Chapter 2 Academic tutoring in times of crisis: reinforcement strategies for the training of students in Communication Sciences

Capítulo 2 La tutoría académica en tiempos de crisis: estrategias de reforzamiento para la formación del alumnado en Ciencias de la Comunicación

AGUIRRE-GAMBOA, Patricia del Carmen*, ANAYA-ÁVILA, María del Pilar and AMADOR-RODRÍGUEZ, Julissa Lizeth

Facultad de Ciencias y Técnicas de la Comunicación, Universidad Veracruzana, México.

ID 1st Author: *Patricia del Carmen, Aguirre-Gamboa*

ID 1st Co-author: *María del Pilar, Anaya-Ávila*

ID 2nd Co-author: *Julissa Lizeth, Amador-Rodríguez*

P. Aguirre, M. Anaya and J. Amador

* paguirre@uv.mx

Abstract

This research addresses the tutorial practice in crisis situations and exhibits the data collected among the student population of the Faculty of Communication Sciences and Techniques of the Universidad Veracruzana (UV). Commonly, the tutorial function in universities is linked to an educational practice that aims to accompany students in a comprehensive manner, guiding them not only in the field of school but also in the professional and, in some cases, the personal. In August 2022, the Rector of the UV declared that between five and six thousand students of this institution could abandon or have already left their higher education studies for economic reasons. Hence the importance of this qualitative research that presents the perceptions of the students of the faculty that concern us. The results show the need to support academic tutoring between teachers and students.

Academic tutoring, Science, Crisis, Pedagogical methods, Technology and innovation

2.1 Introduction

The year 2020 will be considered by the new generations of university students as a year full of uncertainty, challenges, and trials. The health contingency generated by COVID-19 burst into the daily life of the world, to such an extent that the social, political, economic, educational, and cultural dynamics disrupted the existence of millions of people globally, creating chaos in health services and rethinking the possibility of a new normality in various areas of human endeavor. Prior to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, the university authorities implemented emergency action plans that allowed, firstly, to continue with academic activities; secondly, how to work during the confinement in which we remained for about a year and a half; and then the strategies for the return to the classroom in a staggered manner. However, in the disciplinary field of Communication Sciences, undergraduate students are trained to plan strategically how to communicate in a vulnerable situation and even what to do when risks arise caused by various circumstances or events. Therefore, it was necessary to investigate the strategies followed by academic tutors in the Faculty of Communication Sciences and Techniques of the Universidad Veracruzana through the perceptions of the student community. It should be noted that this research is the product of financial resources from the study carried out as a member of the National System of Researchers (SNI).

2.2 Development

In 2022, after two years of living in social chaos, there is reflection on the new paths we should follow in an emergency situation and what strategies should be implemented in the training of communication professionals. Although the health contingency originated from a pandemic that brought with it in many cases the desertion of university students due to problems such as the lack of economic resources, the lack of infrastructure by not having a computer or any device such as a tablet or smartphone, coupled with the precarious development of digital skills, it required at best the implementation of strategies by the authorities, faculty, and tutors to stimulate and provide educational continuity in the face of an emerging situation, i.e.

> The services of protection, welfare, and formal, non-formal, and informal learning that boost, strengthen, or facilitate educational systems in order to ensure opportunities for comprehensive development and equitable, inclusive, and quality learning for all in spaces that are safe and healthy when schools and other educational institutions are closed (Renna, 2020, p. 14)

In this sense, it is necessary to determine what a crisis situation refers to and, above all, what it implies for plans and programs at the higher education level, in the understanding that:

> It is magnified by the media's interest in crises, with the appearance of good guys and bad guys, which attract the public's attention and keep the attention alive, aggravating the processes of deterioration. And the same thing happens in the face of a natural catastrophe, a serious functional failure, a crisis of honorability, an economic threat, or an internal crisis (Villafañe, 1993, p. 300).

