Reflections on tutorial practices in the development of final projects and degree theses a convergence of concerns among Latin American faculty members

Reflexiones sobre la acción tutorial en el proceso de elaboración de trabajos finales y tesis de grado: convergencia de inquietudes entre docentes latinoamericanos

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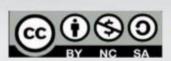## ABSTRACT

This article examines the epistemic perspectives underlying university tutorial practices in Latin America, through the analysis of beliefs, perceptions, and institutional conditions that influence academic advising processes, especially during the development of graduation projects. It is based on an exploratory review of precedents in Venezuela (2004 and 2021), which reveal persistent tensions in the tutor-student relationship, such as communication failures, limited emotional support, normative ambiguity, and power imbalances. The analysis incorporates systematic observation and an exchange of experiences among Latin American faculty members regarding educational dynamics across various university settings, as well as a review of recurring situations emerging from these experiences. Additionally, the article reflects on the need to rethink tutorial praxis from a humanistic, comprehensive, and transformative perspective, one that not only responds to academic demands but also fosters student wellbeing and strengthens the research culture. The conclusion affirms that tutorial support is a strategic component in the development of research competencies in higher education, and that its enhancement requires public policy, inter-institutional cooperation, and continuous tutor training, to consolidate a fairer, ethical, and sustainable educational environment in Latin America.

Keywords: Beliefs, Tutorial Support, Latin America.

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RESUMEN

Este artículo examina las perspectivas epistémicas que subyacen a las prácticas tutoriales universitarias en América Latina, mediante el análisis de creencias, percepciones y condiciones institucionales que influyen en los procesos de acompañamiento académico, especialmente durante la elaboración de los trabajos de titulación. Se basa en una revisión exploratoria de antecedentes en Venezuela (2004 y 2021), los cuales revelan tensiones persistentes en la relación tutor-estudiante, tales como fallas en la comunicación, escaso apoyo emocional, ambigüedad normativa y desequilibrios de poder. El análisis incorpora observación sistemática e intercambio de experiencias entre docentes universitarios latinoamericanos sobre las dinámicas educativas en diversos contextos universitarios, así como una revisión de situaciones recurrentes emergentes de dichas experiencias. Además, el artículo reflexiona sobre la necesidad de repensar la praxis tutorial desde una perspectiva humanista, integral y transformadora, que no solo responda a las exigencias académicas, sino que también promueva el bienestar estudiantil y fortalezca la cultura investigativa. Se concluye que el acompañamiento tutorial constituye un componente estratégico para el desarrollo de competencias investigativas en la educación superior, y que su fortalecimiento requiere de políticas públicas, cooperación interinstitucional y formación continua del tutor, con miras a consolidar un entorno educativo más justo, ético y sostenible en América Latina.

Palabras clave: Creencias, acompañamiento tutorial, América Latina.
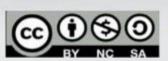
INTRODUCTION

This initiative constitutes a preliminary approach aimed at fostering reflection and awareness regarding the dynamics characterizing tutor-tutee interactions within the Latin American university context. Through case analysis, it addresses the beliefs, perceptions, and conditions that influence this relationship from the perspective of its key stakeholders.

It relates to multiple factors that affect the tutorial process, including public and university policies, the perceptions of those involved, pedagogical strategies employed, logistical conditions, funding, and institutional infrastructure particularly in the context of final projects and thesis writing.

This study is framed as a preliminary phase of a broader comparative research project currently in progress, involving key informants and specialists from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela. Within this framework, a normative approach is also adopted, taking as a reference the Constitution of Ecuador (2008), which enshrines in Article 27 the right to an education of "quality and warmth."

This principle is particularly relevant given the lack of precedents in explicitly considering it from a constitutional perspective in regional educational praxis. Thus, the study of tutor-student interaction in the context of higher education in Latin America emerges as a growing line of inquiry.

Its analysis enables a deeper understanding of this academic relationship through approaches that integrate not only quality standards but also the emotional dimensions influencing the tutorial experience. In this regard, the need is acknowledged for theoretical and methodological frameworks that facilitate the analysis of the beliefs guiding tutorial practices, considering the institutional and human factors shaping these experiences. The central aim of this reflection is to examine the elements conditioning the effectiveness of the tutorial relationship by identifying both the underlying dynamics and the investigative approaches that allow for exploration of commonalities and differences in the beliefs and experiences of the involved actors. This effort is aligned with the objectives of the Red Internacional de Investigation REDIIGEC-Ecuador, which is promoting a regional comparative study. From this perspective, the goal is to construct a robust methodological framework that enables both empirical and conceptual approaches to the factors influencing tutor tutee interaction in Latin American university settings.

