

Quality of Academic Work, College Life, and Work Environment in a Public State University in Mexico, from the Teacher's Perception

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Abstract

This study has the objective to describe academic work quality and work environment of Autonomous University of Baja California South, in Mexico, from the teacher's perspective. We used a quantitative, non-experimental, cross-sectional, descriptive method (Hernández, Fernández, & Baptista, 2014). We applied, electronically, a structured survey based on the change instruments and organizational environment designed by Kraut (1996). The analysis categories were academic work, work environment, college life, and decision making in the institution. The sample was non-probabilistic, of opportunity, obtaining the participation of 107 teachers of many campus located in the cities of La Paz, Cabo San Lucas, Loreto, Ciudad Insurgentes, and Guerrero Negro. The data analysis technique was descriptive, and processed in an electronic system corresponding to year 2013. The results showed a high commitment of teachers to values and principles of the Institutions (94.4%), strengthening their identity and belonging to the Institution.

Keywords

Teacher's Satisfaction, Education Quality, Academic Work, Work Environment, Evaluation, Accreditation

1. Introduction

Teachers' satisfaction has been approached from the international context with empirical research through the instruments such as surveys with sample frames from twenty developed and growing countries, like the study coordinated from Germany, by Teichler (2009), in which the analysis of academic profession was

promoted with an instrument that contains the main topics and variables of international compatibility considered by each participating country. On the other hand, [Huang \(2009\)](#), regarding teachers' internationalization in Institutes, proposes a balance between teaching and research activities and the valuation of public policies in higher education for teachers' mobility in Japan. [Cummings and Bain \(2012\)](#), in their analysis, think that the interest in the satisfaction of academic profession and professional practice has decreased and this has generated low academic productivity from teachers in the United States; they also maintain that the academic status of a growing teachers portion in this country has become unstable, being an obstacle for the academic activities aimed to productivity, and that financing in national research systems is changing into more dependence from business financing in academic research. The analysis made by [Wolhuter, Higgs, Higgs, & Ntshoe \(2012\)](#), maintains that teachers have an unbalanced load regarding attention to students and in research activities, which causes a low productivity in the academic profession in South Africa, pointing out that teachers in universities are in retirement age and need to be renewed, for which presents a challenge in teachers' training that promotes productivity in the country's research. [Balbachevsky \(2016\)](#) analyzes the changes that have happened in academic profession in the different areas of higher education in Brazil and the evolution in the training of post graduate teachers between 1977 and 2000; he mentions that public universities propose to improve education public policies when promoting academic training and scientific productivity in the country, and that the private sector absorbs a big portion of professionals in higher education. Regarding Mexico, [Galaz \(2012\)](#) maintains that academic profession is a subordinated profession when approving academic programs and has little participation in education and institutional policies.

Under the aforementioned context, we present the results of an empirical study, with perception of the participants regarding satisfaction of the activities carried out by Autonomous University of Baja California South (UABCS), and supported by federal resources provided by the Ministry of Public Education (SEP) in Mexico, in collaboration with the academic network of two higher education institutions in Mexico.

The study has the purpose of describing the academic work quality and work environment of Autonomous University of Baja California South, in Mexico, from the teacher's perspective, in 2013. In this way, it contributes to the national goal of *Mexico with Quality Education*, established by the National Development Plan 2013-2018 ([DOF, 2013](#)); and also to one of the policies of Autonomous University of Baja California South regarding university development, which is the full development of human resources, through the promotion and permanent support, paying attention to the academic, administrative, and directive staff development towards the achievement of competences that assure a performance according to the university requirements, as well as the improvement of their life quality in a correct work environment ([UABCS, 2011](#)).

The academic profession is a key profession for higher education; academics carry out teaching, research, extension, and liaison activities that form the substantial functions of higher education institutions and they are the ones who determine, in an important proportion, the quality of services provided. These are the ones that generate knowledge and technology that enriches human lives, through their work they prepare new professionals that move through the education institutions (Galaz, Gil, Padilla, Sevilla, Arcos, & Martínez, 2012), for which the satisfaction analysis of their activities is deemed relevant.

