Relevance of a community care program from the perspective of its stakeholders: educational practices based on social responsibility

Pertinencia de un programa de atención a la comunidad desde la perspectiva de sus actores: prácticas educativas desde la responsabilidad social

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Abstract

Educational desertation is an educational problem that affects part of the school-age population. In order to contribute to the reduction of these problems, there are several mentoring programs in support of children and adolescents that are developed from the public university, whose main objectives are aimed at strengthening the comprehensive training and increase the educational expectations of its participants to achieve their welfare. This qualitative-phenomenological study aims to understand the perspective of mothers and fathers on the relevance of a mentoring program in the academic area; a structured interview was used to collect data. The results obtained indicate that, through a series of identified categories, mothers and fathers are able to recognize the incidence of the program in the academic area, concluding that the program is relevant to achieve favorable results in school activities.

Educational desertation, Mentoring, Program effectiveness

Resumen

La deserción y el rezago son una problemática educativa que afecta a una parte de la población en edad escolar. Con la finalidad de contribuir a la disminución de estas problemáticas existen diversos programas de mentoría en apoyo a la niñez y a la adolescencia que se gestan desde la universidad pública, cuyos principales objetivos están encaminados a fortalecer la formación integral e incrementar las expectativas educativas de sus participantes para lograr su bienestar. Este estudio de corte cualitativo - fenomenológico, tiene como finalidad comprender la perspectiva de madres y padres de familia sobre la pertinencia en el área académica de un programa de mentoría; para la recolección de los datos, se aplicó la entrevista semiestructurada. Los resultados obtenidos indican que, a través de una serie de categorías identificadas, las madres y los padres sí logran reconocer la incidencia en el área académica del programa, concluyendo que, el programa es pertinente para lograr resultados favorecedores en las actividades escolares.

Deserción escolar, Mentoría, Efectividad programas

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Introduction

The National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI,2021) at national level reported that 9.6% of the Mexican population under 18 years of age (i.e. 5.2 million adolescents) and three million students belonging to the basic level were not enrolled in the school cycle; a situation that has been progressing over time, since, as of 2018, INEGI indicated that, from 2015 and until 2018, 2% of girls and boys between 6 and 11 years of age and 16. 2% of 12 to 17 year olds did not attend school for reasons related to lack of interest, aptitude, requirements to enter school, lack of economic resources or dropping out due to entering the labour market (INEGI, 2018). Regarding the above, INEGI (2020) pointed out that, in 2020, five out of every 100 inhabitants were illiterate, meaning that they did not know how to read or write.

Faced with this panorama that has been present for some time, government institutions have established various actions that contribute to improving the quality of education; in turn, different organisations have developed programmes for the development of girls and boys, such as the Peraj programme, in which young university students act as tutors and become a positive role model for primary and secondary school students who are in vulnerable conditions and whose family, economic or social environment limits their potential, academic and socio-emotional development (Peraj-Mexico, 2021).

Preventing school dropout and educational backwardness is the main objective of the Peraj programme, which states that this problem has a negative impact on the social, economic and political processes of the country, increasing social inequalities and diminishing the personal aspirations of those who suffer from it (Peraj, 2021).

The Peraj programme began in Mexico in 2004, following the guidelines of the Perach programme, born in Israel in 1974 and adapted to the conditions of the Mexican context as Peraj.

The fundamental characteristic of both programmes is that the tutors are young university students who establish a tutoring relationship, during one school year, with students in the last grades of primary and first grades of secondary school, who in Perach are called "amig@s". In the 17 years of active work of the Peraj programme in Mexico, it has benefited more than 80,000 beneficiaries in more than 90 higher education institutions and 127 campuses in 26 participating states, involving at least 5,100 tutors per year (Peraj Mexico, 2021).

Research has been carried out to evaluate the effectiveness of the Peraj programme in different universities around the country, which shows that, although there are significant changes in the various areas of development of the beneficiaries who participate in the programme, there is currently a gap in knowledge that helps to understand the relevance of the Peraj programme in the academic area of primary and secondary school students from the perspective of mothers and fathers, focusing most of the research developed based on the criteria of the tutors and beneficiaries of the programme.

For this reason, this research aims to contribute to understanding the relevance of the mentoring programme in the academic area, generating more knowledge about its effectiveness in reducing problems such as school dropout and educational backwardness of those who suffer from it. Through the research question: What is the perspective of parents on the relevance of the Peraj programme of the Instituto Tecnológico de Sonora Unidad Obregón for their children in the academic area?

