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The role of the tutor in nowadays Cuban university context

El papel del tutor en el contexto actual de la universidad cubana


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ABSTRACT

Due to the importance of the role of the tutor in Higher Education and its introduction in this new model of the Cuban University, it is necessary to assess the person who will work as a tutor. It is the person who accompanies students

throughout their bachelor formation, who advises, guides and prevents them from feeling discouraged for different reasons. The tutor should be able, to influence, in a positive way, in each student to look for the best options to plan and fulfill the work and teaching tasks; but the tutor must also know the problems, personal situations, which can influence students affecting the educational process and, thus, advise them in order to give solution to those problems. Students must feel the support of the tutor to achieve better academic results. From this perspective, the objective of this paper is to present a theoretical approach in relation to the role of university tutors who perform their professional practice in the current context of the Cuban university.

Keywords: educational leader; Higher Education; professional practice; tutoring; university tutor.

RESUMEN

Dada la importancia que tiene el papel del tutor en la Educación Superior y su introducción en este nuevo modelo de la Universidad Cubana, se hace necesario valorar la persona que va asumir como tutor. Se trata de la figura que acompaña al estudiante durante toda su carrera, lo asesora, lo guía e impide que se sienta desalentado por diferentes causas. El tutor, ante el alumno, debe ser visto como un líder educativo. El tutor debe ser capaz de influir positivamente en cada estudiante en la búsqueda de las mejores opciones para planificar y cumplir las tareas laborales y docentes. A su vez, debe conocer los problemas, situaciones personales, que pueden influir en el estudiante y afectar el proceso educativo, y de esta forma aconsejarlo con el fin de dar solución a ellos. El estudiante debe sentir el apoyo del tutor para alcanzar mejores resultados académicos. Desde esta perspectiva, el objetivo del trabajo es presentar una aproximación teórica en lo referido al papel del tutor universitario que realiza su práctica profesional en el contexto actual de la universidad cubana.

Palabras clave: educación superior; líder educativo; práctica profesional; tutoría; tutor universitario.

Introduction

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the proclamation of the figure of the tutor in higher education institutions and organizations has been given a great importance. According to what Berg (2020) has expressed, has been significant, around the need to introduce a change in the conception of the old and traditional University, so that Higher Education corresponds to the notable and intense changes in society, called the knowledge society and global society. Thus, with different interpretations and contextual adaptations, declarations of principles have been proclaimed that appear as platforms or basic documents for the projection of contemporary educational practice (Akimenko, 2017).

The present work refers to the role of tutors in full time university students, where the functions and tasks of tutors are analyzed based on the attainment of satisfactory results by the students assigned to them, taking into account the requirements of this type of teaching.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in the World Declaration on Higher Education in the 21st Century: Vision and Action, in its article 9 entitled "Innovative educational methods: critical thinking and creativity", highlights that it is necessary to modify the learning process in Higher Education. In a rapidly changing world, there is a perceived need for a new vision and a new model of Higher Education, which should be student-centered, which requires, in most countries, deep reforms and a policy of expanding access (UNESCO, 1998).

According to Kim & Jung (2019), in the International Research Congress, the Regional Center for Higher Education establishes as the axis for the improvement of Higher Education, the increasing quality of teaching. This conception has been viewed based on the pedagogical improvement of the teaching staff.

Also, the conception of a comprehensive training in the design and development of curricula, with the aim of graduating professionals who master the framework of educational systems of advanced, continuous, open and critical training, where students assumes their quality of active subjects,

protagonists of their own learning and manager of their life project (Palomares Ruiz et al., 2012).

From this perspective, according to Castillo et al. (2003), the Cuban university is in a clear process of diversification, a goal that has been assumed with great clarity from the beginning, by solving the problem of massiveness. These aspirations emerged with a relevant humanist stamp: the Universalization of Higher Education. This proposal brought about a more massive university. It improved the attention of students, in the sense of introducing actions directed towards a more personal and individualized treatment or relations, which allows the adjustment of educational responses to the learning rhythms of students and especially promotes their autonomy, as an essential demand for the professional training of today's society.

In short, it seems necessary to assume the principle of diversity, both in the training objectives and in the characteristics of its protagonists, considering that the educational budgets that are assumed will require a support system based on the figure of tutors and their action. Colleges must become the key element, the integrating bridge of knowledge and educational experiences.

Colleges are reference centers for tutoring, recognizing it as an inherent element in the teaching activity that ensures that education is truly comprehensive and personalized, as it implies an individualized relationship with students, basically considering their attitudes, abilities, knowledge, motivations and socio-affective development (Kim & Jung, 2019).

Body

For many years, the tutor in Higher Education was devoted to guide students only by providing methodological, scientific advice for their Diploma work or to university graduates for the preparation of thesis that would lead to obtaining a title or scientific degree.

