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TUTORSHIP AND ACADEMIC TRAJECTORIES IN SCHOOL: COMPARATIVE STUDY IN TWO PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN MEXICO

Abstract

This work reports on the results of research on modalities of mentoring in the area of social sciences at two Mexican universities and their relationship with the academic trajectories of their students. The analysis focuses on the need to identify influences of different mentoring forms on students' academic performance. The theoretical guidelines are linked to studies on tutoring and academic performance. The method was quantitative, with representative samples collected from students of 8 programs, of the Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities of the Autonomous University of Hidalgo State (UAEH) and 3 programs of the Faculty of Pedagogy and Educational Innovation in the Autonomous University of Baja California (UABC). The results provide significant data that show a positive correlation between tutoring and academic paths. It reflects the strengths and weaknesses in the emotional and academic aspects of tutorship and their impacts on student training in each program. We considered for the analysis, the type of tutoring in each program, teachers who developed it and the interaction that occurs in the process. It is concluded that the result of the study provides an important tool for the planning and development of educational strategies suited for the students of different programs of social sciences and humanities in improving their key skills for professional development.

Keywords: academic tutoring, mentoring, academic trajectories, higher education

Introduction

The economic dynamics that arises with the processes of globalization and integration of commerce blocks in recent decades responds to the rapid advance of science, and technology by influencing the ways to produce knowledge in economic, political and social spheres. This new scenario challenges and demands a more quality higher education. The training of human resources to improve the academic performance of the student population is a priority for the most of the governments; students must have tools to face multiple challenges in all areas of knowledge.

This scenario demands the development of life skills in college students to be applied in a society that changes continuously. The demands of the current student require educational services that are differentiated according to their needs, training trajectories and aspirations. Thus, the personalized mentoring assumes an important role in the integration of the student sector to university studies and the improvement of learning conditions (Canales, 2010).

Reforms in higher education offer the possibility to involve the students in the solution of real problems. They reflected the need to transcend the concept of cookie-cutter school learning and mastery of abstract knowledge in one disciplinary field. This is a reductionist position that has permeated the teaching practices from

the last century. Higher education emphasizes student focused teaching and flexible programs to suit different learning needs of students (Rogers, 1986).

The changes that have occurred in the XXI century have made a clear impact on the lives and works of teachers and university students, which can be seen in the everyday interactions in the classrooms. The overall objective of the study was to identify the influence of different types of tutorship received by students on their academic trajectories.

The article provides an overview of mentoring and academic trajectories of students, the method applied in the study and the most significant results. It concludes with supported considerations about the central topic.

Academic tutoring and academic trajectories

In the XXI century, mentoring has become a process between the tutor and the student to promote academic success from the time when the students enter the university until the time when they graduate. It implies a shared co-responsibility exercise, since the guardian has been companion implicitly or explicitly for almost all modalities of formal and informal educations throughout history. Guardianship (from Greek tutelage) etymologically means protection. Throughout history it has been used as a strategy to drive students from Confucius through Socrates, Plato, Lorenzo de Medici and Michel Angelo to Freud and Jung (Cruz de la, Chehaybar & Abreu, 2011).

In each Mexican institution of higher education, different tutorship models have been implemented. These are derived from the educational policy proposals nationwide to offer support to students. After 14 years after its formal implementation, it had been observed that the process of tutorship is a complex field, because it involves a qualitative and emotional dimension between the tutor and student. Tutorship promotes an educational alternative to developing teachers teaching in front of large groups (Canales, 2004). The teacher assumes the role of counselor and companion and the exercise of its authority is softened to minimum and thereby creating a more relaxed and friendly work environment (Latapi, 1988).

The Institutional mentoring programs aim at providing students with a tutor to accompany and guide them during their college journey. The goal is to contribute in their holistic development through the provision of services including tutoring, academic counseling, psychological care, medical care, vocational guidance, guidance on scholarships and preventive actions for the health of the students. The modalities of mentoring programs implemented at both institutions are:
- Mentoring group: to support the academic training of the students.
- Custom tutoring and/or individual: to attend students with academic and personal problems which require channels to different services.
- Mentoring between pairs: this is the peer support, which focuses on the advanced students providing information and guidance by transmitting its strategic knowledge for survival in university environment at personal level (UAEH, 2010).

We identified two types of mentoring in the UABC:
- Instructor-led process which involves in-person tutoring between guardian and the student.

- On line tutorship.

Academic trajectories

Each student in the study presents a specific behavior throughout its formative process, which begins from his transition from high school to university, and concludes with his graduation from the university. The entire educational system involves school culture that prevails in each student community. We noticed that students life style, material resources, experiences, ways of understanding the world and dealing with problematic situations facilitate the projection of their educational and subsequent career paths (Canales, García & Sánchez, 2013).

Method

We used quantitative method with a non-experimental, cross-sectional and explanatory design; data were collected in a single moment and with different groups to determine the main factors that are related to and influence the academic trajectories.

We used a simple random sample, so all students had the opportunity to participate. The population was chosen from students in the last semester of their school; 14% was considered because the number of students who reach this level is lower than in previous semesters. This was a mechanism for larger representation in every program. We recovered 209 questionnaires 8 departments of the UAEH Social Science and Humanities Institute and 100 from the UABC Faculty of Pedagogy, where the number of students last semester is higher than Hidalgo's university.

