Utopian Speculations on Student Success: Conceptualizing the Value of Mouakhat Within a Neoliberal University Education

by Hachelaf & Parks

Abstract:

Mentoring is recognized as supporting student success, is present in references to good pedagogical practices, but seems to be absent from the vast majority of the Middle East/North African universities. In this article, we suggest that such an absence is due to mentoring not being adequately theorized within regional traditions; mentoring is seen as distinct from the cultures that inform our understandings of educational best practices. To address this lack of a regionally based theoretical framework, this article examines the concept of Mouakhat as a possible framework to address conceptual limitations in how university education is framed and, in doing so, demonstrates the value of communal-based programs, such as university-based mentoring for nontraditional students. In particular, this article argues that the Mouakhat tradition of "brothering/sistering" between Mouhajirin (the new immigrants who were persecuted in Mecca) and Elansar (the inhabitants of Elmadinah) initiated an ethical responsibility of assistance and integration between new and ongoing community members, an ethic which needs to be instilled within university practices and pedagogies. Using the case study of Algerian higher education, we argue that for many nontraditional university students, such as those from rural areas, stepping on campus is a form of immigration and the failure to provide mentoring to them contributes to their high failure rate within Algerian universities. This article begins by contextualizing the stated role of university education in Algeria, with a focus on how such an education attempts to blend global frameworks and local community needs. The article then moves to a consideration of how students self-identified the need for institutional support to succeed in college as demonstrated by students within an international writing collaborative, The Twiza Project. Next, the article proposes how a mentoring program premised on the concept of Mouakhat might address such needs. Finally, the potential value of such a Mouakhat program for students, faculty, and universities is outlined.

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