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A Profile Outline of Higher Education E-Tutoring Programs for the Digital-Native Student – Literature Review

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Abstract

In today's digital literacy society, education is facing challenges that emphasize the need to reconsider the traditional paper-pencil methods of instruction. Thus, e-tutoring programs have the potential to enhance students' academic achievement through counselling and learning-supporting activities. The present paper examines the results of the literature research (i.e. systematic review) related to e-tutoring in higher education, aiming to outline a profile for the higher education e-tutoring programs. Also, we aim to identify the Service-Learning related features of the e-tutoring programs found in the literature. The purpose of this study is to aid instructors designing friendly and more effective e-tutoring programs, well-suited for the digital-native student.

Keywords: e-tutoring programs, digital native students, academic performance.

1. Introduction

Traditionally, education was designed and conceptualized as a face-to-face instructional process aiming to support and develop students' personality and native potential to their fullest. This educational ideal (i.e. the main goal of a country's educational system) still supports the same core beliefs today, but the means and channels of

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designing the instructional process had to continuously adapt to the social and technological changes, so that they can meet today's digital natives expectancies.

According to Prensky (2001), today's students have different thinking patterns and process information differently by virtue of their "native-speaking" ability of the digital language of computers, internet and video games. Moreover, today's digital natives interact (communicate, share, exchange), create, meet, coordinate, evaluate, learn, search, analyse, report, socialize and evolve differently (Prensky, 2004), due to a lifetime of exposure to new means of technology. The nucleus variable imposing changes in every major field of today's society, especially in education, is the reigning of the Web 2.0 era. First described by Berners-Lee (2005), the concept refers to "a collaborative medium, a place for all to meet, read and write". The Web 2.0 brings forward new tools and practices for the digital tech and it appears to have a great potential for the transformation of education (Crook, 2012). Web 2.0 is driven by user-generated content for a more efficient and time-saving information exchange. Moreover, the new web is also focusing on the user's experience (UX) through user-centred design and other user interaction practices, so that the online experience becomes pleasant, entertaining, incentive and productive for users, especially students.

According to Crook (2012), Web 2.0 is "…also about communication practices and distinctive human activities made possible by this infrastructure". Thus, such online environments would be great assets to education because they can offer digital-natives and lifelong learners extra career support in the form of e-learning software and e-tutoring tools.

2. E-tutoring

It is generally acknowledged that academic tutoring is a support and counselling system designed for students, aiming to facilitate their integration in universities by offering guidance when choosing the best social, cultural and educational options, but also to motivate and develop students' skills and improve their academic performance (Babes-Bolyai University, http://www.ubbcluj.ro/). The fundament of academic tutoring is the master-student relationship, where the tutor is a partner and a participant, which enhances students' scientific and personal development (Tapper & Palfreyman, 2000 apud Krajewska & Kowalczuk-Waledziak, 2014). As a form of education per se, tutoring focuses on the personalization of instruction and learning processes by varying interaction methods, becoming and instructional-learning-event (Bourdeau & Grandbastien, 2012). Most of the higher education institutions indicate the following advantages that the tutoring programs might offer to the students: (1) helping students become aware of their optimal academic development trajectory, (2) helping students develop a sense of self-management and responsibility in terms of personal and professional development, (3) letting students know that they are not alone in the education process, they can benefit from support, (4) improving students' experience at the university, (5) helping clarify students' professional options and goals for further development and (6) at the institutional level, facilitating the development and implementation of strategies and activities that have a positive impact on students' experience (for further details, see http://www.ubbcluj.ro/).

The term e-tutoring has extended the framework of traditional tutoring, so that its purpose could be achieved in the virtual environments as well. Thus, e-tutoring refers to individualized support from a tutor to a single or a small group of tutees that uses the Internet as its medium of communication (Flowers, 2007; Johnson & Bratt, 2009 apud Corrigan, 2012). The online tutor refers to any person undertaking a role to support and enable students to learn online effectively (Higginson, 2000 apud Kumar & Jayaraman, 2012) and it implies a broad spectrum of functions: the setting and administration of learning-environments as well as technical and social support (Kerres & Thomas, 2000 apud Adamus et al., 2009). There are numerous studies demonstrating the effectiveness of traditional and online tutoring as a valid form of intervention ((Biesinger & Crippen, 2008; Fuchs, Fuchs et al., 2008; Fuchs, Seethaler et al., 2008; Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, & Jones, 2009; Merriman & Codding, 2008; Song, 2005 apud Corrigan, 2012), but, in order to design an optimal e-tutoring program, one should first review the existing programs and identify the specific elements related to the efficiency of these programs at all the potential levels regarding their implementation (i.e. technological support, categories of tutees and tutors, outcomes of the e-tutoring etc.).