The research draws on a theoretical review that systematizes various studies, academic articles, and documents related to tutorial support in higher education. Empirical evidence, methodological frameworks, and multivariate analyses from recent sources, relevant precedents, and specialized authors are considered. Throughout the development of the study, research is highlighted that applies quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches, as well as different theoretical schools and challenges related to both didactic and emotional aspects of tutoring. Techniques for data collection and analysis relevant to addressing the phenomenon are also examined. Furthermore, diverse factors affecting the quality of tutorial support are made visible, such as the quality of communication among actors, the organizational structure of institutions, and the pedagogical and research competencies of both tutors and students. These elements represent critical nodes limiting effective tutorial progress and invite deeper reflection on the process. Motivated by these concerns, a group of teacher researchers joined efforts to explore tutorial practices under the hypothesis that similar situations may be replicating across other countries in the region.
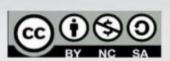
Likewise, the analysis considers emerging variables such as the virtualization of tutorial processes and the disruptive entry of artificial intelligence into academia phenomena that have significantly transformed modes of knowledge production. Consequently, this initiative is presented as the result of a regional articulation among academics from three Latin American countries, with the purpose of generating inputs to support the design of public policies, pedagogical strategies, and institutional conditions that strengthen tutorial relationships in universities, promoting a solid research culture aimed at academic and professional development of students, as well as the progress of our societies.

DEVELOPMENT

A Persistent Situation Over Time: Background from the Year 2004

The origin of this line of research dates to 2004, when an exploratory study was conducted in Venezuela and presented at a national higher education congress organized by the then Ministry of University Education.

This study revealed a series of conditions requiring urgent attention.

The research involved a sample of 35 graduates who had completed their thesis projects. The findings highlighted concerning situations. For instance, in response to the question, "*Did you cry during the process of writing your thesis?*", 45% of respondents selected the option "At least once." Additionally, the quantitative results presented in Table 1 revealed further difficulties associated with the process, such as lack of regulatory clarity, arbitrary impositions by the tutor, limited access to bibliography, high costs, and a widespread perception of insufficient learning or methodological mastery.

Table 1.
Perceived Difficulties During Thesis Development (2004)

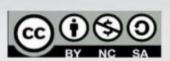| Category	Response Rate
Incompetent tutor	80 %
Lack of bibliographic material	40 %
High costs	100 %
Confusing guidance	100 %
Tutor's imposition of personal criteria	100 %
Tutor rejected everything	100 %
Tutor rechazaba todo	100 %
Learning from the experience (response: none)	87 %
Mastery in thesis development (response: none)	92 %
Aversion to research-related subjects	82 %

In addition to the quantitative data, anecdotal records added depth to the diagnosis. Among the testimonies were accounts such as: "*My tutor had a conflict with one of the jury members, and I ended up being harmed*" or "*I showed the tutor the university's regulatory manual, pointing out that his instructions were incorrect. His response was: 'Ignore that manual. I'm in charge here. If not, I won't sign anything.'*"

According to the records, these types of experiences were common in a significant percentage of cases. Another noteworthy finding was the acknowledgment of unethical practices, such as hiring external services to prepare the theses, often with unsatisfactory or even fraudulent results. These elements, already observed at that time, underscored the need for a deep reflection on the conditions that were hindering what should be a formative and rigorous academic process.

Two Decades Later: Review of Background in the Year 2021

Nearly twenty years later, in 2021, the analysis of this phenomenon was revisited within the framework of a doctoral investigation, broadening the original perspective to include not only the students' views but also those of tutors and thesis committee members.

Furthermore, a new and impactful variable was incorporated: the virtualization of the tutorial process, driven by the 2020 pandemic, which acted as a catalyst in transforming academic advising environments. The updated results are presented in Table 2 and reflect a series of persistent tensions in the process of developing graduation projects.
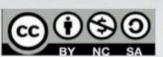
Table 2.
Perceived Difficulties in the Thesis Process – Student Category (2021)

Category	Percentage of Responses
Access to information (not frequent)	83 %
Anxiety (very frequent / frequent)	51 %
Overall tutor performance (fair)	71 %
Conflict resolution by the tutor (not frequent)	77 %
Warmth in the tutor's attention (not frequent)	90 %
Encouragement of student initiative (not frequent)	90 %
Moral support from the tutor (not frequent)	69 %
Importance of the process in life project (not important)	47 %
Overall satisfaction with the process (not satisfied)	82 %

