

Psychology in Mexico

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THE FIRST formal psychology course taught in Mexico was in 1896 at Mexico's National University; today, National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM in Spanish). The modern psychology from Europe and the US in the late 19th century were the primary influences of Mexican psychology, as well as psychoanalysis and both clinical and experimental psychologists. Structuralism and functionalism also were fundamental in the early development of psychology in Mexico.

Mexican psychology has been influenced by experimentation, inductive theory, psychological testing and statistical methods (Sánchez-Sosa, 2004).

In the early 1960s the College of Psychology was divided between the two main general approaches; psychodynamic and experimental. Finally, the College separated from its original Faculty and became the Faculty of Psychology in 1973.

Psychology is studied more by females than males. Some common characteristics in people studying this major are being sensitive, empathetic, and wanting to help others. This is the professional profile of psychologists.

At UNAM, psychology is the second most sought-after major after medicine, so it is popular. But it is not recognised as a profession that can make changes in society. Few people know psychology is a science and if they hear this, they might refute the idea. Unfortunately psychology is only seen as clinical psychology, if you are not in the ambit, you might never know there are several other areas to study in psychology.

It is estimated that half of the working psychologists do so in the clinical or health field. About 10 to 15 per cent work in industrial fields and another 10 to 15 per cent work in school settings. The rest of them

work as academics and researchers in universities. Approximately 95 per cent of Mexico's psychologists practice in urban areas. And it is important to stress that the salaries for psychologists in the public sector are much lower than those of other professionals.

In order to study psychology all one needs is a Secondary Degree (*Certificado de Bachillerato*). Then one has to do an exam for being accepted either in a public or private university to study psychology exclusively.

After four or five years attending classes, working in laboratories and doing external practices, students have to do social service. Once they have completed it they can choose whether they make a thesis, a supervised practicum at an external training site, or a general exam in order to get their degree.

The first three years, in a common professional licensing degree, are dedicated to teaching subjects involving the biological bases of behaviour, perception, motivation, cognitive processes, emotion, learning, motivation, sensation, research methodology, statistics, test construction and theories and systems of psychology. The last year(s) students choose and take subjects concerning their area of interest. The typical class size at many public universities is around 45 students; class size decreases as the students move on in their career and there are other formats like seminars.

Once students receive their degree and professional diploma, they have to register at an office for the regulation of professions in order to work legally as a psychologist, getting a *Cedula Profesional*. This license can be revoked in case of improper or illegal professional conduct.

The most prestigious public universities training psychologists include UNAM, IPN and state universities of Baja California, Guadalajara, Nuevo León, Sonora Veracruz

and Yucatán. Prominent private universities include Anáhuac, Iberoamericana and del Valle de México. Despite these universities, UNAM continues to hold the best resources (like laboratories, books, and journals) and most prominent researchers in Mexico.

Approximately half of psychologists who decide to continue studying for a graduate degree decide to do so abroad, especially in Europe and the US. The rest stay at Mexico's universities and get their Master's or Doctoral degrees. Another intermediate title is called specialty or specialisation diploma; it doesn't demand the student to have a Master's degree.

I do not know if our degrees are different from the UK ones. Here in México, UNAM has the most recent curriculum (2008). We study four semesters of general psychology. We learn history, philosophy of psychology, lots of social psychology, clinical psychology, a little cognition and experimental analysis of behaviour. From then on we have to choose an area, but we can inscribe in subjects from other areas. So we have the liberty of choosing our own subjects for the other four semesters. We finish our degree in four years. Then we can choose whether we specialise or not; the specialisation lasts one more year.

Once psychologists get their *Cedula Profesional*, they can work anywhere they are needed: government offices, educational agencies, IMSS (Mexican Institute of Health Insurance), INEE (National Institute for Educative Evaluation), SEP (Secretary of Public Education), particular companies, etc.

In the late 1960s, psychology was dominated by the psychodynamic model. After that, the orthodox model shifted to a Frommian view. In the 1970s, experimental psychology rose with strength among the psychological community and animal research began along with more statistical methods. More recently, applied psychology has turned to cognitive-behavioural interventions. In educative psychology, the Piagetian approach still prevails, while organisational psychologists have been more

influenced by the business community rather than the psychological one.

The status of Mexican psychologists is lower than some other professionals related to the social or health field. In the health sector physicians have higher status and are better paid, but psychologists are starting to being respected as professionals dealing with health problems and their role is now differentiated from the physicians'.

Psychologists who work in schools deal with the childrens' learning difficulties, but the success in areas like curricula improvement and increasing the teaching quality are rather modest. Organisational psychologists mainly work selecting personnel or doing job training. Competition for workstations is tight, while educational psychologists compete with educators, organisational compete with business administrators all the time.

On the other hand, Mexican psychology research is supported by many organisations, especially the CoNaCyT (National Council of Science and Technology), which gives the largest proportion of funding in the social sciences. The most influential journal in the country is the *Mexican Journal of Psychology*. Nowadays every psychological field produces research especially experimental and neuropsychology, which is standing strong among the Mexican research and is getting a great budget to produce many papers, doing research with animals as well as with humans.

Along with these achievements in Mexican psychology, Mexico's socioeconomic conditions affect directly the development of psychology in the country. The costs of studying increase every moment, books and journals become more expensive and the scientific and technological information gets less accessible.

Although most people with higher education know what psychologists do, Mexican psychologists still have to struggle with the misconceptions of their profession. As if it were not problem enough, globalisation, with the online universities and institutes of fields related to psychology, has also caused the lack of credibility to this science.

Psychology can and must have a bearing on public politics. Psychologists can create better **options** in fields like health and education, two of the most important problems that Mexico is now facing. For instance, people with diabetes and obesity face the same problem: they do not attach to the treatment. Psychologists can design programmes for the patients in order to improve their quality of treatment. Likewise, psychologists can review the curricula of the different educational levels and evaluate them in order to improve them as the society needs change.

On the other hand, psychologists can create and evaluate social programmes in favour of the little communities and towns, especially for the indígenas. They can improve the social inequality and help them preserve their culture and language without being excluded from the rest of the society.

My plans for me as a psychologist

I have one more year of studying psychology; I am in the Cognitive and Behavioural Sciences area, but I take subjects from Education as well. I like the cognitive processes that are needed when one learns and also when they teach. I found how complex this daily processes are very interesting .

Education is one of the strongest problems that my country faces nowadays. Mexico continuously appears in the last places in the PISA evaluation, and few students reach a university degree. Most people stay with a secondary degree because they have to quit studying in order to get a job to feed their family.

I study the basic processes of memory, perception, learning, thought and language. I do practices in public schools in order to get an idea of the work there needs to be done and the treatment with students and professors. Besides I learn statistics and methodology of evaluation in order to make a real scientific work.

My goal is to create better programmes and teach professors and students how to work on it. I want children to show a genuine interest in science and culture. I believe that if at a young age you are interested in something and motivated by the world around you, one can continue like this all your life, or at least make it easier when one grows up and grows old.

If more people in my country got a good education, got themselves a university diploma and understood science is for the progress of society, our people would develop better technology, better social conscience, better ambiantal programmes and Mexico would appear in the best developed countries because we have the natural resources to do so. Importation would decrease and jobs would increase. Along with more jobs, more people could afford their family education and with the extensive needs of Mexico, professionals would solve their community, state or country needs. People would read more and watch less TV, people would be better informed in matter of politics, economy and arts. People would create things instead of buying ideas from others... Mexico would be the country that deserves to be.

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Reference

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