Higher Education Institutions (HEI) are committed to transforming the context that surrounds them, attending to its needs and generating alternative solutions. From the university functions of training, research, social extension and management, the programmes of attention to the community that they operate as part of their social responsibility, they have the capacity and the commitment to transform the context that surrounds them, attending to their needs and generating alternative solutions to the problems that they face. (Universidad Iberoamericana, 2020).

The Peraj programme, through its areas of development, responds to one of the problems that have been identified as a priority in the community, as it is aimed at children who are about to finish their primary education and start secondary school, it has the opportunity to contribute to reducing and preventing school dropout and educational backwardness.

The word dropout means to abandon; therefore, by adding the word school to this word, it refers to students dropping out of school, which is a personal decision caused by various factors (Hernández et al., 2017), mainly that the student abandons their school activities to meet other types of needs, generally of an economic nature.

On the other hand, educational backwardness is known as the condition of any person over 15 years of age who has not completed basic education, nor met the learning objectives expected for their level of development; educational backwardness represents a condition of social inequality and lack of justice in terms of distribution of educational services and opportunities, which limits the individual in their personal development, their economic fulfilment and, to a large extent, their prospects of achieving a decent life and a fairly remunerated job (Navarrete-Cazales and Ocaña-Pérez, 2022).

For Carro and Lima (2022), there is a clear relationship between school dropout and educational backwardness, stating that "dropout generates educational backwardness, and this in turn discourages the continuation of studies in many families", being both cause and consequence.

Thus, school dropout and educational backwardness are multifactorial problems, referring to the influence of various reasons or factors, such as a) individual: personality, health; b) institutional: family, education system, school; c) economic issues: poverty, lack of material and budgetary resources; and d) socio-cultural: attitude and valuation towards education, socialisation patterns, school climate and environment (National Institute for the Evaluation of Education [INEE], 2016).

The first factor refers to good relations between teachers and students, where Lozano and Maldonado (2019) indicate that trust and two-way communication benefit, thus influencing academic performance. Similarly, the attention given to students by parents and siblings, the social relationships inside and outside the school and the trust given to teachers and managers, and therefore, the continuity of studies is strengthened. The second factor to consider is study techniques and habits, which play an important role in academic performance, mainly in terms of students' note-taking as a habitual practice for revision for homework or exams, as well as the time dedicated to study.

Methodology to be developed

This study is based on the interpretative paradigm within qualitative research through the methodological scheme of phenomenology.

For this research, eight mothers and fathers of the sixteenth generation of Peraj students from the ITSON Obregón Unit participated in the study during the 2022-2023 school year, who were selected by means of purposive sampling.

The technique used for the recovery of information was the semi-structured qualitative interview, this selected technique allowed to collect information about events and aspects of people: beliefs, attitudes, opinions, values or knowledge, which otherwise would not be available to the researcher (Salinas and Cardenas, 2009); in addition, being semi-structured allows to formulate new questions, depending on the answers provided by the interviewee, being more flexible and adjusting to the needs of the interviewee. (Díaz-Bravo et al., 2013).

Five study categories were identified (see table 1):

1) Incorporation or strengthening of study habits.

2) Passing grades.

3) Continuation of studies.

4) Social-academic relationship.

5) Academic autonomy.

Category	Description
Categoy 1. Incorporation or strengthening of study habits	Set of methods and strategies that the mother or father identifies that their child puts into practice in order to assimilate knowledge in an efficient and effective way.
Category 2. Passing grades	- Actions that parents identify that their child implements in order to:
Category 3. Continuing their studies	- Maintain or increase their school grades
Category 4. Social-academic relationship	- Attain knowledge and skills as a result of passing or passing some kind of academic test, activity or exam.
Category 5. Academic autonomy	Actions that parents recognise as part of the implication that their child wants to continue studying at the next level of education, study a profession or identify a career of interest.

Table 1 Description of categories
Source: Own elaboration

Based on the establishment of the categories, an interview guide was designed for the collection of information, which is based on 11 trigger questions about the study habits that the child presents or has modified from their experience in the programme, in terms of academic performance, the changes that have occurred in qualifications and their attitude in carrying out academic activities, their aspirations to continue their studies and the interactions between teachers and students were investigated. The interviews were conducted virtually, using the Google Meet platform.