In turn, the testimonies collected from faculty tutors and thesis defense committee members revealed alarming situations. Among the statements cited by Salas (2021) are: "*The written work was flawless, but the oral presentation was very poor. Clearly, the student did not do it*"; "*I was offered bribes, such as money or trips, in exchange for approving a thesis*"; and "*I have to supervise more than 30 thesis students, upload their progress, run plagiarism checks, review planning and other documents all before the platform closes in three hours.*"

These experiences reinforce the idea that the issues identified in 2004 have not only persisted but have also evolved and adapted to new technological environments, without achieving a structural improvement in the quality of tutorial support. The comparative analysis of data collected in 2004 and 2021 shows that despite advances in connectivity and digital tools, unfavorable conditions continue to hinder a satisfactory tutorial experience.

Among the most significant issues are the absence of emotional support, perceived lack of interest from tutors, and, in some cases, insufficient clarity in the development of the research process. Considering this scenario, there is an urgent need to rethink tutorial mediation with the aim of designing institutional strategies that promote more effective, ethical, and humane academic guidance. This includes revising internal policies, providing continuous training for tutors, and creating conditions that allow students to undertake the research process in an environment characterized by respect, support, and academic rigor.

Subjects and Processes in University Tutoring as a Pathway to Knowledge Production

In the university context, tutoring represents a key instance for academic development, particularly in the guidance of graduation projects. This process is conceived as a formative modality focused on student learning, supported by pedagogical and methodological tools aimed at enhancing their research and professional capacities (Novoa & Pirela, 2021).

This guidance essentially involves two actors: the faculty tutor (or thesis advisor) and the student. Both interact within an environment shaped by multiple institutional and contextual factors, such as national science and technology policies, curricular guidelines, available resources, institutional research agendas, sources of funding, and infrastructure conditions.

From a sociocultural perspective, Vygotsky's contributions allow us to understand this interaction as a process mediated by language and the tools available in each cultural context. Learning, in this sense, does not occur in isolation but rather emerges from a dialogic and structured relationship between the student and more experienced actors.

The role of the tutor is therefore associated with the construction of pedagogical scaffolding that enables the student to progress toward higher levels of understanding, through mediation tailored to their zone of proximal development. This perspective aligns with the proposals of the constructivist approach, widely adopted in Latin American educational systems, which promotes education centered on the active participation of the student in the construction of their own knowledge (Pareja, Aguirre, & Guanilo, 2023).

This complexity has generated increasing interest in the academic community, as the importance of studying how these dynamics manifest in tutorial practice is recognized. Understanding the human dimension of knowledge involves analyzing the interactions, tensions, and conditions that shape the tutor–tutee relationship (Novoa, Pirela & Yecid, 2023). In this context, López, Tobón, Veytia, and Juárez (2021) emphasize that mediation in the educational field should be oriented toward inclusion, collaborative knowledge management, and problem-solving, framed within values such as ethics, sustainability, and collective work.

Conceiving this process as a system implies that all actors must perform their roles with commitment, willingness, and responsibility to achieve common objectives: the rigorous and ethical completion of a graduation project. Beyond the completion of the project, however, the goal is for the experience to be configured as an enriching didactic process, grounded in respect, cordiality, and academic solidity.

Despite the intentions expressed in institutional documents, many students report difficulties in the development of their research.

These range from a lack of effective communication with their tutors to obstacles related to technical, economic, or interpersonal deficiencies. As reflected in the data collected by Salas (2021) and summarized in Table 3, there is a clear dissonance between the perceptions of tutors and students regarding the quality of the support received and provided.

Table 3.
Comparison of Perceptions Regarding University Tutoring (2021)

Category	Tutors – Highlighted Perceptions	Students – Highlighted Perceptions
Relationship between research policies and implementation	Students show no interest in institutional research policies	Lack of informative mechanisms regarding research policies
Performance evaluation among actors	"They don't want to work," "They just want to pass," "They don't study the materials provided"	"Doesn't provide feedback," "Doesn't support," "I don't understand what they're asking for," "I feel humiliated," "Confusing guidelines," "Too expensive"

These tensions, in addition to hindering the formative process, can lead to delays in graduation, which directly impacts the student's professional development. As López et al. (2021) propose, tutorial mediation must be understood as a transformative process, in which the instructor not only guides but also fosters the student's ethical, intellectual, and emotional growth, in alignment with the principle of "educational warmth" enshrined in the Constitution of Ecuador (2008).

An illustrative example of the importance of tutorial support is that of the National Autonomous University of Mexico, which designed a specialized course to guide students in the development of their theses. This initiative was a response to an alarming statistic: 70% of students opted for graduation modalities that excluded research (Fundación UNAM, 2020). This phenomenon is not isolated; it reflects a widespread trend in many Latin American universities, which necessitates a rethinking of the goals and methods of thesis work as a privileged space for developing research competencies.

