

Academic tuition: perceptions of students and professors concerning pedagogical practice in dental education

Raul Elton Araújo Borges*, Bruno Cesar de Vasconcelos Gurgel**, Maria Cristina dos Santos Medeiros**, Patrícia dos Santos Calderon**

* Ph.D. student, Graduate Program in Dental Sciences, Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte

** Associated Professor, Department of Dentistry, Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte

Received July 17, 2019. Approved May 25, 2020.

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to evaluate the role of academic tuition and the challenges related to this pedagogical practice during academic education in Dentistry, considering the perception of professors and students. This is a quantitative-qualitative study, developed in the Dental school of Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN). Data was collected by means of semi-structured questionnaires, answered by 106 students, and 15 professors with expertise in academic tuition. Data analysis was descriptive and a qualitative analysis was carried out using the content analysis method. Student perceptions showed weaknesses in the performance of academic tuition, mostly concerning the relationship between tutor and students, frequency of discussions, as well as the method adopted. The professors pointed out the need for permanent education strategies, aiming at their qualifications to the tuition. It is concluded that there is an underuse of this pedagogical practice in dentistry education. To overcome this weakness and the challenges inherent to the practice, in the view of the students, it is necessary that the tutors become more present during the onset of their university life by early directions on their responsibilities and supervision of the education process along the graduation. For professors, it is necessary to provide permanent strategies for academic tuition improvements.

Descriptors: Education, Dental. Faculty, Dental. Staff Development.

1 INTRODUCTION

As a result of the National Curricular Guidelines (DCN) employment for undergraduate health courses in mid-2002, many proposals for curricular changes were observed in several Dental schools in the country^{1,2}. Such changes were mainly guided by the adoption of new teaching-learning methodologies, articulation between the areas of knowledge, curriculum flexibility and focus to the population's needs³. The DCN defines a solid instructing base, indicating what was required by the institutions regarding the quality of education^{4,5}.

The change process was carried out by curricular adjustments, which get numerous challenges, including breaking with structures and traditional teaching models and preparing health professionals with skills that allow them to recover the essential dimension of care^{6,7}. It is worth mentioning that these discussions are inserted in a broader context and are derived from the achievements obtained over the past years, both in Education and Health fields.

In this scenario, the UFRN Dental School has undergone profound reformulations in its curricular matrix since 2015, because of the weaknesses found in the previous curriculum and the requirements signaled in the DCN for Dental schools, which constituted the guidelines for curricular structure preparing and carrying out of innovative pedagogical practices.

However, this process of changes and curricular restructuring is gradual and challenging, as there is a need for structural changes, requiring adjustments of several pedagogical practices of higher education institutions (HEIs)^{8,9}. Because of this panorama, the Structuring Teaching Nucleus (NDE) of UFRN Dental School was demanded to discuss the academic tuition as a pedagogical practice

strategy.

At UFRN the academic tuition aims to contribute to the students' integration into university life, supervising them in academic activities, a function regulated by resolution No. 171/2013-CONSEPE/UFRN¹⁰, which discusses the tutors' duties. The tutors' main functions were: collaborating with the course coordination and NDE in presenting the pedagogical project and the university structure to students; supervise the students' academic development; plan, with the students, a curriculum flow compatible with their interests and possibilities; guide decision-making regarding academic activities, in addition to the other duties provided.

In this context, to achieve the possible advances in the perspective of improving what is being developed in the UFRN Dental school, there is an increasing need for discussion between professors and students on the current limitations and possibilities of changes for the concreteness of an effective, qualified and transforming academic tuition. Thus, the objective of this study was to evaluate the role of academic tuition and current challenges related to this pedagogical practice in the perception of professors and students of the UFRN Dental school.

2 METHODOLOGY

This is a descriptive, exploratory and quantitative-qualitative study, developed at the UFRN Dental school to understand the perception of professors and students about academic tuition and the current challenges of this pedagogical practice. The research project was approved by the UFRN Central Research Ethics Committee (CAAE 13202419.6.0000.5292, draft 3.455.507/2019).

Professors who had already performed the tutor function and students admitted in Dental

school were invited to participate in the study. Semi-structured questionnaires, previously tested, were used as a data collection method. All participating subjects were previously informed about the research purposes, and only those who agreed to collaborate were included, by signing the Informed Consent Form.

