investigation project is to find the reasons by which students came to choose a degree intended for a very specific type of candidate, we aim to gather information which allow us to verify if students who are already enrolled in this major have received some kind of orientation before making such decision.

This research will be executed following a schedule programmed to guide the events which in turn will guide us during the inquiry and analysis process.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Vocational and personal interests are widely regarded as some of the most elusive and yet significant areas in which career choice and the election of a major, during compulsory higher learning education stage (Holland, 1997). Key elements such as motivation and personal gain are other very important matters that affect career choice altogether. Predictive utilization of the knowledge gained and the degree achieved by students are relevant at the moment of knowing which career to study but are truly significant due to the satisfaction from performing in a career. (Multon Brown and Lent, 1991).

Several pieces of documentation were chosen to support our research due to their exploring on the characteristics of the following areas: career choice, student profiling in language teaching, and professional development.

The general aim of studies such as “Epistemological styles and types of personality as factors associated in choice of study areas”, (Lucio Rehbein Felmer et al, 2009) is to describe career types that are prone to be chosen by the participants in the major areas of higher education. The improvement of self-knowledge about certain psychological variables (such as interests, abilities, personality traits, etc.) as a part of the vocational counseling processes is another very important matter to be discussed when delving in the career choice world. (Marcos Cupani y Edgardo R. Pérez, 2007) This stresses how the importance of counseling is vital and

yet continuously disregarded as a crucial component to make successful and rewarding career choices.

Students' orientation, vocational orientation and student profiling hold an important contribution in decision making. The supplementary methods to help the aspirants to make an educated decision and contribute in the searching for their vocation are all questions we present in the following pages. Vocational orientation is characterized as a persistent process of assistance to students, in order to develop their cognitive and motivational potential that enable them to consciously choose a profession and become engaged with the quality of the formation during the study of it; especially for adolescents: defining the future is not only to define what to do but also to define who he or she will be and at the same time who he or she won't be. (Bohoslavsky, 1976).

Research papers such as "Conceptions of teaching: English language teaching early experiences " (Luis Porta, Maria Cristina Sarasa, 2002) and "Alternatives when choosing a teaching career" (Mereshián, Noemí Rosa y Calatayud, Pilar, Universidad de Córdoba 2008) allow for the exploration of some of the complexities concerning pre-service EFL teaching education and also sets out to help identify what are the most important factors which may come in aid of potential teachers at the moment of choosing the next step in their compulsory education. These articles and studies, although containing some existing and rather obvious wants, have helped us pointing out which are the key points to be taken into account at the

moment of carrying out our research. For instance, the success of finding out whether students to be surveyed were aware of the intricacies of the career of their choosing is one of the constants in the lack of the information contained in this literature. Therefore, it should be carefully mentioned and mandatory upon its discussion in our own approach to this particular issue.

Research Synthesis

Career choice demands great attention in our study. Every student with aspirations to enroll in a university has to face at any given moment with the decision of choosing a road which for them is the most adequate and which will fill their personal interests. However, deciding which degree to study is not always an easy task. There are many aspects that must be taken into account in order for students to choose a correct career path. Some aspects that we have encountered within the literature we reviewed, concerning career choice, are related with career counseling, which is one of the areas aiming towards professional advisory to people facing a career choice. The question: which career should I study? rings so true and frequent that there is no doubt about the necessity of career counseling.

Investigations about this same topic have been done in the central university of Marta Abreu de las Villas (Guerra, 2003), which implement an strategy of professionals' orientation based in the leadership of university as socializing agents fundamentals in the orientation; According

to them, to avoid the emerging of the conflict (disappointment and desertion issues) is a task that must be resolved through adequate orientation. As a result, one of the main causes of desertion during the first year of a career has a very close relationship with the area of career choice.

