

Open University Degree Program in Language Teaching

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Our paper today is a progress report on a project for designing an Open University Degree Program in Language Teaching. This project has been underway at the Acatlán campus of the National University (UNAM) for the past 2½ years. We hope that it will be opened initially in the areas of English, French, German, Italian and Spanish as a Foreign Language, and then later extended to other languages.

It is hardly necessary to emphasize the increasing importance of foreign languages in our present-day world. On the one hand, as the world has grown smaller in a sense, people need to speak languages in common in order to communicate with each other. On the other hand, the greater appreciation of ethnic and cultural diversity in our world has sparked serious interest in the maintenance of the languages of every cultural group. Consequently, language teaching has taken on considerable importance, and with it, the matter of teacher training in this field. Even more, there is a concern for training the trainers.

To give an example, the UNAM cannot keep up with the demand for foreign-language courses. The main campus and five branch campuses of this university handle a total of over 20,000 foreign-language students in any given semester, and many more potential language students are unable to enroll. There are simply not enough qualified teachers at the university level for so many students. By qualified, we refer to teachers who have (1) a good command of the language, and (2) a sound theoretical-methodological basis for formal classroom teaching.

Traditionally, these teaching positions have been filled by graduates in the area of literature, English, French, Italian, and German. The problem is that there are too few such graduates and, aside from their

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foreign-language preparation, they are trained as specialists in literature and not in language teaching.

As a result, most of the foreign-language teachers have come from many different educational backgrounds and run the gamut from no training in foreign-language teaching to extensive coursework and occasionally even a university degree in the field.

Our experience in the UNAM is that in general teachers work to improve their foreign-language skills and are particularly eager to keep up-to-date in their field. The number of people attending events such as this one is a clear indicator of that.

While several new options have been created to help train foreign-language teachers, they are still limited. Teacher-training courses are offered within the UNAM at the CELE and at the FES-Cuautitlán. Other public and private universities, and organizations such as the Instituto Anglo-Mexicano de Cultura, have well-respected training courses. University-level degree programs have also been started in the past 10 or 15 years in several cities in Mexico. The ENEP Acatlán has offered a degree in the teaching of English since 1985. At the graduate level, the CELE has a Master's in Applied Linguistics which covers language teaching as well as other areas.

Even so, the problem of providing foreign-language teachers with a viable option for learning this profession and receiving a recognized university degree is a long way from being solved. Some of the main problems are:

1. Most existing degree programs focus on training English language teachers--and those who teach other languages have very limited opportunities.
2. Some teacher training courses are of short duration, and are focused on teaching practical techniques, often to the exclusion of the theoretical bases underlying classroom activities. These courses are often costly. In the best of cases, they don't award the trainee a university degree, now increasingly a requirement in public and private schools at secondary and university levels.

As part of our preliminary work in developing this program, we checked records in the language centers of the UNAM and several other universities. We found that in the UNAM slightly less than half of the foreign-language

teachers had an undergraduate or postgraduate degree, and of these only a third were in the area of foreign languages. Findings were similar in other universities, and the situation was more serious in the CCHs, where only about a quarter of the teachers had any degree at all.

3. Those teachers who want to do university studies in the area are often unable to enroll in a traditional full-time on-campus college program because of their job or family commitments or because they live far away from universities offering degree programs.

4. Many of these same reasons are also valid in the case of people who are not teachers at present but would like to be.

What does this mean in terms of our field? Often it means that teachers are not able to advance professionally within the institution. In the UNAM teachers without a university degree are not able to fill full-time professorships nor obtain the concomitant benefits or job security. No matter how many courses they take or workshops they participate in, no matter how excellent their work is in the classroom, they are locked into a low-level position. This can be demotivating.

Finally, the Rector of the UNAM, recognizing the vital importance of offering more and more flexible options to meet the needs of people living in our increasingly complex world, issued a directive that all schools in the university were to explore ways to adapt their programs to open-system education.