All questionnaires that had filling errors were excluded from the analysis. The instrument did not require the identification and was composed by objective and discursive questions related to academic tuition, such as: the role of the tutor, ideal moment for first meeting, situations that the tuition is needed, which moments they had or would like to receive instructions and solutions to improve academic tuition. The professors' questionnaire, on the other hand, consisted only of open questions, related to their experience as an academic tutor, activities, challenges and suggestions to overcome difficulties and limitations.

For data analysis, objective questions were analyzed quantitatively by means of descriptive statistics. The discursive questions were interpreted qualitatively by the content analysis method¹¹.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sample was composed by 15 professors and 106 students (46 students from the initial periods (2nd to 5th periods) and 60 from the final periods (6th to 9th)).

The perceptions of students concerning academic tuition showed differences according to the course stage. Thirty-two (70%) students from the initial periods indicated that they did not know the role of the academic tuition, while 38 (63%) of those who attended the final periods answered that they did know. The narratives of students corroborate with the obligations of the

academic tuition arranged in the institutional resolution, as can be seen in the students' reports.

"Guide students concerning curricular questions, mandatory and elective courses, individual difficulties" (2nd period).

"Guide students in academic decision-making, courses suspension, options more suitable for students depending on the period they are in (6th period).

"It is the professor responsible for ensuring that the student is having the necessary and expected academic experience. That is fulfilling the expected workload, that has links in projects and other activities needed to graduate" (8th period).

These attributions are part of a broader discussion on the role of the dental education professor after the curricular changes, concerning to knowledge diffusion, the professor must focus on teaching activities, monitoring, supervising, coordination and integration of students in research groups^{12,13}. Authors point out that for this proposal of teaching improvement, changes in the pedagogical projects and in the educational practices that guide Dental education are essential, what produces resistance of some professors and students, especially those most linked to traditional education¹²⁻¹⁴.

When asked about meeting the tutor, only 4 (9%) of the beginners and 3 (5%) of the concluding answered that they did not meet their tutor once. Among students who met the tutor, the most reported moment of the first meeting was in the second period for beginning students (23, 55%) and in the concluding students (18, 30%), as illustrated in figure 1.

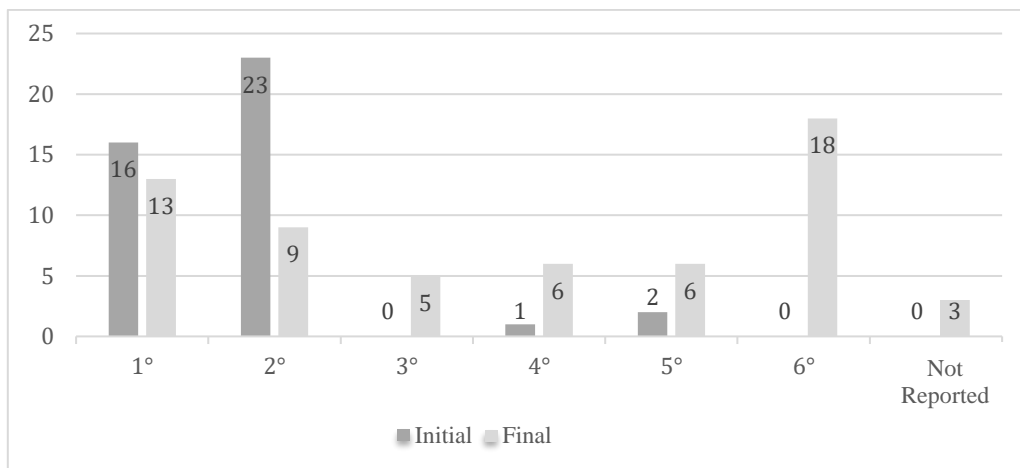


Figure 1. Period of the first meeting with the tutor. Initial (2nd to 5th periods), Final (6th to 9th periods).

The later meeting between student-tutor is harmful for an effective tuition and the tutor must be more available and establish a link that brings a closer relationship, as noted in the following speech.

"Every semester my tutor is willing to help me, asks if there is a problem that needs to be solved, as well as advising about mandatory and electives courses, this makes all the difference, but I know that not all professors here are like this"(8th period).

This evidence, also observed in other studies^{15,16}, demonstrates the importance of the methodology and pedagogical practice used by the faculty to facilitate, understand and increase students' interest in academic tuition. In this context, when this meeting does not happen early at the beginning of graduation, when students have many anxieties and doubts about the course, this relationship can become compromised.