Autonomous University of Baja California South (UABCS) has a great interest in knowing the perception of the university community in many academic aspects and its work environment, in addition to paying attention to the institutional programs of planning and development (UABCS, 2011), in a way they can contribute to the implementation of general policies, strategic axis, and institutional action lines that promote and materialize the design and implementation of programs that improve academic work and organizational environment. In this sense, the analysis constitutes a necessary tool in order to have information that allows the valuing academic tasks carried out by the Institution teachers, valuing correct answers, recognizing strengths, indentifying weaknesses or opportunity areas, and defining the actions required in order to improve; in addition to monitoring decision making for the implementation of policies, strategic axis, and institutional action lines contemplated in its planning institutional programs, and at the same time contributing to solve the need for internal and external information of the university, processes of accreditation of education programs, and certification of management and lab processes; it also allows it to be a reflection instrument for the university community regarding their acting in institutional behavior, and, especially, to pay attention to the recommendations of the accreditation organizations and the evaluation of Inter-institutional Evaluation Committees of Higher Education (CIEES).

Academic profession in Mexico has a great influence in teachers' satisfaction, nonetheless, restrictions of the public policy in higher education affect the college and individual performance of teachers, since economic incentives and work stability are restricted in higher education institutions, and, for such motive, it is very important to approach topics such as those set out in this study.

Even though there have been comparison studies in developed and growing countries regarding teaching, research, management, and scientific innovation, the results obtained entail more questions regarding academic practice and teachers' satisfaction in the different national and international contexts.

Based on the aforementioned, the study parts from the question what is the perception regarding academic work quality and work environment that the teachers' community have in Autonomous University of Baja California South?

2. Teachers' Satisfaction as Useful Tools in Continuous Improvement Processes in Higher Education Institutions

In the last two decades, the area of Higher Education in the United States en the

countries in the European Union has suffered changes, among others, an increase in the number of educative institutions, even though there is a growth in the candidates to enroll in the institutions the reality reflects rates of lower applications. The aforementioned has intensified the processes of competence among organizations that provide education services, generating, as consequence, a specialized and highly competitive market, where public financing becomes scarce and, thus, the idea of the money's value as search criteria is strengthened, in which efficacy and quality is valued from the perspective of such organizations, but specially from their users or internal and external clients' view, a not very developed topic (Alves & Raposo, 2006). In this scenario, the reflection of incorporating measurement strategies and mechanisms began, with orientation to the market, in search of competitive advantages, positioning, and image. Among the studies, evaluation efforts regarding the satisfaction evaluation of Higher Education Institutions start, specifically the teacher as one of their main actors (Alves & Raposo, 2006).

Facing the changes every day in the education environment, the Higher Education Institutions began the adaptation to increase quality of the service they offer, with centered actions, most of them, in the evolution of education paradigms, certifications, and re-certifications of ISO regulations, as well as the many accreditation processes according to the discipline to which they belong; processes in which the main actor is the university teacher (Cárdenas, Méndez, & González, 2014).

The perception studies are constituted as valuable tools to evaluate from the organizations' actors, clients, and suppliers, allowing the observation of the satisfaction or dissatisfaction levels that cause many factors. Due to its results, they are used in development processes of continuous improvement. Considering that human resources are the core of Higher Education Institutions, it is relevant to consider the perception results of the teachers. The aspects that facilitate the good performance of teachers are institutional values, such as communication, involvement with the company and their objectives, beliefs, and expectations (Linares, Ochoa, & Ochoa, 2013).

3. Repercussions of the Work Satisfaction or Dissatisfaction and Organizational Environment in the Quality of Life of Teachers in Higher Education Institutions in Mexico

The factors that influence work satisfaction of the university teacher are the well established structures for communication, inducement and involvement practices, while the elements that limit it are the communication competences, as well as physical and administrative dispositions, the stressing in performance evaluation control, and the absence of recognition, an aspect that always comes up in studies where the satisfaction levels in economic and social aspects are measured. In this environment, the satisfaction level is measured based on economic awards. The repercussions that the teachers' satisfaction can have in their

performance can be teaching quality and students' learning (Linares et al., 2013).

Five main factors of teachers' satisfaction and dissatisfaction are teacher profession, personal relationships, teacher-coworker relationship, and teacher-administrative staff relationship in the academic unit where they carry out their activities, among others. One of their main satisfactions is when there is an affective relationship with their students, transforming their work into something pleasant instead of a physical and emotional load, since positive experiences in the exercise of the profession lead to a personal growth and to improve teaching quality and the students' learning, increasing their commitment to the education institution and its wellbeing (Linares & Gutiérrez, 2010). Negative experiences such as the low results of students lead to a personal and professional dissatisfaction, which frequently cause exhaustion in the teacher and, in some cases, such dissatisfaction can become discomfort. Word satisfaction of teachers influences academic work productivity and quality: thus, when not having satisfactory results, teachers may consider the possibility of a work change to such an extent that they can think about retiring from the exercise of teaching and their continuity in the education institution (Linares & Gutiérrez, 2010).