The processing of the information was carried out using the process for data analysis proposed by Hernández (2018, p.495), who determines that it is necessary to systematise the data in order to construct theoretical principles through the logical interpretation of the information, for which he proposes the following procedure:

1. Transcription of the narratives of the experiences.

2. Review of the description and information collected in order to have a complete picture.

3. Identification of units of analysis, which includes the elaboration of controls and codes.

4. Generation of categories, themes and patterns present in the participants' descriptions and narratives of the experiences with respect to the phenomenon under study.

5. Identification of connections between participants' experiences in relation to the phenomenon.

6. Constructivist and comparative determination of the phenomenon from the analysis of the experiences.

Results

The following results were obtained from the processing of the information.

Category 1. Incorporation or strengthening of study habits

According to the results of the study, it was identified that mothers and fathers perceive in the beneficiaries the incorporation or strengthening of study habits that they put into practice at school, mainly, by using technological applications and using Canva, for which participants P1, P2 and P3 coincide, commenting:

> "They have used different applications and they have taught him how to use them and he puts all that into practice" (P1); "He looks on Youtube how to do fractions or equations, he repeats them until he manages to understand them and do his exercises" (P2); while P3 added: "What she learned to do in Canva with her tutor she also did at school in some activities, in some tasks that she was asked to do at school (. ..) the skills that they help them to develop through the programme, if she uses them and transfers them to the activities that she has to develop within the school." (P3)

Likewise, participants P4, P5, P6 and P1 agree that as a study habit they identify the search for information in books, encyclopaedias and internet by students, as well as the use of computer equipment or mobile devices to do so, for which P4 said:

"She is already looking in the books and encyclopaedias that we have here at home or at her school, and that is something that she did not do before the programme, her tutor taught her that" (P4); "She looks for information on the internet more now, she has learned to use it a little more (...) she looks for information on her own" (P5), as well as what P6 added: "He has developed the fact of researching, what is related to technological resources, in fact he already looks for references, he looks for the source from where he got the information" (P6), and finally: "He researches, he works on the computer (...) he learned, with the help of the computer, how to use it" (P6), and finally: "He researches, he works on the computer (...). ...) he learned, with the phone, with the tablet or with the laptop to enter his classes, to research and do everything he needs for his classes" (P1).

From the above, it can be said that mothers and fathers identify that the beneficiary students, from their participation in the programme and the interaction with their university tutors, incorporate or strengthen study habits that they put into practice and transfer to their school activities.

Category 2. Passing grades

In the results obtained, mothers and fathers identify that the students maintain or increase their school grades, for which participants P1, P7, P4 and P8 agree, adding that they have improved them: "Since he has been in the programme, his grades have gone up in all subjects" (P1), P7 commented: "In his grades it was notorious (...) he has improved his grades in all subjects" (P1), P7 commented: "In his grades it was notorious (...) he has improved his grades in all subjects" (P7). ..) he has improved in his grades and quite a lot" (P7), P4 also added: "He has gone up a lot because he keeps applying what he learned in the programme" (P4) and P8 mentioned: "In his grades it has helped him a lot" (P8). On grades, they have not varied, they have been fine" (P3); P2 commented: "She has always been fine, she has never had problems academically, she has always had good grades" (P2), "She has good grades at school and has maintained them" (P5) and finally P6 mentioned: "Her grades have been maintained, she is between nine and ten and has maintained those grades during the two generations that she has participated" (P6).

Likewise, as part of the actions to obtain passing grades, it was identified that mothers and fathers perceive that students pass their exams and hand in their activities at school on time, for which P7, P3, P5 and P4 agree: "He is very compliant in terms of his homework, that is, to take it and not let it pass, even if tomorrow he does not have that subject, he always tries to do it" (P7); In addition, P3 added: "In exam periods, his mother downloads guides for him, goes over the questionnaires with her, asks him questions about the study guides that teachers send" (P3); For his part, SL mentioned: "He focuses more on homework and completing the work in a classroom" (P5), and finally P4 commented:

"She tells me I'm going to review because tomorrow I have an exam (...) she just told me that she was going to review the subjects to see if I didn't miss something that I haven't studied." (P4)

This category identifies mothers and fathers observe children carrying out actions within the school to maintain or increase their grades, as well as to obtain passing grades in their exams and school activities, attributing part of the results in the academic area to what they have learned during their participation in the programme.