Also, most of the meetings between student and tutor took place in the classroom, when the course was being taught by the tutor, especially in the initial periods. Besides, 34 (74%) of the students in the initial periods and

33 (55%) of those in the final periods had not yet received any type of academic tuition. For the ones that had received some support, most meetings took place only once or twice, until the time of the survey. Thirty-one (67%) of initial and 36 (60%) of final periods students stated that at some point in the graduation they needed support and only 10 (32%) and 16 of them (46%) have their request answered by the tutor, respectively.

Regarding the situations in which students would like to receive or have received academic tuition, the main situations addressed were about complementary and elective courses, enrollments, meetings, post-graduation, curriculum vitae, research projects, internships and costs related to career. The following narratives illustrate these observations.

"I would have liked to have received information at each stage about: elective courses, how to join a project, additional hours required to complete the graduation" (4th period).

"Guidelines related to the curriculum vitae and other activities related to the research and postgraduate course" (9th

period).

"At the beginning of the clinical courses, material prices, I was a little lost. In the elaboration of abstracts for meeting and scholarship, answering questions about the job market"(5th period).

In this scenario, it is evident the need to incorporate the principles of the DCN, which signals the students' proactive behavior to the teaching-learning process and the professor's role as facilitator^{16,17}. Thus, with the use of a contemporary teaching methodology, professors should be able to reflect on their importance in conducting academic tuition, contributing to the inclusion of students into university life, placing them in the role of protagonists of their graduation, having learned about academic activities^{6,17,18}.

Another important finding was that on several occasions there was a lack of knowledge about the roles of the academic tuition from the student, which happened when they indicated situations not consistent with academic tuition activities.

Students signaled some suggestions to improve the performance of academic tuition. Among them, the importance of the first meeting, better communication between student and tutor, academic organization in each stage, frequency of meetings, monitoring of academic activities and complementary hours. The following statements highlight some of these suggestions.

"Face-to-face meeting during the first period to introduce and speak about tutor function, I'm about to graduate and I don't even know my tutor yet" (9th period).

"Create a better communication between tutor and student, even online. Make meetings every six months to

discuss relevant topics to the students" (7th period).

"Conducting face-to-face meetings to assess student performance. Especially concerning mandatory hours" (9th period).

"Guidance on the information of scholarship opportunities that the university has since the first period" (2nd period).

The students' suggestions signal that tutors become more present in the initial university life, with early support on their obligations and mediating the academic process in all stages of the course.

The 15 professors participating in this study had expertise in the following areas: Preventive and Social Dentistry, Restorative Dentistry, Orthodontics, Endodontics, Periodontics, Implantology, Odontopediatrics and Dental Prosthesis. Regarding the period that they attended as tutor, an average interval of 2 to 4.5 years was observed.

Most professors reported not having received any support or training to perform as an academic tutor, with some exceptions, markedly among young professors. For them, the main reasons indicated for having been chosen for the tuition were related to joining the university as professor, experience and/or involvement with administrative issues, as noted in the following narratives.

"I had just joined the university, and then the coordinator invited me to be an academic tutor";

"I was chosen because I was new in the university, I was part of the course collegiate and I was involved with some academic issues";

"I don't know what the criteria were at the time. Maybe my involvement and commitment to the undergraduate

course, maybe my academic experience”.

Among the main activities cited by tutors in the exercise of their functions are, the orientation and validation of course enrollments, directions to complementary activities, monitoring the completion of academic hours, answering questions about the course, semiannual meetings with students, checking specific situations.

Professors highlighted the lack of clarity about how an academic tutor should perform as the main challenge met in the tutor function, further the unfamiliarity with the curricular structure, the correlation among disciplines (co- requirement, prerequisite, etc.), meeting with the students in the first stage. Some authors indicate that these difficulties take on particular relevance in undergraduate health courses, where the different teaching-learning scenarios, the countless assignments of professors, the work overload and the complexity of the curricular structure make the challenge of changes even greater^{19,20}. Professors listed some suggestions with proposals to overcome such challenges, presented in the statements below.

“That a list of obligations of the tutor as well as the student be listed”;

“Training of future tutors before the start of activities and meetings, under the responsibility of course coordinator”;

“Conducting workshops, courses and discussions so that we can be more aware of our role, as well as knowing how to better guide students on relevant issues”;

“Conducting meetings with students every semester to talk about academic tuition in the semester”;

“Implementation of an academic tuition

manual”.

In dentistry, the quality of teaching is related, among other factors, to the qualification and permanent education (both technical and didactic-pedagogical) of professors²¹. Thus, considering the results, it is possible to reflect that despite all the potential of academic tuition as a pedagogical strategy in training, it is still underused by both students and professors at UFRN.