The word tutor derives from the Latin verb of the same denomination that means, "watch over, protect, and "defend"; in connection with its pedagogical roots, the tutor was the mythological figure of the tutor. In the framework of the current transformations of education worldwide, according to Bray & Lykins (2012), every teacher is a tutor. The teaching activity, as a teacher-student

relationship, does not culminate in the only relationship that can occur in the teaching-learning activity, but rather emphasizes on the formation of the students' personality.

According to Rojas et al. (2017), the tutor is not a teacher in the traditional sense. He remarks that the tutor's role is not to transmit information, but also to contribute to the students' comprehensive formation. He must be a constructive critic, who helps the student to get out of certain difficulties and explore new fields. The process revolves around the concept of predisposition: how to see things, how to evaluate the evidence, how to relate one fact to another, not only in the students groups, but in an individual way, according to each one's educative needs, in coordination with the rest of the teachers of the group. In turn, a good student will acquire independence from his teacher by developing his own interpretation criteria. The criterion of Daza et al. (2021) coincide with the idea that the tutor is a counselor, the person who facilitates the student's learning, but is not primarily a provider of knowledge" handles the constructivist idea of the facilitation, but not the direction of personality education, taking the student as the protagonist. The tutor is the coordination link between the centers and the family; it supposes an individualized and personalized process of the teaching-learning process. Rojas et al. (2017) make emphasis that this is a fairly generalized definition in the different educational systems that have the figure of the tutor. This concept has the limitation of being centered on school-family relations and does not incorporate other social agents that influence the student's education.

In fact, the idea that the tutor is the one who globalizes, integrates and coordinates the orientation task that all teachers have to carry out collectively is taken up again. That is, the role of the pedagogical group, which is responsible for the education of the students, beyond the specific task of facilitating the teaching-learning of the area or subject that each member teaches.

The conception of the new university that makes its way into Cuban Higher Education is based on a set of challenges related to the increase in access to the University. A stage is initiated that is characterized by a deep process that demands personalized attention on the part of the teacher to the students to

achieve better results and responds to the new demands of economic, social and cultural development of society (Piñón González & García Rodríguez, 2002).

In this context, a relevant significance corresponds to the work of the tutor with a new line of work, aimed at permanently advising and guiding students during all their studies. The tutors' work in the new University does not only have to do with the support in teaching, but also establishes affective relationships with students. It provides a clearer vision from the political-ideological point of view on the importance that the Cuban revolutionary process has had.

The Cuban revolutionary process has been able to implement this new modality in the Cuban University, with the objective to the formation of a general and comprehensive culture of university students to prepare them for life in a globalized and dehumanized world with little access to information.

Taking into account ideas of Prakhov & Sergienko (2020), the guidance and tutoring works are major issues in Higher Education. Innovations in tutoring are numerous and have been promoted at universities so that their guidance and tutoring systems can incorporate new technologies and scientific developments that respond to identified needs (Saiz-Linares & Ceballos, 2021). High quality tutoring enhances retention and facilitates advancement throughout the Higher Education pipeline, positively impacting undergraduates. Tutoring is especially important for students who are at risk of dropping out and for gender equality and the integration of minorities (Girves et al., 2005; Ruiz & Fandos, 2014).

Liu (2018) remarks that tutor and his activity have gone through different approaches and philosophical interpretations such as neo-Thomism, positivism and currently through educational ones such as behaviorism and constructivism, which highlight the support of tutorial actions as a personalized method in the learning processes.

There is coincidence in considering the inclusion of the figure of the tutor in university educational systems. However, taking into account the tutor's role and functions, are there differences between a teacher and a teacher-tutor?

Regarding the differences between the teacher as an expert in the subject and the tutor, there are some discussions. A teacher can be both an expert in a field

of knowledge and a competent tutor. The ideal tutoring, according to Zhang & Bray (2019), presupposes that all teachers are experts in their field and can give educational advice, but at the same time, that they are involved in the tutoring work with the students assigned to them. An extension must be established, by the tutor, between the educational guidance that is given in class times or in response to an academic or disciplinary need by the professor of a subject and the accompanying work from the moment the student enters until he graduates of their training at the level they are at (Martínez Clares et al., 2019).

Taking the parallel made by Huenumán (2014), where he points out that there are differences between the teacher of conventional education and the teacher-tutor, some interesting elements are taken up in order to establish greater precision between the modes of action of each of these teachers involved in the teaching-educational process.

According to Navarro & Hernández (2021), the characteristics that a teacher-tutor must have, cannot not be idealized, since it is not about a superhuman being. It is about professionals highly committed to the task of educating and training the future generation, who love their profession and young people and should make students aware of the challenge before them. These qualities allow students to feel comfortable and feel the need to seek the educational guidance and help. Both academic and personal training are necessary for developing an adequate tutoring with students.