A decision that brings satisfaction about what we do and brings good contributions to society is perhaps a very difficult one. Some universities demand several tests which may include a physiological exam first to know if the candidate student fits in that a profile and in this way to guarantee that students will be productive in their life, taking advantages of the time and the aptitudes they have. Taking a career as a second option can be perceived as being in detriment of students since a really wrong decision may affect their academic and professional development. Due to this, Students may never feel comfortable in their profession or become known as exemplary professionals. The choice of teaching as a second option is defined from the objective conditions as a space of the possible and incorporated through the habitues, (Bourdieu 1995) according with this, the habit is acquired by the lasting experience of a condition in the social world and means a perception of the position as well that others occupies. At the time to make a decision regarding career paths, students must be really sure about the enormous difference between what they want and what they are apt to study, in order to facilitate a process that can become uncomfortable, if carried out hastily. The election of a teaching career as a second alternative presents many variants. One of them has to do with the fact that the election is done in the context of the personal capabilities in

which the preferred career is the less achievable according with the students' position and condition, (Bourdieu 1995). At that time, students visualize that they do not have the possibilities to afford the career they prefer and decide to take teaching a language as a second option with the hope to adjust with the passing of time.

On the other hand, there is the vocation argument, where the candidate students choose a career because they feel the vocation for it and they will feel satisfied doing what they want to do. Vocation as a rational component is non elective, yet effective and almost sacred in which there is no instrumental interest as the salary and other material advantages becomes in tension with the idea of learned occupation (Tenti Fanfani,2006).

Student profiling in language teaching is perhaps a very obscure and difficult area to study. What is the function of a student profile? A student profile provides information about a student. Some methods to gather information on students profile may include administering career aptitude tests and counseling. Vocational and family issues are often discussed as experimental and defined by personality than other factors. Yet, such issues may deeply affect the way in which a student may see the entire process of career choice and often perceive it as a tampered one. Age and other physiological factors are also determinant however are not obtrusive (Holland, 1993)

Students profiling becomes a widely regarded area in terms of establishing what are the factors that may determine the adequate career or major for an undergraduate or potential freshmen student to get a degree in English language teaching. In order to study a degree students' must be first initiated in the stages of orientation and guidance. Retention as opposed to desertion by students is a significant factor when it comes to establishing the advantages over a very prolonged period of time, such as it is the case of a major. The capacity in which students can be profiled is not solely based on future perspectives but also on grounded options and definitions.

Students profiling helps us enable students capabilities (Luis Porta, 2002). However, it is also implied that these career choices affect deeply the psyche of the student as to guarantee the possible outcomes based on the career or major of their liking. What happens then when a major is not an entire base to build their professional life, as opposed to building over a bigger foundation as it is their likes and dreams? Well, the result becomes painful obvious as we delve deeper into the next area of study.

In regards to **professional development**, career choice is really important in order to succeed not only in the academic field but also in their working life. Therefore, it is not a short process, or simply a test students take as to identify what is the best option for them to follow. There are many instruments that help students to know their abilities and interests but do not have the enough specificity and deepness to assure its accuracy or usefulness, for candidate

students is important to have a more complete orientation in which their aptitudes can be assessed by experts in the area.

The most effective way for every student who decide to study language teaching, should be that they have the desire to do it or they want to study as a vocational career. The vocational interests have been exhaustively examined to reach such results, estimating that an adequate knowledge contributes to predict the career choice and the satisfaction in the practice of the career(Holland,1997). However, studying languages in order to teach the actual setting of the language is part not only of the vocation itself but also from the point of view in which a career is the most suitable for them in terms of an eventual and inevitable variation of their future life in the working field.

The teaching of a language as a career choice must be carried out through the sole base of vocation? Career choice in regards to language teaching, specifically in regards to English Language Teaching, is a matter of denoting a complete and utter reliance on one's own interests and aspirations rather than how to pursue them (Luis Porta, 2002). Some of the limitations that we encountered upon perusing this particular study is that most teachers who are interviewed expressed that language teaching was not entirely their first option. Actually, upon reading all of the articles at our disposal, we stumbled upon the fact that less than the 12% percent of the professionals in education who were interviewed at the time, did not

choose their career based on anything else in mind that the actual economic benefit at long term.

Economic benefits in contrast to other more profitable career choices are also a recurrent matter in all the studies which were used to document our research. By economic benefits we need to consider the fact that this particular profession offers an entirely unique array of circumstances that may help contribute the professional development of an individual in the long or short terms regarding the way in which he or she perceives the cost of living and other usual endeavors from adulthood as a compelling pressure to seek for a career in which time consumption is as little as possible. The significance of career choice in later professional development is more important than the fact that career is chosen with the pursuit of a career in the long term in mind (Marcus Cupani, 2001).