This weakness presented in the reports of professors and students' experiences shows that permanent education constitutes a privileged space for reflection on teaching practice, especially focused on the role of the academic professor. The role of permanent education would be to encourage, in all scenarios, the problematization of experiences, and to expand the exchange of experiences among participants, favoring personal development and the labor process^{21,22}. In a universe of possibilities, the proposals for teaching development in Dentistry that have been implemented and signaled in undergraduate courses, have led to reflection on the most diverse teaching practices at the national level and need to be disseminated.

It is well known that proposals for changes in pedagogical practices that directly impact the quality of teaching and training in Dentistry should provide elements in which the understanding of the DCN is clear, in its essence and principles, especially about the role of the professor and the students in the teaching-learning process^{1,6,23}. Thus, the commitment of professors is essential, and that the institution must assume the training and qualification of professors and the appreciation of the role of academic tuition, reflecting the desired results, both for students and professors.

Given the complexity involved in

changes in pedagogical practices in health education, the results of this investigation were essential to guide the NDE and the coordination of the UFRN Dental school in overcoming the difficulties and weaknesses encountered by students and professors, concerning academic tuition.

Among the strategies that have already been sent by the institution, the creation of an Academic Tuition Manual for the Dental school, highlighting the function, attributions and methods that should be used in the academic tuition in UFRN Dental school. Also, professor training workshops are being considered, given the need to provide permanent education and professor training, to perform as facilitators of the academic process. Finally, it is hoped that the results discussed in this investigation will also serve as a reflection on this pedagogical practice in other Brazilian HEIs.

4 CONCLUSION

Even with its potential as a pedagogical strategy in the integration of students into university life, academic tuition is still underused by students and professors.

RESUMO

Orientação acadêmica: percepções de discentes e docentes sobre a prática pedagógica na formação em Odontologia

O estudo objetivou avaliar o papel da orientação acadêmica e os desafios atuais relacionados a essa prática pedagógica durante a formação acadêmica em Odontologia, na percepção de docentes e discentes. Trata-se de estudo de natureza quantitativa, desenvolvido no curso de Odontologia da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN). A coleta de dados foi realizada por meio de questionários semiestruturados, respondidos por 106 estudantes e 15 professores de Odontologia com experiência

em orientação acadêmica. A análise quantitativa dos resultados utilizou estatísticas descritivas e, na sequência, realizou-se avaliação qualitativa por meio da técnica de análise de conteúdo. As percepções discentes demonstraram fragilidades no desempenho dos professores orientadores acadêmicos, principalmente em relação ao vínculo com a turma, período e frequência dos encontros, assim como metodologia adotada. Os docentes apontaram a necessidade de estratégias de educação permanente, visando sua qualificação para o exercício dessa função. Conclui-se que existe subaproveitamento dessa prática pedagógica na formação em Odontologia. Para superar esta fragilidade e os desafios inerentes à prática, na visão dos discentes é necessário que os orientadores acadêmicos se tornem mais presentes no cotidiano universitário desde o primeiro período, com orientações precoces sobre as suas obrigações e mediando o processo de formação acadêmica em todas as fases do curso. Para os docentes, é necessário investir em processos permanentes de desenvolvimento docente.

Descritores: Educação em Odontologia. Docentes de Odontologia. Desenvolvimento de Pessoal.

REFERENCES

1. Fonseca EP. As diretrizes curriculares nacionais e a formação do cirurgião-dentista brasileiro. *J Manag Prim Health Care*. 2012; 3(2):158-78.
2. Warmling, CM, Marzola, NR, Botazzo C. Da autonomia da boca: práticas curriculares e identidade profissional na emergência do ensino brasileiro da odontologia. *Hist Ciênc Saúde Manguinhos*. 2012; 19 (1):181-95.
3. Zilbovicius C, Araujo ME, Botazzo C, Frias AC, Junqueira SR, Junqueira CR. A paradigm shift in predoctoral dental curricula in Brazil: evaluating the process of change. *J Dent Educ*. 2011; 75 (4):557-64.
4. Freitas SFT, Calvo MCM, Lacerda JT. Saúde coletiva e novas diretrizes