According to Chacón (2021), tutoring is a systematic, specific action specified in a time and space (legally one hour a week in the classroom) in which the student receives special attention, whether individual or group, considering it as a personalized action because:

- a) It contributes to comprehensive education, favoring the development of all aspects of the person: identity, value system, personality, sociability.
- b) It adjusts the educational response to particular needs, preventing and directing possible difficulties.
- c) It guides the decision-making process regarding the different training itineraries and the different professional options.

- d) It favors relationships within the group as a fundamental element of cooperative learning and socialization.
- e) It contributes to the adequate relationship and interaction of all the members of the educational community, since they are all agents and fundamental elements of this environment, fulfilling certain objectives.

Based on what objectives is tutoring defined?

The tutoring function is a teaching task and supports the teacher-student relationship and its objective content, that is, the relationship: teaching-learning. Zhang & Bray (2020) asserts that a tutor's function consists in describing the actions or activities that, a certain context must carry out in order to achieve the stated objective.

It can be stated that the functions of the teacher-tutor are those activities that must be carried out to guide their students in their professional, academic, social, ideological and personal life.

Fernández Torres (2018) refers to the tutor's guiding first function, and it is essential at the beginning of the studies. It includes various forms of student's guidance, such as indicating the characteristics of the subjects and their study methods.

Following Rivera Obregón et al. (2017), this students' guidance must continue permanently in order to detect the needs of students. Students should become aware of the characteristics of their learning through a reflective process about what to do and when to do it and to adopt a position of active learning that leads to continuous detection of problems and answers to questions. In addition, the tutor must provide guidance on the following aspects: comprehensive reading of texts, reading of complementary bibliography, search for bibliographic sources, carrying out practical activities, assignments and exams.

Ferreira (2021) defines tutoring as objectives that refer to guidance: personal, academic and professional. It is academic guidance with the objective that students:

- Find out about their abilities and skills in the field of learning (student profile).

- Be aware of what needs to be reinforced according to the content to be learned (learning difficulties).
- Be guided in the choice of study content and academic tasks.
- Be aware of the condition of being a student.
- Properly use the intellectual work techniques that improve their school performance and their writing performance in exams.
- Increase satisfaction with intellectual work.
- Be trained for self-employment: learning to learn
- At the same time, academic structures should:
 - Provide information on the tutoring action.
 - Analyze the suggestions, claims, etcetera, of students.
 - Collaborate to optimize the academic performance of the center.
 - Favor the inclusion of the tutorial action plan in the objectives of the group project and the educational strategy of the center, and vice versa.
- Assign tutors taking into account pedagogical criteria.
- Stimulate tutor teams.
- Plan a time for tutorial activities.

As suggested by Castillo et al. (2003), according to the perspectives of Cuban nowadays Higher Education, academic tutoring and a new educative guidance conception should offer guidance for the teaching and learning process where the acquisition of knowledge prevails. It refers to orientations for studying either from the content or the methodology. This tutoring is like an instrument to improve the quality of the educational process, by achieving tutorial functions as ones of the tasks of this professional and educator in Higher Education.

The tutorial function, according to López & González (2018), appears as a key element to be able to offer an educational response to the demands of training, according to the historical context, since it facilitates intervention in order to optimize the process of transition to university and the professional and personal training of students.

In the same way, it stands as an alternative to be able to assist to students who have difficulties in following their studies and, above all, in facilitating the processes of making their working decisions.

This last consideration that focuses on the important role that the tutor in the university, plays in the comprehensive training process and the conception of quality of the current university, allows professors from Higher Education to focus on the conception of tutoring from the Cuban model (Gonzalo, 2020).

Students will develop skills to defend, with solid arguments, the ideas of the Cuban Revolution and support with an active participation in the different programs and tasks of social impact that are part of the economic and social development of the nation.

In the context of the current Cuban university, the tutor must be a guide that allows reconciling the work and university responsibilities of students in order to avoid discouragement and failure to be able to fulfill them. As suggested by González (2020), the tutor must project himself in an action plan with the student, which includes:

- Helping students organize their time for study and not only organize time but also teach them how to study, since many do not have independent study skills.
- Exchanging with family, coworkers, as well as the group to which the students belong to, to learn about their performance, their relationships with the family, their personal problems and provide support in case of difficulties.
- Helping students in the elaboration of research works oriented in the course of his major, providing a methodological guide with the steps to follow for the preparation of this work.
- Ensuring that students reach a political and ideological preparation. This has to be based on knowledge of the national and International news.
- Encouraging them to participate in the tasks of social impact carried out in the country.
- Facilitating the integration of students in the university.
- Assisting the students in their academic work.

- Helping students solve problems related to academic and university life.
- Facilitating the students' personal and professional progress.
- Helping students in their transition to the professional world.