All of this led to the current project to design a degree program in language teaching in the open system of the university at the Acatlán campus of the UNAM. The project was planned in three major stages (see Table 1). The most extensive work for our committee to date has involved the first point, presenting a proposal for such a program in the open university system. This is because the programs in the open-university system have special characteristics, and both academic personnel and students function differently from their traditional roles. For one thing, learning groups work both on-campus and off-campus. But perhaps the most significant difference is that independent study is basic, and consequently study materials assume great importance. The advantages of this type of system are numerous, the most important being that its flexible nature permits it to offer education to a broader sector of the population.

TABLE 1: PROJECT STAGES

1. *Pedagogical Proposal In Accordance With Open University System (SUA) Norms*

- 1.1 General Objectives of the Program
 - 1.1.1 Graduates
 - 1.1.2 Prospective students
 - 1.1.3 Career opportunities and job market
- 1.2 Program Design
 - 1.2.1 Description of areas
 - 1.2.1.1 Language system and use
 - 1.2.1.2 Pedagogical training
 - 1.2.1.3 Research methodology
 - 1.2.1.4 Spanish
 - 1.2.1.5 Specialization (Language)
 - 1.2.1.6 Electives
 - 1.2.2 Course of study
 - 1.2.2.1 Curriculum design
 - 1.2.2.2 Credits
 - 1.2.2.3 General requirements and course prerequisites
- 1.3 Areas: Objectives, Content Outline and Bibliography
- 1.4 Courses: Objectives, Content Outline and Bibliography
- 1.5 Work Modes and General Criteria for Evaluation of Learning
- 1.6 Admission, Registration and Degree Requirements, Course Prerequisites

2. *Development Of Instructional And Study Materials For Each Area*

- 2.1 Guidelines for Materials
- 2.2 Study Guides
- 2.3 Course Outlines
- 2.4 Anthologies

3. *Definition Of Requirements Of Academic Personnel*

The following is a brief discussion of the points which have been defined to date.

The general objectives for the Degree in Language Teaching, Open University System, UNAM - Acatlán Campus, are:

- To benefit the UNAM and other institutions (high school and university levels) in Mexico by making specialized professional formation for language teachers available and thus adding to the number of professionals with university degrees in our field.
- To create the conditions for language teachers and others to complete a degree program in the field by offering a systematic, orderly and reasonable option for doing so.
- To relate the content of the B.A. curriculum (this project) to the daily reality and needs of teachers in the schools where they are working.

The prospective student in this type of program is one who:

- takes responsibility for his/her own learning
- has good (independent) study habits
- can tie together theory and practice
- has a good command of the language s/he has chosen to teach
- shows interest in learning more about the chosen language
- likes teaching (has a vocation for teaching)
- communicates well with other people
- has a feeling for the problems involved in learning an L2 and will try to master the practices which best facilitate this process

- is creative and has a critical attitude when looking at different alternatives and approaches for solving problems which involve research applied to foreign-language teaching.

The general admissions requirements to register in this program are:

- high school diploma (diploma de preparatoria)
- fulfillment of the language requirement in chosen specialization (Those with a certificate awarded by the UNAM-CTIE (Comisión Técnica de Idiomas Extranjeros) or a diploma from either the CELE or the FES-Cuautitlán Teacher-Training Course are exempt from this requirement.)
- passing grade on the admission exam to UNAM

The graduate of this program would be a career teacher with a command of his/her chosen language (specialization) in many aspects, i.e., semantic, linguistic, cultural, etc. S/he would be able to compare the chosen language of his/her specialization to Spanish. S/he would have a psycholinguistic, psychopedagogical and methodological knowledge about language teaching and learning which permits him/her to develop both the teaching and research elements in the field of his/her specialization.

We have put together an eight-semester program and divided it into the following six key areas. Five are common-core areas, and one is called "specialization", varying according to the language selected: English, French, German, Italian or Spanish for Foreigners.

For each of these areas, we have defined the general objectives, the basic content outline, the formative tasks, and justified its importance within the whole program. The courses have been related both vertically, that is, with respect to the other areas, and horizontally, with respect to the series of courses in the same area.

1. Language system and use

This area includes courses in general linguistics at the introductory level, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and discourse analysis. The purpose of these courses is to look at the structure of language systems in general, at the universal properties of human language, from phonetics and

phonology, morphosyntax, lexicology, word formation, and semantics through discourse analysis.