- curriculares em odontologia: uma proposta para graduação. *Trab Educ Saúde*. 2012; 10(2):223-34.
5. Junges R, Stello RS, Rösing CK, Samuel SMW. Impact of new curriculum implementation on student experience in a school of dentistry in Brazil. *Braz Oral Res*. 2011; 25(6):478-84.
 6. Noro LRA, Farias-Santos BCS, Sette-de-Souza PH, Pinheiro IAG, Borges REA, Nunes LMF, et al. O professor (ainda) no centro do processo ensino-aprendizagem em Odontologia. *Rev ABENO*. 2015; 15(1): 2-11.
 7. Secco LG, Pereira MLT. Concepções de qualidade de ensino dos coordenadores de graduação: uma análise dos cursos de odontologia do Estado de São Paulo. *Interface Comun Saúde Educ*. 2010;8(15):313-30.
 8. Scorzoni MF, Bueno SMV, Coscrato G. O currículo e as implicações dos novos paradigmas educacionais na formação do enfermeiro. *Saúde Transform Soc*. 2013; 4(1):11-5.
 9. Ferreira NP, Dantas TS, Sena-Filho M, Rocha DG. Clínica integrada e mudança curricular: desempenho clínico na perspectiva da integralidade. *Pesqui Bras Odontop Clín Integr*. 2012;12(1):33-9.
 10. Ministério da Educação. RESOLUÇÃO Nº 171/2013-CONSEPE, de 5 de novembro de 2013. Regulamento dos Cursos Regulares de Graduação da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte. Natal, RN. 2013. [Cited: March 01, 2019]. Available at: <https://ufrn.br/resources/documentos/regulamentos/regulamento-dos-cursos-regulares-de-graduao-da-UFRN.pdf>.
 11. Bardin, L. Análise de conteúdo. 70 ed. São Paulo: Almedina; 2011.
 12. Toassi RFC, Souza JM, Baumgarten A, Rösing CK. Avaliação curricular na educação superior em odontologia: discutindo as mudanças curriculares na formação em saúde no Brasil. *Rev ABENO*. 2012; 12(2):170-7.
 13. Toassi RFC. Integrated curriculum for teaching dentistry: new directions for training in the field of healthcare. *Interface (Botucatu)*. 2012;16(41):529-42.
 14. Reul MA, Lima ED, Irineu KN, Cardoso RSC, Costa EMMB, Madruga RCR. Metodologias ativas na graduação em Odontologia e a contribuição da monitoria. *Rev ABENO*. 2016; 16 (2): 62-8.
 15. Júnior AMLF, Miranda NR, Assunção R, Silva SA, Oliveira FAM, Oliveira RG. Percepção de estudantes de Odontologia sobre metodologias ativas no processo de ensino-aprendizagem. *Rev ABENO*. 2016; 16(3):66-77.
 16. Semim GM, Souza MCBM, Corrêa AK. Professor como facilitador do processo ensino-aprendizagem: visão de estudante de enfermagem. *Rev Gaúcha Enferm*. Porto Alegre (RS). 2009;30(3):484-91.
 17. Noro LRA, Farias-Santos BCS, Sette-de-Souza PH, Pinheiro IAG, Borges REA, Cruz RKS, et al. Revisiting the Basic Cycle: Prospects by Undergraduates' Students of a Brazilian Dentistry School. *Pesqui Bras Odontop Clin Integr*. 2019; 19(1):e3901.
 18. Lage RH, Almeida SKTT, Vasconcelos GAN, Assaf AV, Robles FRP. Ensino e Aprendizagem em Odontologia: Análise de Sujeitos e Prática. *Rev Bras Edu Med*. 2017; 41 (1): 22-9.
 19. Borges MC, Miranda CH, Santana RC, Bollela VR. Avaliação Formativa e aprendizado na saúde. *Medicina (Ribeirão Preto)*. 2014;47(3):324-31.
 20. Deus JM, Alves DRN, Figueiredo RR, Silva MMM, Amaral AF, Bollelal VR. Aula centrada no aluno versus aula centrada no professor: Desafios para a mudança. *Rev Bras Educ Med*. 2014, 38(4):419-26.
 21. Borges REA, Noro LR. Coerência entre editais de concurso público para professores e Diretrizes Curriculares dos cursos de Odontologia. *Rev ABENO*. 2016; 16(4):29-39.
 22. Lazarin CA, Francischetti I. Educação

Permanente: uma ferramenta para o desenvolvimento docente na graduação. Rev Bras Educ Méd. 2010;34(4):481-6.

23. Brehmer LCF, Ramos FRS. Experiências de integração ensino-serviço no processo de formação profissional em saúde: revisão integrativa. Rev Eletr Enferm. 2014; 16(1):228-37.

Correspondence to:

Raul Elton Araújo Borges

e-mail: raulleton@hotmail.com

Av. Sen. Salgado Filho, 1787 - Lagoa Nova, 59056-000 Natal/RN Brazil