In this case, a pandemic caused by the presence of COVID-19 unleashed a series of crises in various fields and at a global level, including education.

For authors such as Piñuel, the notion of crisis is aimed at:

> Responding to a sudden change between two situations, a change that endangers the image and natural balance of an organization, is necessary because between the two situations (the situation before and the situation after the crisis), there is a sudden (unexpected or extraordinary) event to which an organization has to react by compromising its image and its internal balance (as an organization) and external balance (as an institution) before its public. (1997, p. 167).

And as the various faculties belonging to the Universidad Veracruzana are organizations, in order to exercise academic continuity and comply with their programmatic plans, they undertook various actions to seek strategies to level the chaos caused by a health contingency.

2.3 Literature review

For a theoretical approach to academic tutoring, it is necessary to know the previous studies on the concept. Hernández Rojas (1998), in his work "Paradigms in Educational Psychology," points out that within the field of educational psychology, two types of paradigms can be examined: the general ones of psychology: behaviorism, cognitivism, humanism, constructivism, etc., and those that he considers psychoeducational, which have been developed from the analysis of educational situations to understand them and intervene directly on them. And it is precisely among these paradigms that academic tutoring can be located, with the purpose of intervening in the given situation of the tutor teacher to the subject who receives these psychoeducational processes. Other authors, such as Lázaro and Asensi (1989), (2003), have pointed out what tutorial action implies.

Meanwhile, Ferrer (2003) points out that "tutoring is a formative activity that affects the integral development of university students in their intellectual, academic, professional, and personal dimensions.", Therefore, it is a priority in the formation of students who face the encounter with what will be their professional future. The task is not easy because it requires dedication and knowledge of the various substantive functions of the university, as well as the implications of the educational model that prevails in the various institutions of higher education.

According to López and Oliveros (1999) and Almajano (2002), cited by Álvarez and González (2005, p. 2)

> Tutoring is a continuous process of proactive nature, of listening, understanding, counseling, and permanent orientation; therefore, it is a pedagogical strategy with which it is intended to support and advise students in their process of integration, development, and training. It aims to enhance the capabilities of each student, helping them to overcome the difficulties that appear throughout the educational process.

Within the university context, tutoring, in the words of Martínez, Pérez, González, et al. (2020, p. 56),

> It re-emerges as a process capable of responding to the reality of the university of the 21st century and, therefore, to the needs of the student body, becoming one of the central debates in the Bologna Process and also an important current research topic that has focused the efforts of numerous researchers who have developed a multitude of studies in recent years.

2.4 The tutoring program at the Universidad Veracruzana

The Universidad Veracruzana establishes through the regulations of the institutional tutoring system the objective of providing support to students and solving academic problems in order to promote their autonomy and comprehensive training, and also seeks to contribute to academic performance based on personalized or group attention. The regulations include seven chapters: general provisions, coordinators of the tutoring system, academic tutors, tutor teachers, monitors, students, as well as transitory attention modalities.

These regulations establish that there are two types of tutoring: academic tutoring and tutorial teaching.

The first refers to the follow-up performed by an academic, called Academic Tutor, of the academic trajectory of one or more tutorees during their permanence in the corresponding educational program in order to guide them in the decisions related to the construction of their professional profile; and tutorial teaching refers to the personalized attention performed by an academic, called Tutor Professor, aimed at supporting the tutorees who so require it in problems related to the thematic contents of the educational experiences or who have an interest in a broader disciplinary formation through the development of Programs of Support to the Integral Formation. (Chap. 1, Art. 7, 2009, p. 8)

2.5 Academic tutoring in times of crisis

Viel (2014) points out that tutoring is a form of accompaniment, guidance, and support for students; tutoring is presented as an improvement strategy that, together with the revision of teaching practices and the institutional management model, could weaken the aforementioned problem and increase the quantity and quality of graduates.