This area will provide the basis for in-depth study of the specific language selected, and will enable the student to read and analyze bibliography about linguistics, make hypotheses, and arrive at conclusions applicable to his/her teaching situation.

2. Pedagogical training

This area begins with general, more theoretical courses covering education, pedagogy, learning theory and methodology, including its history and development in our field, and then moves to more specific and practical courses focusing on teaching different aspects of the language, different types of discourse activities, and the skill areas. Courses also include evaluation and testing, classroom observation, teaching assistantship, micro-teaching, and practice teaching under supervision.

More than a knowledge of classroom methods, the goal of this area is to build habits, such as creating a positive classroom atmosphere, handling the various concerns of classroom management, planning and decision-making in terms of specific teaching aims.

3. Research methodology

Courses in this area include basic research techniques and research in language teaching. Practical application will involve course design and materials preparation, and finally senior seminars are included to help students set up independent research leading to a thesis or other project approved for satisfying graduation requirements.

Besides being qualified teachers, graduates will be able to design courses and prepare materials on a large or small scale, and to carry out formal research should the opportunity arise. More likely they will be able to do some informal research in the classroom on foreign-language learning. We are looking not so much for full-time researchers, but for teachers with a researcher's mentality, that is, someone who constantly reflects on, questions and analyses his/her own teaching experience, with a view to a solving problems and making improvements, a mentality so necessary to professional advancement.

4. Spanish

This area will include three courses: first, morphosyntax of present-day Spanish, second, oral and written expression in Spanish, and lastly, 20th century Spanish-American narrative. No matter what language is chosen for "specialization", it is important for future teachers to have a basic understanding of the structure of Spanish to use as a point of reference, since their students are going to be Spanish speakers. The second course is included because, as students, as university graduates, and as future professionals, teachers are expected to have an excellent command of both written and spoken Spanish. The course in literature is offered to provide general cultural background and, again, will serve as a point of comparison when looking at the literature in the specific language selected.

5. Specialization

The courses in this area are not for learning the language, but for learning about the language in order to be able to teach it and about the culture which is both implicit and explicit in it. There are courses on the structure and use of the particular language, covering phonetics, phonology, morphology, word formation and lexicology, syntax, and stylistics.

Another block of courses covers the contemporary culture and civilization of the places where the language is spoken, and includes the art, literature, history, geography, socio-political systems, traditions and customs, and other features of these cultures.

6. Electives

At least two electives will be included, which the students may select from a series of choices. These courses are not necessarily related to each other, but represent different specific areas or issues of interest in which the students can broaden their knowledge of a particular subject and propose solutions to problems based on this knowledge.

To receive a degree, the requirements are:

- 100% credits covered
- reading comprehension requirement in a language other than native language or chosen language specialization fulfilled

- social service completed
- completion of one degree option (thesis, etc.)

Some of the career opportunities contemplated for graduates are as a teacher and/or researcher at the high school or university level in either public or private schools, or in businesses that need to train personnel in a foreign language.

At this time we have completed the project through stage 1.3 (Areas: objectives, content outline and bibliography), and the objectives, content outline and bibliography (1.4) for the courses in the first two semesters have been written up. Work modes and general criteria for evaluation of learning (1.5) must still be defined. Admission, registration and degree requirements and course prerequisites (1.6) have been completed.

The second phase of the project, the development of instructional and study materials for each area, will be done by specialists in the field. We have set up guidelines for the development of these materials and as soon as these are approved, we will publish a call for those who would like to work on developing materials (study guides, course outlines, anthologies) for each of the courses. While chosen authors are writing materials for the first two semesters to be submitted to the University Boards for the approval of the program, work will continue on the course objectives, content outlines and bibliography (1.4) for the remaining semesters. Calls will be published for the development of materials for these later semesters.²

² Anyone interested in writing course materials or in eventually enrolling in the program may call 623-1511 (Coordinación del Centro de Idiomas Extranjeros, UNAM-ENEP Acatlán) for further information.