Career choice and professional development sometimes are deemed to go hand in hand, although most of the time are simply a result of a choice which repercussions may haunt students for over a long period of time.

METHODOLOGY

As mentioned in previous chapters, career choice oriented towards education, is a rather important and often difficult task for most people to endeavor. Some of the often encountered difficulties in career choice are deemed to be a result of the deeply underlying difference between the apparent and sometimes misinterpreted personal and vocational success. After all the most important part of career choice for students in university is the desire to develop professionally in a great extent (Rehbein et al, 2009). In this particular case, the students who have enrolled to become professionals in the education field have encountered their own assortment of troubles and difficulties at the moment of choosing which major to study. This segment of our study will explain what are the methods we will use in order to gather and analyze the necessary data to answer how such difficulties have come to be surpassed and a final decision was made by the freshmen students at the Foreign Languages Department of the University of El Salvador.

SETTING

In the case of our study, our research will take place at the Foreign Languages Department at the University of El Salvador. This department is perhaps one of the largest departments in the university not only in terms of physical space, but also in terms of the quantity of students it manages to service. A very large segment of such students' population consists of freshmen and sophomores. There is a restricted assortment of classes that such students may apply,

according to their level of study and the pertaining semester. The authorities of the department are well defined and the faculty has its facilities within the main building.

Sample / participants

The population within the Foreign Languages Department is very large, perhaps one of the largest in the entire university. The population has been known to grow at a very accelerated rate during the last few years in which the Department has been offering the two options which are English language Teaching and Modern Languages. As stated before our research will take place in the confines of the main campus of the University of El Salvador, more specifically at the Foreign Languages Department from the school of arts and sciences. The data will be collected from students who are in currently in their first year, freshmen, and who are active students at the foreign languages department. This segment of the population has been chosen due to the fact that their experience is deeply connected with nature of our research. They are the ones who can recollect in a better way the specific information, necessary to fully understand the problem at hand. We have decide to gather a rather small sample of them in order to be participants in our research. The sample with which we will work consists of 60 students and a buffer of four to five students of the first year from the English language teaching major. We will interview students from the English language teaching major, offered by the department. We have decided to interview a sample population of 60 students in total, in order to have a rather representative tendency in our data. We consider that this particular instrument will allow us to explore in depth the true factors that affected their decision in this respective case.

Instrument

In order to collect the necessary data to answer our research questions. We will make use of a survey protocol consisting of around 20 items which will inquire students regarding the most important aspects in the choice of their major. For instance, one section of the survey will be dedicated towards finding out how aware they are regarding the curriculum and characteristics of this major as well as their alternatives prior making their choice. Another area will help us clarify their intentions at the moment of choosing this major over other possible options. And another section will help us know the student's thoughts towards their professional life.

In order to guarantee the validity and reliability of the instrument we are going to use, we have focused the interview protocol in three areas which are detailed in the previous chapters and describe the overall intention behind this instrument. Areas such as career choice, students' profiling and professional development are deeply embedded in each questions carefully aimed to elicit students' answers as well as possible. As a final notice, the instrument will be composed in Spanish to ease the gathering of the data.

The instrument has gone through multiple revisions and a pilot stage in which four students were interviewed and subsequently the instrument was adjusted to guarantee the adequate flow of answers from the students interviewed; furthermore we are going to record the interviews as a back up for the validity of research.

A sample of the instrument may be found as an annex to this document;

Data gathering procedures

The necessary data will be collected during class hours, especially in those classes in which most students are freshmen. Students will be given the adequate and necessary instructions prior answering the questions from the interview and retrieve the most important information. Data will be analyzed the by means of establishing a pattern within the answers from the participants and a thorough distinction of the observable tendencies within the answers.

Data analysis.

As for the analysis of the data gathered during the recopilation stage of these step, we will have to rely on the procedures necessary to analyze qualitative data rather than quantitative. The use of an interview protocol demands that the resulting data gathered during the last stage to be carefully analyzed through means of codifying the existing answers, which means that the most common answers will be placed according to the frequency in which they were made, even though the phrasing may be rather different. We will need to establish a tendency on the answers and after that we will need to establish whether or not those same tendencies shed the expected light onto the topic at hand.

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