In this context, at the Faculty of Communication Sciences and Techniques and at the Universidad Veracruzana in general, academic tutoring played a prominent role during this time as various pedagogical methods were implemented. For this higher education institution:

Academic tutoring consists of the follow-up given by an academic tutor to the scholastic trajectory of students during their permanence in the educational program in order to guide them in the decisions related to the construction of their professional profile, taking as a basis the study plan. Academic tutoring is characterized by developing a personal character and being a continuous, coherent, and cumulative process (online).

Academic tutoring involves the generation of spaces to promote interaction and to give guidelines for reflection on the different ways of facing the conflicts that students face during their time at the university. A tutoring program helps to strengthen the permanence of students within the institution, help them face the challenges they face, maintain a constant dialogue with their teachers, and avoid dropping out of school. Castro, Prats, and Aránega (2013) define it as "a continuous process of guidance and personalized accompaniment whose purpose is to contribute to the construction of knowledge and the integral formation of the student".

Prior to the appearance of COVID-19, the communicator in training received from the teacher-tutor the necessary scaffolding with which the students should develop their critical thinking, manage their self-learning, and strengthen their academic trajectory within the institution. This scaffolding made it possible for tutoring to establish interactions between a tutor and a student. The tutor offered sufficient support so that the student could progress through some process (Bruner, 1975). This scaffolding, in the words of Reiser (in Peñalosa, 2007, p. 26):

Sketches help to: 1) structure the task for problem solving through presenting the structured knowledge, breaking down the tasks, focusing the effort, and allowing monitoring; and 2) problematize the topic to cause learners to attend to aspects of the task that they had not noticed but that help to find the solution through encouraging the learner to articulate the required knowledge or to identify gaps and disagreements in the arguments.

These actions were carried out individually or in groups during at least three sessions during the semester. However, due to the crisis caused by the pandemic, students faced several problems that, in some cases, caused them to drop out and postpone their studies.

For this reason and in the face of this crisis, the teachers and authorities of the institution opted to generate strategies through innovative pedagogical methods in order to reinforce the academic trajectories. This interaction between teachers and the student community implied mutual knowledge about the training of future professionals and their emerging labor field in the face of a health contingency that resulted in a social crisis. As Weisberg (2006, p. 156) states:

If one of the school's priority objectives is to form autonomous individuals who are responsible for their actions, it is important to provide instances of participation where it is possible to elaborate and design strategies that favor reflection and position-taking regarding situations that make up the coexistence and daily life of the institution; an approach to conflicts that recognizes them as learning opportunities; and the protagonism of students in the resolution of conflicts through forms that facilitate agreements.

2.6 Strategies implemented in response to the pandemic crisis situation. Tutoring in the face of the pandemic

During the health crisis, the reinforcement of university education was strengthened by the role played by tutors, although it should be noted that several students temporarily withdrew due not only to the health crisis, we were facing but also to other types of economic problems. Although it should be noted that several students left temporarily due not only to the health crisis we were facing but also to other economic, labor, technological, emotional, and educational problems, the teachers continued with their tutoring sessions through the implementation of pedagogical methods that made use of socio-digital tools, such as video calls, WhatsApp messages, and the use of e-mail, among other options.

Among the actions undertaken by the tutoring teachers was to carry out a closer accompaniment with the students in order to avoid school dropout and, on the other hand, to guide them in the choice of their educational experiences in such a way that the school trajectories would be followed and an educational backwardness would be avoided. Tutoring, in this sense, had relevance within the formative processes of higher education, not only as an institutional program but also as a figure of moral authority and emotional support for young people.

2.7 Methodology

For the purposes of the research, a quantitative study was chosen among students from different semesters. The quantitative methodology "has a clear and precise process on how it is investigated; it starts in the first instance from a theoretical framework that has been accepted by the scientific community, and from there, a series of hypotheses arise on the possible expected relationships between the variables that are part of the problem being studied" (Chaves, 2018, p. 169).