It is indeed significant that universities recognize the complexity of the tutorial relationship and create institutional conditions that encourage constructive interaction between faculty and students. Studying this relationship helps identify areas for improvement that can inform the design of policies, programs, and strategies aimed at strengthening the research culture in Latin America, with direct impacts on educational quality and regional development.

Theoretical Approaches to Understanding University Tutoring

In the field of higher education, tutoring has been consolidated as an essential practice that supports students throughout their academic trajectory, particularly during decisive stages such as the development of research projects. This process requires academic, pedagogical, and human conditions that ensure structured guidance aligned with professional training objectives. From a conceptual standpoint, tutorial guidance in thesis development can be grounded in constructivist and narrative theories, which recognize the student as the protagonist in the construction of knowledge.

Furthermore, if the theory of social systems is incorporated, the environment is understood to function both as a context and as an agent capable of transformation. This perspective highlights the importance of educational interventions that not only guide the student but also influence the institutional setting in which they operate (Labraña, 2022).

Marcelo (2015), citing Rodríguez in his review of tutorial models, emphasizes that academic support must be aligned with institutional missions and visions, while also responding to the expectations of both students and society. Tutoring, therefore, should not be viewed merely as technical supervision but as an experience that enhances the student's integral development.

In this vein, Crespo (2020) stresses that tutors must be trained not only in academic aspects but also in emotional and social dimensions, fostering a climate of trust that facilitates the student's personal and professional growth. Tutoring thus becomes a space where key decisions are made, critical skills are developed, and the emotional support necessary to meet the demands of the research process is provided.

Based on these premises, the need to diversify tutoring modalities is acknowledged. Individual strategies allow for personalized attention to the student's concerns, while group sessions promote the exchange of experiences, collaborative learning, and peer feedback. Both approaches should be integrated into regulatory, logistical, and curricular frameworks that define the institutional conditions for their effective implementation (Rodríguez et al., 2008).

Indeed, Rodríguez and his team propose a model that organizes tutoring into various dimensions which, when addressed in an integrated manner, allow for a comprehensive understanding of and response to the challenges identified in university academic support.

Table 4.
Dimensions of the University Tutorial Model by Rodríguez et al. (2008)

Dimension	Description
Cognitive and intellectual	Development of skills for decision-making, problem-solving, and the strengthening of autonomous learning.
Emotional and affective	Promotion of self-awareness, social skills, and the construction of positive self-esteem.
Social	Encouragement of participation in academic communities and engagement with the broader environment.
Professional	Guidance toward academic and career pathways, as well as the integration of practical experiences.

This comprehensive approach acknowledges that learning processes are intertwined with cognitive, emotional, and contextual factors. Therefore, its incorporation into tutorial practice can facilitate the development of key competencies for students' academic, professional, and social lives.

Within this framework, university tutoring is configured as a cross-cutting strategy that integrates pedagogical support, personal guidance, and vocational orientation. Likewise, this model recognizes the need to adapt tutorial processes to institutional and demographic specificities, considering historical trajectories, available resources, and the sociocultural characteristics of the student population.

From this perspective, it becomes essential for universities to strengthen the training and professional development of their tutors by providing them with relevant didactic tools to meet current challenges. A notable practice in this regard is the use of methodologies such as Service-Learning, successfully implemented in Anglo-Saxon contexts and with strong potential for adaptation in Latin American settings (Rodríguez & Rodríguez, 2020).
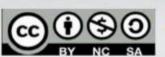
Finally, it is necessary to build integrated guidance systems that promote articulation between tutorial programs and institutional support services. This synergy will not only enrich the academic experience of students but also contribute to their formation as reflective citizens, capable of confronting the challenges of their environment with social commitment and critical thinking (Rojas, 2018).

Methodological Considerations for Comparative Studies on the Tutor–Tutee Relationship

- Foundations and Approach to the Methodology

This study aims to lay the groundwork for future research that expands the analysis of tutor tutee interaction in Latin American universities. In line with this goal, the research team has projected a series of ongoing actions intended to deepen the study of this topic from a comparative perspective among countries in the region. Within this framework, the need to design appropriate methodological strategies are acknowledged strategies that allow for a rigorous examination of the relational dynamics that characterize tutorial support. This line of analysis represents a growing area of interest for the regional academic community, as it enables the identification of common patterns, shared challenges, and opportunities for improvement in university tutoring processes. The proposed methodological approach aims to generate relevant data that can support decisions aimed at strengthening this educational experience. To achieve this, it is considered essential to study the beliefs that guide tutorial practices, as well as the emotional, institutional, and pedagogical factors that affect the quality of the relationship between instructors and students. Based on this premise, various academic works addressing tutoring in university settings were reviewed, with emphasis on methodological foundations, multivariate approaches, interpretative frameworks, and data collection techniques. This review has allowed for the identification of relevant proposals that guide the study's methodological design.
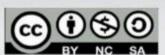
- Methodological Design, Techniques, and Instruments