The sample of UABC focuses on teacher training in the areas of math, language and educational guidance. The students of UAEH, participated from 8 programs of the Social Sciences and Humanities Institute; they are Education Sciences, Communication Sciences, Law, History, English Language, Political Science, Social Work and Sociology.

Research question

How does academic tutorship influence the academic trajectories in strengthening the specific skills of students at the UAEH Social Sciences and Humanities Institute and in the UABC Faculty of Pedagogy?

Instrument

A Likert scale was used with a range from one to five, where one meant full agreement and five meant disagreement. The questionnaire was divided into three sections: a) general information; b) seven factors that represent academic trajectories; and c) three open questions.

This article is a report of the factor called Perception of mentoring, which consists of 14 questions that were correlated with the academic trajectories of the students involved in this study.

Results

Every undergraduate program at UAEH has a different form of academic tutorship, according to the number of students and professors. In four programs, students are under the tutorage of full-time teachers and hourly professors. In three programs, students are only under the tutorage of full-time teachers and, in one program, students are under the tutorage of full-time professors and hourly teachers. In English Language and Communication undergraduate programs at UAEH, students are under group tutorage every semester. In History, Political Science, Law, Sociology and Social Work programs at UAEH and in three programs at UABC, students are under individual tutorage every semester. At UABC, students have tutors and online tutorage service from the beginning of their education at the school.

The average grade obtained by students was divided into three ranges: From 7 to 8, from 8.1 to 9 and from 9.1 to 10. At the first range, 9.8% of UAEH students and 7.4% of UABC students were placed. At the second range 66.7% of UAEH students and 27.1% of UABC students were placed. Finally, at the third range, 19.6% of UAEH students and 65.6% of UABC students were placed.

Also, in both institutions, four types of academic trajectories were identified:
1) Students having more than two courses failed and the average grade of less than 7. Percentage of students placed in this trajectory were: 14.8% at UAEH and 4% at UABC.
2) Students with one course failed and an average grade between 7.1 and 8: 17.7% at UAEH and 3% at UABC.
3) Students with an average grade between 8.1 and 9: 49.7% at UAEH and 27.2% at UABC.
4) Students with an average grade above 9.1: 17.7% at UAEH and 65.8 at UABC.

Academic tutorship in Mexican universities is used as a strategy for academic improvement. For that reason, it is interesting to analyze the answers to the question of "*quality monitoring of students' academic trajectories*". The highest percentage of answers which is 85.8% comes from UAEH's undergraduate degree of History, followed by three undergraduate programs at UABC with 81.8%, Law undergraduate program at UAEH with 63.7% and the rest of UAEH undergraduate programs with 24.11%.

In customer service and emotional aspects, History and Social Work programs obtained the highest percentages: 86% and 100% respectively; UABC registered 92.9% in the following question: *During your academic tutorship, were you treated in a respectful and ethical way?*

On the issue of the contribution of mentoring with your development as a researcher, History program at UAEH obtained 87% and the other programs less than 50%; at UABC, this question obtained 60%.

In the question: Did tutorship improve communication with you? UABC scored 73%; at UAEH, Social Work scored: 100%, History: 86%, and Education: 69.3%.

At UABC, tutorship average was 66.2 while at UAEH was 42.8. At UABC's tutors are seen as companion, facilitator and mediator during their entire academic career. Difference between both universities is important, with 30% more students at UABC. An interesting fact could explain this difference: At UABC, students have

had academic tutors since the very beginning of their study, while at UAEH, tutorship is not regular and only 27.5% of students have had permanent tutorship. The answers to the questionnaires suggest a significant correlation between academic careers and tutorship.

Conclusions

The feedback to the questionnaire indicates the lack of information among students at UAEH's Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities about tutorship and how it is useful for their academic career. When the questionnaire of this research was created, individual tutorship was applied in six of the eight undergraduate programs included in this research. Students who have a government scholarship are the only ones that receive tutorship in a systematic way, in order to keep the necessary status for the scholarship. The results show that there is a difference between the guidelines written in school rules and students' opinions.

It is clear that in the undergraduate degree of History at UAEH, professors understand the meaning of being a teacher and being a school tutor at the same time, because it is an online career. For that reason, 85% of students that participated in the research stated they were treated in a respectful and ethical way, got monitoring of their academic career and always had a good communication with their professors. This behavior was also seen at UABC's College of Education, because all of the students have permanent tutorship during their academic career.

Being a professor and a school tutor at the same time means that professors should know what their students need in every one of their courses. In each undergraduate program analyzed, it seems that there is low concern about tutorship among students.

Tutorship is integrated with teaching, in order to do a proper monitoring to every group of students. A true professor leads the students' efforts towards their individual needs, makes them see the world from the point of view of their class, favors reflection and the development of critical thinking. For a professor all of above means that since the beginning of the course he should have good communication with every student, as well as develop confidence and respect from the students. Only professors at UAEH's History and Sociology undergraduate programs showed commitment and responsibility with their students with respect to activities in their academic environment.

This result is an important tool for planning and developing teacher training strategies in every undergraduate program, in order to promote students' skills required for their professional development.

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