To obtain the data, a questionnaire of the "non-probabilistic sample by convenience" type was applied to 64 students of the Faculty of Communication Sciences, with the purpose of creating samples according to the ease of access and the availability of the research subjects to be part of the sample in a given period of time.

The application of this instrument was carried out through a form created in the Forms Office. The students who participated are from different semesters and opted to be part of the study.

2.8 Results

The findings obtained were the product of a quantitative-approach study since information was collected on the perceptions of the students and the tutoring program. The results are described by means of a descriptive analysis consisting of the use of measures of central tendency and frequencies to classify the data. This research uses a questionnaire-based data collection instrument, which was shared and applied virtually to undergraduate students who received continuous tutoring sessions.

The first question was of a general nature and refers to the way students experienced the contingency period.

Table 2.1 Contingency crisis

During the pandemic ¿how did you experience the health contingency crisis?	
56.3%	With uncertainty and stress
31.3 %	With all kinds of problems
12.5%	With tranquility

Source: Own elaboration

56.3% consider that the COVID-19 pandemic was a period in which students lived with uncertainty and stress, not only in their daily activities but also in the reception of their classes. Barraza (2020: 19 and 20)

Comments that the measures of social distancing, confinement, fear of contagion, and the suspension of social, labor, and recreational activities have generated high levels of stress in the Mexican population. He explains that this syndrome is an adaptive mechanism of human beings, constituted by three moments: perception, reaction, and action as a response.

a) The beginning of this process occurs when the human being perceives situations that represent a risk, a threat, or a danger to his personal integrity.

b) Before this potentially dangerous situation, a series of reactions occur in the human being that serve as an alarm of the imminent danger that looms over him.

c) Once the potentially dangerous situation is identified and the body is prepared to act, action occurs to preserve his personal integrity.

This confirms that undergraduate students have not been the exception and that stress and uncertainty have left a strong emotional crisis among university students.

Of these 64 students, they considered that academic tutoring was undoubtedly important in the pandemic period, and although not all of them had the same opinion, they gave a glimpse of the importance that this educational program has for university life.

Within the convenience research sample and in response to the question, "Do you receive academic tutoring? The data obtained were as follows:

Table 2.2 Percentage of students who received tutoring

During this time of crisis, did you receive tutoring from your assigned professor?	
70.3%	Yes received
29.7%	did not receive

Source: Own elaboration

29.7% responded that they did not receive tutoring (in virtual mode) from their assigned teacher, which is a pending issue to consider, due to the characteristics of the educational model that prevails in the institution, it is a priority to accompany the student in his academic career, from the beginning to the end of his professional career. The fact that for two years they did not receive either group or individual counseling only served to create more doubts in that percentage of the population that did not receive this academic support.

Table 2.3 Role of the mentor-teacher

During this time of crisis, the teacher-tutor helped you to:	
Resolve doubts regarding the career	79.7%
Guide my academic career and my self-learning	51.6%
Stimulate my independent study through pedagogical techniques	18.8%
Making an appropriate selection of courses and credits	53.1%
Maintain permanent communication with me	37.5%

Source: Own elaboration

Regarding the role of the teacher-tutor, 79% said that resolving doubts about the career was essential, especially in the two generations that practically began their studies and did not have the opportunity to receive orientation in person. Similarly, for students in advanced semesters, it was essential to have the support of their assigned tutor, since this allowed them to make an adequate selection of courses and credits on the one hand and, on the other, to strengthen their cognitive and socioemotional skills. This is demonstrated in the following graph:

Table 2.4 Scaffolding by tutors

Do you consider that the educational scaffolding provided by tutors was:	
Inadequate	9.4%
Average	25
Adequate	32.8%
Very adequate	31.3%

Source: Own elaboration

Educational scaffolding by tutors ranged from very adequate (31.3%) to adequate (32.8%). Only 25% thought that this scaffolding was normal. This shows that tutoring in times of crisis contributed to the strengthening of school trajectories. In the following cloud of descriptor phrases, we can glimpse the phrases alluding to scaffolding on the part of the tutors. As for the way in which the communicators in training received the tutorials, it was through messaging services such as WhatsApp.