Tutors must call students to, at least, three individual tutorial sessions and have documentary evidence of the tutoring. They must also take part in tutor training, in follow-up meetings and in evaluating mentoring.

Establishing a good rapport between students and tutors is the most important factor in the success of tutoring. For this to occur, tutors should first make contact with students and actively seek them out for follow-up meetings (Malik, 2020).

A recent study by the Interuniversity Group for Teacher Education about the skills required by academic staff shows that interpersonal skill is especially important in tutoring actions. This group defines the interpersonal skill as "promoting critical spirit, motivation and confidence, recognizing cultural diversity and individual needs, and creating a climate of empathy and ethical commitment" González (2020), meetings between tutors and students can take any of the following forms:

- Seminars (for all students who wish to participate, to provide information or training).
- Group tutoring (training, discussion and student participation).
- Individual tutoring (personal guidance).

From the foregoing, the establishment of a tutorial action is inferred, which is enriched by the inherent particularities of each student being tutored, achieving a labor, political and moral maturity that students must acquire so that when they complete their university studies, they can face life and jobs successfully. The functions of the tutor with the group will be aimed at achieving the best relations among the students (Hajar & Abenova, 2021).

The Tutorial Action Plan (TAP) defines the actions that the university might undertake to ensure that students receive monitoring and guidance. This is especially useful in three transition periods of a student's life (Ruiz & Fandos, 2014):

- 1) University entrance: assessment of the abilities and competencies required for successful academic results.
- 2) During the course: introduction of the concepts relating to professional development, supervision of internships in companies, facilitation of employment and exploration of the labor market.
- 3) Transition from the university to work: development of job search strategies.

The areas it focuses on are the following: academic guidance, bachelor advice, continuous evaluation, academic decisions and conflict resolution.

By implementing the TAP, it is supposed that every student will be able to define and develop his or her own academic and professional profile. For achieving such development, the students should have the following learning outcomes:

- 1) All students can develop their own interest/motivation in the academic and professional field.
- 2) All students can identify and respond to their training needs.
- 3) All students can define and develop their academic path considering their formative needs, interests, and academic and professional motivations. All these outcomes are only developed or achieved if the tutor is well selected by the corresponding authorities or the institution as such.

Taking into consideration those outcomes, for the selection of the tutor, it is necessary to take into account some requirements such as:

- Promote the development of participatory attitudes in the group of students, both in the center and in their socio-cultural and natural environment.
- Inform parents of everything that concerns them in relation to teaching activities and academic performance.

Tutors also assume some functions in relation to the rest of the teachers. These functions are linked to the task of mediation and coordination of certain educational aspects. This legitimizes and makes necessary the figure of the tutor with the rest of the pedagogical group to coordinate the programs and

especialmente las actividades de respuestas a necesidades educativas especiales, basadas en las demandas de aprendizaje y opciones educativas diferenciadas que se basan en los objetivos de formación y la diversidad e interindividual e intraindividual y la variabilidad de los aplicantes. Asimismo, en las universidades cubanas actuales, incluye la coordinación en el proceso de evaluación del grupo de docentes y la información de los estudiantes, lo que permite acciones comunes con los otros tutores dentro del marco del proyecto educativo del grupo.

Al hablar de actividades con los docentes y el resto del grupo pedagógico, este autor recomienda tener en cuenta lo siguiente:

- Colaborar en la programación general de actividades de los diferentes asignaturas.
- Informar a los docentes del plan de tutoría, solicitando su apoyo.
- Transmitir las dudas de los estudiantes.
- Mediar entre los estudiantes en conflictos que afecten a ambos.
- Solicitar ayuda para desarrollar tareas de apoyo para los estudiantes con problemas de aprendizaje.
- Preparar las sesiones de evaluación de modo que sean formativas y orientadoras.
- Analizar el desempeño (relación habilidades/conocimiento) del grupo y de cada uno de los estudiantes.
- Coordinar las actividades educativas con los otros tutores.

Conclusion

Los tutores no deben estar enmarcados en un solo plan de acción; su atención debe ser sistemática e individualizada.

Los tutores deben verse como un educador integral que garantiza que los estudiantes que asisten puedan graduarse con el conocimiento necesario para enfrentar la vida profesional con profesionalismo.

Los tutores deben tomar decisiones claras en relación con sus habilidades profesionales para la actividad educativa. Esto debe asumirse a partir de un proceso de mejora donde se ofrecen herramientas teóricas y metodológicas basadas en sus conocimientos y potencial, para la construcción de lo esencial

psychopedagogical aspects, related to the tutorial activity from a situational understanding and a reflexive argued position.

The different methodological structures, mainly the major' teachers' staff and group teachers' staff, must implement a critical analysis in the educational practices that they develop with their tutors, based on the process of scientific inquiry, allowing them to understand the educational environment and solve professional problems, as well as personal and situations.

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Conflicto de intereses

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