Category 3. Continuing their studies

With the answers provided by the participants, it was determined that the beneficiaries identify a university career or profession of their interest, ask about the university and justify their choices according to their vocational orientation, commenting that: "She already has very clear what she wants to be (...) she has shared with us that she wants to be an astronomer, she is very focused on what she wants to be" (P3), "Since she was very young she said she wanted to be a teacher, she has always said she wants to be a teacher, so, she really likes working with children, she wants to continue studying" (P2).

Likewise, P7 added: "He has said that he would like to be a veterinarian because he likes to help animals" (P7), other participants mentioned:

"He says I want to be either a veterinarian or an agricultural engineer or I want to be an architect, that's what he would like" (P1), "He told me that he was very interested in the career of architecture, I think a person had gone to talk to them about it and told me that it caught his attention" (P5), "With the students from different professions I think he was more interested in the area of engineering. She wants to continue studying, although she is still looking and getting to know other areas" (P6), "He has told me that he is interested, he is very young and still needs to know more, but he is already interested and has knowledge about what he can choose in the future" (P8).

Finally, P4 also commented on the students' interest in studying a university degree, sharing his doubts about the university and the different educational programmes: "He wants to continue with his studies, yes, he does, he wants to continue, right now he wants to be a doctor, but if he asks me, not just about that degree, about all of them, how long it takes to finish school and what he is going to study, but yes, he wants to study a profession, that is clear to him" (P4). (P4)

The results show that the beneficiary pupils of primary and secondary school do have an interest in continuing their studies by taking an interest in a university degree, expressing doubts and concerns about the different options offered by university education. This makes it possible to identify that they have future expectations of higher education.

Category 4. Social-academic relationship

According to what was obtained by the participants, it was determined that mothers and fathers identify that the beneficiaries make and receive positive comments from the school, are more sociable and work as a team. Among the main comments were: "She expresses herself well, she expresses herself well, she is very sociable and speaks very well of everyone (...) her teacher expresses herself well, she has no problems with her, she is very participative and cooperative" (P6), "She has more friends, at first she was very close to me and now not so much because now she looks for her friends on the phone, in class, with them she helps her work, even if it is online, but she does her work with them" (P6),

"She has more friends, at first she was very close to me and now not so much because now she looks for her friends on the phone, in class, with them she helps her work, even if it is online, but she does her work with them. (P1), "Now she likes to work a lot in a team, she used to do her work and homework by herself at home (...) now I see that she likes to do team work, to meet with other classmates" (P2), as well as what P8 said: "It has helped my son a lot, he is much better (...) he explains it and helps his classmates, he tries to teach his classmates too" (P8), P7, who mentions: "He started to be more social than he used to be before being part of the programme (...) he started to be more social than before (...) he started to express himself a little bit more, just like his classmates. ...) to get along a little bit more, he was not as shy as he was at the beginning, he also expresses himself well (...) for him they are cool (...) that's how he expresses himself, just like his classmates (...) with positive comments". (P7)

Likewise, participants P3 and P4 added: "Last week she participated in the honours, she learned by heart what she had to say, and the principal congratulated her (...) the teachers congratulate her a lot for her work" (P3); as well as: "He told me that everything was very good, that she related well with her classmates (. ...) also when he received third place, there were congratulations from the teachers and from the school group of his classmates, when they gave him the award in front of the other groups there were cheers and everything". (P4)

Based on the data obtained in this category, it can be inferred that mothers and fathers recognise that their children establish better social-academic relationships as a result of their participation in the Peraj programme at the ITSON Obregón Unit, making and obtaining positive comments from the school, being more sociable and working collaboratively with students and teachers, all of which benefits their integration into the school context, participation in activities and events.

Category 5. Academic autonomy

According to the results obtained in the present study and the answers provided by the participants, it was determined that the students have shown initiative in different situations and contexts to learn on their own, for which participants P3, P4, P2, P6, P8 and P9 coincide adding:

"She is very independent, she can do many things on her own (....) most of them know that she has the initiative to learn on her own, she is very independent, many things she can do on her own (...) most of the time she knows that she has to learn on her own".) most of the time she knows that she has activities on her own and she starts to do them" (P3), as well as what P4 said: "She is very independent and knows how to get herself ready to do the activities", P2 commented: "I don't need to remind her or ask her if she has homework, she is a very independent child, she arrives and does her homework and just tells me I have finished my homework" (P2), to which P6 and P8 agreed: "She does her homework on her own, and when she doesn't understand if she asks me for help (...) but it's on her own, it's not constant that I have to remind her, she does it on her own initiative" (P6) and while P8 shared: "He arrives and does his homework, he has his schedule for his homework and other activities, the same during his sessions with the tutor" (P8), finally, P9 added: "He is only in charge of doing his activities and seeing which day it is his turn to accommodate his schedule and homework to how he has to hand them in, his dates and everything", "he is autonomous to do everything" (P9).