Table 2.5 Resources and technological tools used

Technological resources and tools used in tutorials in times of health contingencies	
Eminus 3 or 4	37.5%
WhatsApp	82.8%
Social networks	32.8%
Video call	48.4%
Cell phone	20.3%

Source: Own elaboration

To conclude, we can point out that the students of the Faculty of Communication, in their return to classes, asked to shore up the academic tutoring program due to the lack of orientation that, in some cases, was given, the presence of a pandemic crisis, anxiety, stress, and uncertainty, which made the emotional health of the university students sore.

2.9 Conclusions

Tutoring is a modality within higher education institutions, as it is at the Universidad Veracruzana. It allows personalized attention to the student to foster in him the knowledge and skills of critical and creative thinking within the formation of future professionals, in this case, of communication.

The academic tutor is directly responsible for this action; "it is the person who serves as a guide or facilitator and as the initial contact for the identification of problems and their signaling, as well as their appropriate channeling to the support instances within and outside the institution". (Sanchez, 2002)

The tutor becomes an agent of transformation and orients and supports the undergraduate student to be adequately trained, together with the assurance of a quality of life within the university.

The situation caused by a health contingency revealed weaknesses in the educational system and its teaching staff, which made it possible to recognize and chart a course towards new directions and face educational problems in crisis situations. However, the use of innovative pedagogical methods made it possible to create bonds of common good in the student-tutor interaction, as well as the use of technological programs that facilitated the reduction of the uncertainty generated with a view to a renewal of educational practices and the strengthening of the actors in the teaching-learning process.

2.10 References

1. Álvarez, P.P. y González, A. (2005). La tutoría académica en la enseñanza superior: una estrategia docente ante el nuevo reto de la convergencia europea. *REIFOP*, 8 (4). Recuperado del sitio web: http://www.aufop.com/aufop/home

2. Barraza, A. (junio, 2020). El estrés de pandemia (COVID 19) en la población mexicana. Centro de Estudios Clínica e Investigación Psicoanalítica S.C, México. Recuperado del sitio web: http://www.upd.edu.mx/PDF/Libros/Coronavirus.pdf

3. Universidad Veracruzana (2009). Reglamento Institucional de Tutorías. Recuperado del sitio web: https://www.uv.mx/economia/files/2022/02/Reglamento-Tutorias-UV.pdf

4. Bruner, J.S. (1975). The ontogenesis of speech acts. Journal of Child Language, Volume 2, Issue 1, April 1975. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305000900000866

5. Castro, L., Prats, M. y Aránega, S. (2013). Percepciones de alumnos/as y tutores/as sobre el proceso de acción tutorial en el Trabajo de Final de Máster. Un estudio de caso en la Universidad de Barcelona. Revista Iberoamericana para la Investigación y el Desarrollo Educativo, 10. Recuperado del sitio web: http://ride.org.mx/111/index.php/RIDESECUNDARIO/article/view/171/166

6. Chaves, A. (2018). La utilización de una metodología mixta en la investigación Social. Lozano, K. (Editor) La utilización de una metodología mixta en la investigación social. Primera edición, 195 págs. Ediciones UTMACH

7. Ferrer, V. (2003) La acción tutorial en la Universidad. En F. Michavila y J.García (Coord).La tutoría y los nuevos modelos de aprendizaje en la Universidad (pp. 67-84). Madrid: Consejería de Educación de la Comunidad Autónoma de Madrid.