Given the multidimensional complexity of the tutor tutee relationship, the proposed methodological design adopts a mixed methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative tools. This decision responds to the need to capture the interpretive richness of experiences, as well as to identify generalizable patterns based on systematized data, as suggested by various authors and recent studies (Betancourt, 2019). Regarding data collection, the use of structured surveys and in-depth interviews with key informants is planned. These techniques will make it possible to gather both broad perceptions and context specific testimonies about the tutorial process. The combination of both approaches will provide a more comprehensive view of the tutor–student interaction across the university environments analyzed. For the questionnaire design, it is proposed to include both dichotomous and polytomous closed questions to facilitate statistical analysis. This instrument will be validated through expert judgment, and its reliability will be determined using appropriate procedures for comparative studies. The study sample is estimated to include approximately 3,000 graduate students from seven Latin American countries. On the other hand, the interviews will allow for a deeper exploration of the experiences and evaluations of tutors and tutees, providing complementary information that will enrich the interpretation of the quantitative findings (Feria, Matilla & Mantecón, 2020). The methodological strategy includes a five-phase sequential design: hermeneutic document analysis, fieldwork, interpretative analysis, integration of results, and theorization. Each phase has a specific purpose that contributes to the development of the study and the construction of a comprehensive framework regarding the object of investigation.

- Analysis, Integration of Results, and Expected Contributions

The interpretative analysis phase will focus on the processing and coding of the collected information, enabling the identification of recurring patterns, emerging categories, and significant relationships. In the case of qualitative data, thematic categorization techniques will be applied, while quantitative data will be processed through statistical analysis, including correlational and multivariate procedures to contrast variables. Subsequently, in the integration stage, triangulation of results from different sources and methods will be carried out. This phase will seek to consolidate an explanatory framework that reflects the complexity of the tutor–tutee interaction, as well as the contextual conditions that shape it in each participating country. The final theorization will aim to elaborate a robust interpretative construct that enables the understanding of the underlying structure of beliefs, perceptions, and dynamics related to tutorial support in Latin America. This construction will serve as a basis for formulating recommendations addressed to higher education institutions, to optimize academic policies, pedagogical strategies, and the organizational conditions that support the tutorial function. Ultimately, the results of this study are expected to provide valuable input for the design of public policies and institutional guidelines that promote more effective, ethical, and student-centered tutorial support, recognizing students as active agents in the construction of knowledge.

CONCLUSIONS

Tutorial work in the Latin American university context faces profound challenges arising from a complex network of interrelated institutional, human, and cultural factors. These variables are intertwined and mutually influential, directly impacting the quality of support students receive during their research training processes. The analysis conducted highlights the urgent need to adopt comprehensive, person-centered approaches in tutorial practices. This means considering not only academic guidance but also the emotional and social support students require to fully engage in their university experience.

In this regard, the prevailing trends in higher education in the region, particularly those linked to constructivism, project-based learning, and competency development, offer a strong theoretical and normative foundation that supports the recognition of students as active agents in the construction of their knowledge and educational trajectory. Nevertheless, the tensions between what is prescribed in regulatory frameworks and what occurs in day-to-day academic reality have been repeatedly identified in the studies reviewed. These contradictions reveal the gap between institutional intentions and the actual conditions in which tutoring takes place in many Latin American contexts.

Faced with this situation, it is essential to formulate public and institutional policies that address the multiple dimensions of tutorial support, ensuring that this process goes beyond merely meeting academic requirements and instead promotes a comprehensive, empathetic, and socially and culturally responsive learning environment. In this endeavor, coordination among universities, the productive sector, and government agencies emerge as a key component. Such collaboration can contribute to strengthening infrastructure, funding, and the development of technical and research capacities among students, enabling the effective application of acquired knowledge in real world contexts.

In conclusion, systematic study and continuous improvement of university tutoring is not only a relevant necessity but also a strategic commitment to regional development. Building an academic culture rooted in science, technology, and research constitutes an essential path for overcoming the conditions of inequality and dependency that have historically hindered sustainable progress in Latin America.
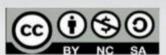
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