With the above, it can be deduced that mothers and fathers identify that their children are more independent and organise their time to carry out activities from home; they do not require reminders from family members for their homework, as they have their own initiative to do it, thus benefiting their autonomy in the learning process.

The results obtained are reaffirmed by another of the investigations carried out to understand the impact of the Peraj programme by the authors Martínez and Manzo (2011), who conclude, as part of their study applied to university tutors, that primary and secondary school students, through their participation in the programme, managed to generate new knowledge through their own methods in their learning style, develop communication skills, dare to carry out activities they did not do before and have initiative to learn and improve their academic performance.

Likewise, and as part of the results of the study, from the perspective of the mothers and fathers, their children put into practice what they learned in the programme and that this allows them to maintain or increase their grades, pass their exams and submit their activities in a timely manner, attributing that these actions were developed or strengthened in the child as a result of their participation in the programme.

This result coincides with the findings of the research by Martínez and Manzo (2011), who compared the students' grades at the beginning and at the end of the Peraj programme, inferring that there was a significant increase in school grades, as well as greater success in school, which translates into progress in learning, an improvement in the acquisition of study habits and positive expression of the students by their teachers.

Conclusions

The objective of this research was to understand the perspective of mothers and fathers on the relevance of the ITSON Peraj Obregón programme in the area. According to the results obtained, it is concluded that the objective was achieved, determining that, in its sixteenth generation of service in the institution, the programme has contributed to its participants in basic education obtaining better results in the academic area, incorporating new study habits, reinforcing their social skills, helping to preserve or increase their school grades and encouraging their interest in continuing with their educational process.

On the other hand, based on their experiences in the programme, the students are more interested in the educational process and in continuing their studies at the next level of schooling, until they reach a university career and develop a profession in the future, which coincides with the conclusions of Hernández and Villegas (2021) in their study on the relevance of the Peraj programme at the Autonomous University of Baja California, from the comments of the mothers and fathers, who report greater sociability, motivation, interest in sports, learning, enthusiasm for achieving personal goals, as well as that it is important for their daughters and sons to study a professional career, which is in line with the objective of the programme.

The participants consider that there is a favourable modification in the beneficiaries of the programme, visualised in their way of establishing social-academic relationships with those involved in the educational process, being more sociable, participative and expressing themselves positively about the school, classmates and teachers. The conclusions reached by Hernández and Villegas (2021) in their study agree with the results obtained in the present study, from the perspective of university tutors on improved school performance of primary and secondary school students, development of social skills and increased self-esteem. As well as, what is included by basic education teachers, who indicate that the attendance of some of their students to the programme led to better group integration, teamwork, increased school attendance, as well as their socialisation.

Finally, the dynamics of the programme and the accompaniment of the tutor allowed for the strengthening of academic autonomy in its beneficiaries, by contributing to the self-regulation of the educational process from home work, independence and autonomous time management without requiring supervision; results that, compared with other studies such as those previously mentioned by Hernández and Villegas (2021), agree that the tutor-tutored relationship improves communication and family relationships, behaviour, motivation, decision-making, organisation, planning and participation in household chores.

Assessing the relevance of the ITSON Peraj Obregón programme, from the academic area, allowed us not only to know how it affects the achievement of better results in school by primary and secondary school students, but also to identify areas of opportunity and areas for improvement.

In spite of the approach obtained to the reality of the programme, it is evident that more extensive research is required to know its impact in the different areas proposed with the activities it develops, which is why it is recommended to continue strengthening the study and generate greater scope with the research, with the aim of going deeper into those aspects that mothers and fathers recognise in the development of their daughters and sons, as a consequence of their participation in the mentoring programme within the institution.

For the Instituto Tecnológico de Sonora, carrying out studies where it is possible to determine the relevance of the programmes that serve the community, is a great step to permeate the culture of social responsibility in the context in which it is located, since having accurate and timely information allows guiding decisions to improve the actions that are offered to the population.

Acknowledgement

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