The evaluation methodology of the teachers' perception has been applied to know improvement challenges and opportunities regarding the relevant aspects for institutions and the moment they live, for example, infrastructure, education model, management offices services, staff treatment, etc. (Jiménez, Terriquez, & Robles, 2011). Nonetheless, there also has been research that, based on these macro elements, delve into more important aspects that, in recent times, have had more attention such as work stress, hiring policies, teachers' life quality, incentives system (Verdugo, Guzmán, Moy, Meda, & González, 2008; Rodríguez, 2013), academic work, institutions, and public policies (Galaz et al., 2012), service, and effects that have their satisfaction in work and personal performance (Linares et al., 2013), among others.

The affectations in health derived from the teachers' dissatisfaction of academic work and work environment are observed in the results of many studies that match in an increase on the prevalence of the *burnout* syndrome in IES teachers, known as the teaching sickness and progressive emotional exhaustion that can be expressed as apathy and defensive confrontation strategies, which can cause chronic stress, as well as somatic and psychological problems that can significantly damage professional execution in the relations with students and teaching quality (García, 1996; Guerrero & Rubio, 2005; Marrau, 2004). There has always been dissatisfaction with the work role and the negative and uncontrollable changes in the work pressure, associated to depression somatic symptoms, anxiety, and insomnia (Matud, García, & Matud, 2002).

Regarding the relation between scores obtained by university teachers in the evaluation of their performance with the level of stress perceived and the presence of indicators of the *burnout* syndrome, there were significant relations with aspects such as institutional disorganization, supervision style, and organization

conditions that affect the teachers' development, and, thus, produce stress (Cárdenas et al., 2014).

The perception studies to determine IES teachers' life quality in Mexico establish that, regardless of gender, salary, or work status of university teachers, the main factor that modifies the most quantity of areas that comprise life quality is health, suffering from illness and perceiving its intensity as moderate or serious correlates with the factors of relations with their coworkers, social relations and personality, work satisfaction, and health (Verdugo et al., 2008). An thus, it is observed that the workday has been extended by having to cover a series of requirements, without which is impossible to participate in evaluation processes of the federal programs mentioned (performance scholarship, SNI and PRODEP); there has been an increase in the teachers' administrative load, reducing the effective time dedicated to activities linked to teaching-research-liaison-extension; causing, in the teachers' population, stress, sleep disorders, dysphonia, as the most relevant (Sánchez & Martínez, 2014).

According to these examples, the following was determined as the study's objective.

4. Objective of the Study

The study has as objective to describe the perception of academic work, college life, work environment, work conditions, and pertinence of teachers in a way for the results to contribute to the improvement of evaluation and accreditation processes of Autonomous University of Baja California South from an analysis context with national and international records, and, particularly, with UABCS, located in a growing country such as Mexico.

5. Method

The methodology design of the study was quantitative, non-experimental, cross-sectional, and descriptive (Hernández, Fernández, & Baptista, 2014). We analyzed different experiences in the national and international research context regarding teachers' satisfaction and academic profession with the performance of teachers in teaching, research, liaison, and management, which is why this study is delimited to a case of UABCS in Mexico. In order to know the perception of UABCS teachers, a structured survey was applied electronically, with multiple option questions that included the answers: totally agree, agree, neutral, totally disagree, disagree, I do not know, and does not apply. The survey is based on the instruments of change and organizational environment designed by Kraut (1996). The analysis categories were academic work in the institution, college life and decision making, work environment in the institution, work conditions, along with identity and belonging to the institution. An invitation to answer the survey was extended to the teachers' population in the Autonomous University of Baja California South (UABCS) campuses, obtaining a sample of 107 teachers in the many campuses: La Paz, Cabo San Lucas, Guerrero Negro,

Loreto, and Ciudad Insurgentes. For the analysis of these results, a descriptive statistics technique was used and the data was processed in an electronic system. The study presents percentages of the teachers' opinions and these correspond to year 2013.