8. Hernández, R.G. (1998). Descripción del paradigma sociocultural y sus aplicaciones e implicaciones educativas. En Paradigmas en Psicología de la Educación. México, D.F.: Paidós. Recuperado del sitio web: https://escueladenegocioscui.files.wordpress.com/2013/08/paradigmas-en-psicologia-de-la-educacion.pdf

9. Lázaro, S y Asensi, J. 1989. Manual de orientación escolar y tutoría. Madrid: Narcea

10. Lázaro, A. (2003). Competencias tutoriales en la Universidad. En Michavila, F. y García Delgado, J (Ed): La tutoría y los nuevos modos de aprendizaje en la Universidad. Madrid: Cátedra UNESCO

11. López Franco, E. Y Oliveros, L. (1999). La tutoría y la orientación en la Universidad. REOP. 10 (17). 83-98. 49. 49(195), 55-72. Recuperado del sitio web: http://resu.anuies.mx/ojs/index.php/resu/article/view/1251

12. Martínez Clares, Pilar, Pérez Cusó, Javier, González Morga, Natalia, González Lorente, Cristina, & Martínez Juárez, Mirian. (2020). La Tutoría universitaria vista por sus alumnos: Propuestas de mejora. *Revista de la Educación Superior,* 49(195), 55-72. Epub 09 de marzo de 2021.Recuperado del sitio web: https://doi.org/10.36857/resu.2020.195.1251

13. Peñalosa, E. (2017). La tutoría como herramienta para fomentar el pensamiento crítico. En Reflexiones, análisis y experiencias sobre la tutoría en la educación media superior / coordinadores Carlos Cinencio Pérez … [et al.]; editor Eduardo Peñalosa Castro. -- México: Ediciones del Lirio: UAM, Unidad Cuajimalpa. México. Recuperado del sitio web: http://dccd.cua.uam.mx/libros/archivos/Reflexiones_pdf3-1.pdf

14. Piñuel, J. L. (1997). Teoría de la comunicación y gestión de las organizaciones. Madrid: Síntesis

15. Renna, H. (2020). El derecho a la educación en tiempos de crisis: alternativas para la continuidad educativa. Sistematización de estrategias y respuestas públicas en América latina y el Caribe ante el cierre de escuelas por la pandemia del COVID-19. UAR| UNEM| Clúster Educación. Recuperado del sitio web: https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/derecho_a_la_educacion_y_alternativas_continuidad_educativa_documento_estudiantes_curso_h_renna_1.pdf

16. Reiser, B.J. (2004). Scaffolding complex learning: The mechanisms of structuring and problematizing student work. *Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 13(3), 273-304. Recuperado del sitio web: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/220041136_Scaffolding_Complex_Learning_The_Mechanisms_of_Structuring_and_Problematizing_Student_Work

17. Sánchez, M. W. (2002). La tutoría académica (una opción en la formación integral del alumno) Conciencia Tecnológica, núm. 19, abril, 2002, p. 0 Instituto Tecnológico de Aguascalientes, Aguascalientes, México. Recuperado del sitio web: https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=6481450

18. Universidad Veracruzana (2009) Reglamento Institucional de Tutorías. Recuperado del sitio web: https://www.uv.mx/economia/files/2022/02/Reglamento-Tutorias-UV.pdf

19. Universidad Veracruzana (05.09.2022) Tutoría Académica. Recuperado del sitio web: https://www.uv.mx/dgdaie/tutorias/tutoria-academica/

20. Viel, Patricia (2014). La tutoría como Proyecto Institucional, *Revista Argentina de Enseñanza de la Ingeniería* (Argentina), N°6, pp. 99-102 (en línea). Recuperado del sitio web: http://www.ing.unrc.edu.ar/raei/archivos/img/arc_2014-05-02_20_26_36-Trabajo%2010.pdf

21. Villafañe, J. (1993). Imagen Positiva. Madrid: Pirámide.

22. Weisberg, V. Desarrollo de estrategias de participación institucional y comunitaria, en Krichesky, M. (2006) Proyectos de orientación y tutoría. enfoques y propuestas para el cambio en la escuela, Pág. 156. Editorial Paidós.