6. Results

Regarding the teachers that provides answers about the topic, 56.1% was of masculine gender and 43.9% was of feminine gender; 57% had postgraduate studies (38.8% had a master, 14% had a doctorate, 4.7% post-doctorate); 50.5% were working in the area of Social Sciences and Humanities, 31.8% of Sea Sciences, and 17.8% of Agriculture Sciences. We had de participation of many campuses, 72.9% from La Paz, 13.1% from Cabo San Lucas, 7.5% from Guerrero Negro, 3.7% from Loreto, and 2.8% from Ciudad Insurgentes. 15% had the national recognition of teachers' profile for the Development of Professional Teachers Program, of higher education (PRODEP, formerly PROMEP), and 17.8% had the distinction of the National System of Researchers (SNI). 21.5% had a full time contract, 74.8% were part time teachers, and 3.7% just had half the workday. The category of teachers' contracts was: 40.2% were adjunct teachers, 22.4% were definitive, 7.5% were doing internships, 24.3% were contracted for a determined time, and 5.6% had the category of substitute teacher. The ages of all participants ranged from 24 to 54 years old; most of them (23.4%) were in the range from 34 to 38 years old.

Regarding the *academic work in the institution*, when arranging the answers, the highest percentage was focused in the category of totally agree and agree, specifically in the affirmation "I am satisfied with the classes I teach and, in general, I am satisfied with my work as a teacher (with 95.3% each as part of the addition)". It is important to observe the Neutral answer, since the percentage is 37.4% regarding the affirmations about the psychological counsel services has contributed to the academic improvement of the students, and 30.8% regarding the psychological assistance service provided that has supported the teachers' work (see **Table 1**).

Regarding the aspects related to college life and decision making, in the addition of the answers "totally agree" and "agree", most of them (49.5%) think that many college academic bodies have assumed an important role in academic life of my academic unit, and are satisfied with their participation in the academic body to which they belong (43%). There is low satisfaction (the addition of answers "totally disagree" and "disagree") in the level of participation in the elaboration of the Comprehensive Program of Institutional Strengthening (PIFI) (30.9%) and with the participation of teachers in decision making associated to their work (35.5%) (see **Table 2**).

As for the opinions regarding affirmations relative to aspects related to work environment of the Institution, the total of answers "totally agree" and "agree" had its highest percentage in the following affirmations: 72.9% considers that the

Table 1. Academic work in the institution. Teachers' perception. Year 2013.

AcademicWork	Answers scale (percentage)					
	Totallyagree	Agree	Neutral	Totallydisagree	Disagree	I don't know/does not apply
Teachers regularly participate in liaison, culture diffusion, and university extension programs	29.0	29.0	21.5	3.7	9.3	7.5
Teachers regularly participate in mobility and academic Exchange programs	6.5	23.4	28.0	6.5	16.8	18.7
Teachers actively promote mobility and student academic exchange	19.6	29.9	25.2	4.7	10.3	10.3
Teachers are good value models that we want to pass on to students	38.3	28.0	22.4	3.7	6.5	0.9
I am satisfied with the classes I teach	65.4	29.9	4.7	0.0	0.0	0.0
I am satisfied with the research activities I carry out	29.0	35.5	18.7	1.0	1.9	13.1
Continuous education programs are working correctly	23.4	31.8	21.5	5.6	9.3	8.4
The psychological assistance service provided has supported my teachers' work	11.2	17.8	30.8	5.6	7.5	27.1
The psychological assistance service has contributed to improve the academic development of my students	14.0	15.0	37.4	4.7	4.7	24.3
Tutoring has helped improve the students' academic development	15.9	25.2	28.0	8.4	6.5	15.9
I use information and communication technologies as support for my teachers' work	54.2	37.4	4.7	0.9	1.9	0.9
I consider that graduates of this academic unit are well prepared	24.3	53.3	10.3	2.8	8.4	0.9
In general, I am satisfied with my work as an academic	57.9	37.4	4.7	0.0	0.0	0.0

work environment in which I perform is good, 66.3% in There is an academic community preoccupied for the students' training, and 65.4% in My institution recognizes teachers' work correctly; even though we can observe a 38.3% in the affirmation "Academic considerations have more weight than administrative aspects, and 33.6% in that the Transparency Agreement has improved trust, communication, and work environment in the institution" (see **Table 3**).

7. Conclusion

The elaboration and analysis of the data obtained presented in this year allow to observe the institutional reality based on the perception that teachers have regarding aspects associated to academic work, college life, work environment, work conditions, and belonging to Autonomous University of Baja California South (UABCS). Considering the addition of answers is observed in most of the affirmation percentages answered by the teachers regarding the institutional indicators analyzed in year 2013.

Regarding academic work in the institution, most of the teachers are satisfied with their academic work, particularly with the classes they teach, existing the

Table 2. College life and decision making. Teachers' perception. Year 2013.

College life and decision making	Answers scale (percentage)					
	Totally agree	Agree	Neutral	Totally disagree	Disagree	I don't know/does not apply
Many college academic bodies has assumed an important role in the academic life of my academic unit	15.9	33.6	21.5	11.2	8.4	9.3
The teachers have a significant college life (committees, decision making, etc.)	15.0	23.4	22.4	13.1	17.8	8.4
I significantly participated in the elaboration of the Comprehensive Program of Institutional Strengthening (PIFI)	5.6	8.4	24.3	22.4	13.1	26.2
I am satisfied with the participation of teachers in decision making associated to our teachers' work	13.1	19.6	31.8	14.0	14.0	7.5
I am satisfied with my participation in the academic body to which I belong	18.7	24.3	20.6	7.5	4.7	24.3
The Area Technical Council of my academic unit regularly meets	16.8	21.5	29.9	7.5	2.8	21.5
The decisions made by the Area Technical Council of my academic unit are the result of a proposal discussion	17.8	19.6	31.8	5.6	5.6	19.6
I influence decisions made in my academic unit	11.2	24.3	29.0	15.0	7.5	13.1
The decisions made by the University General Council are the result of a proposals discussion	10.3	28.0	29.0	10.3	4.7	17.8
I influence the decisions made in the institution	7.5	16.8	30.8	18.7	8.4	17.8

lowest participation of teachers in mobility programs and academic exchange. The most important thing for teachers is to teach their classes; and they are partially satisfied with their academic work, adapting to the education model for the students' training.

As for college life and decision making, teachers mentioned that college academic bodies have assumed an important role in the academic life of the academic unit, are satisfied with their participation in the academic body, and are dissatisfied with their participation in decision making associated to their teachers' work. Teachers consider that college academic participation influenced their satisfaction over their teachers' activities and academic productivity, underlining participation in work meetings and specialization of different disciplines, and their discussions of academic content in academic training.

Regarding work environment, the teachers consider that the work environment in which they perform is good; they stand out the importance that teaching has in teachers' professional training and the influence of preoccupations that affect teachers the most is the perception they have regarding the teachers' ability to transmit their knowledge in different academic spaces.

Based on these findings, we propose to establish policies, strategies, and actions focused on improving academic work conditions and work environment, and to strengthen the aspects related to college life of the institution, as well as to

Table 3. Work environment in the institution. Teachers' perception. Year 2013.

Work environment	Answers scale (percentage)					
	Totally agree	Agree	Neutral	Totally disagree	Disagree	I don't know/does not apply
My institution recognizes teachers' work correctly	22.4	43.0	13.1	7.5	12.1	1.9
There is an academic community preoccupied for promoting research activities	17.8	37.4	16.8	9.3	11.2	7.5
There is an academic community preoccupied for promoting liaison activities	15.9	29.0	25.2	11.2	10.3	8.4
In Autonomous University of Baja California South(UABCS), ideas are discussed openly and freely	20.6	32.7	25.2	10.3	9.3	1.9
There is an academic community preoccupied for the students' training	28.0	38.3	19.6	6.5	5.6	1.9
The internal calls for support to research projects have strengthened the activities in this field inside UABCS	13.1	29.0	25.2	11.2	8.4	13.1
In UABCS, there is a high collaboration sense among their teachers	15.0	22.4	29.0	17.8	15.0	0.9
In UABCS, people are the most important thing	26.2	26.2	23.4	14.0	9.3	0.9
The teachers' state of mind is good	18.7	40.2	22.4	8.4	10.3	0.0
I consider that the work environment in which I perform is good	29.9	43.0	15.9	6.5	4.7	0.0
Academic considerations have more weight than administrative aspects	13.1	18.7	38.3	14.0	14.0	1.9
The Transparency Agreement has improved trust, communication, and work environment of the institution	15.9	17.8	33.6	15.0	8.4	9.3
I know the current stipulations, rules, and laws of the University	18.7	41.1	21.5	3.7	8.4	6.5

make studies every six-month period in order to know the evolution of teachers' satisfaction in academic performance, scientific productivity, innovation, liaison, and projects management with national and international networks.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests related with this investigation, the authorship and/or the publication of this paper.

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