Psicología Educativa

Vocational guidance programme for unemployed young people

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ABSTRACT

This study presents the structure and fundamental characteristics of a Mixed Experience Training and Employment Program aimed at getting teenagers in rural areas acquainted with the labor world by providing them with training activities. An assessment of the impact of these educational activities on participating students and their satisfaction with them is carried out. Participants were 40 students, aged 16 to 24, from rural areas of the province of Málaga, without previous employment and qualification. Data show that the program has been a successful experience that has helped facilitate labor insertion of participating students. Data also show positive attitudes in students towards the use of new technologies, such as Internet, to facilitate their learning. The students perceived most activities very satisfactory.

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Programa de orientación vocacional para jóvenes desempleados

RESUMEN

Se presenta la estructura y características fundamentales de un programa de experiencias mixtas de formación y empleo cuyo objetivo general fue introducir a jóvenes que viven en núcleos rurales en el mundo laboral, proporcionándoles las actividades formativas necesarias para ello. Se aporta una evaluación del impacto y satisfacción que determinadas actividades educativas ha tenido en el alumnado participante como protagonistas del proceso de enseñanza/aprendizaje. Los participantes fueron 40 alumnos, con edades comprendidas entre 16 y 24 años, del ámbito rural de la provincia de Málaga, sin empleo anterior y sin cualificación profesional. Los datos demuestran que el programa ha sido una experiencia exitosa que ha contribuido a facilitar la inserción sociolaboral del alumnado participante. Los resultados muestran en el alumnado actitudes positivas hacia el uso de las nuevas tecnologías como Internet para facilitar su aprendizaje y que la mayoría de las actividades realizadas les han resultado muy satisfactorias.

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Nowadays, fully adapted to the European Higher Education, we should be more aware than ever of the importance of an adequate vocational guidance, as well as of the enormous benefits of such initiatives and programs for the population in general and particularly for socio-culturally disadvantaged groups –that are especially vulnerable in times of recession.

The Mixed Experience Training and Employment Program [Experiencias Mixtas de Formación y Empleo, EMFE] is a an example of a successful program of the type that public policy should promote in two directions: On one hand, it can be improved by training such as the one considered here for the preparation for active life; on the other hand, measures should be laid down to facilitate social and occupational integration and to promote tutoring, educational and personal attention, such as the ones in this program, aimed at preparing young people for professional practice.

In this program, theory and practice were appropriately combined in each module so that at the end of the course the student had acquired the knowledge and skills that enable them for the professional practice. Thus, the overall objective of the program was to insert young people living in rural communities in the province of Malaga in the labor world, giving them a complete overview of both the physical environment and current employment problems and to take advantage with regard to the labor market. Additionally, they would also achieve a better employability and learn about the latest trends, techniques, and innovations in a number of jobs.

The specific objectives of EMFE were: 1) to provide the students with the knowledge and practical skills required to access any of the forms of self-employment or existing paid employment; 2) to

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provide the students with a comprehensive training by combining the theoretical knowledge about these specialized education and skills to develop productive work via practical activities; 3) to determine the resources, employment prospects, interests, social and employment situation, motivation, skills, abilities, and knowledge of students as a basis for the proposed social and occupational integration; 4) to set a plan throughout the program's orientation activities to facilitate social and occupational integration of participating students by drawing a tailored employability plan for each student to increase his or her career opportunities (once the plan is established it has to follow a path to achieve the target set); 5) to promote the use of local resources consistent with the improvement of urban environment, community services, and the environment; and 6) to generate added value in rural areas.

An important consideration in this area of educational guidance (consistent with the importance given to the model of intervention through technological resources) is that concerning the relationship between training, employment, and new technologies. There are many advantages and contributions of digital technologies to the world of orientation today. In this line, a point to note is that mass access to the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) is changing our conception of time.

One of the important elements in the process of integration of ICT in this program is to know exactly the views and attitudes of students regarding the use of ICT in the learning process and integration (De Pablos, 2009; Martinez Aguaded, 2004; Trujillo, 2005). Specifically, this study analyzed the results of the questionnaire *Attitudes towards and Interests in ICT* which was answered by the participants in this program.

All the above said, the overall objective of this study was to set the structure and fundamental characteristics of a successful Mixed Experience Training and Employment Program (EMFE, in Spanish) aimed to get young people and teenagers living in rural areas acquainted with the workplace. In order to achieve this general objective, a survey consisting of attitudes and interests towards ICT is completed by students participating in the Program, as an important EMFE element before making use of various technological means to facilitate the employment insertion process consistent with the current technological model. It also presents an evaluation of the impact of educational activities on students and satisfaction with them. The students participating in the program are the main actors of the teaching/learning process, along with the main activities and achievements of social and occupational integration.

Method

Participants

The total number of students participating in the program was 40, with three training specialties, aged between 16 and 24 (with a majority in the 17-20 range) living in rural areas of the province of Malaga. All the students were then under 25 and did not have a job qualification nor prior employment. The sample was gender balanced with 46.67% of male students and 53.33% of female students. Some of them had special education needs and a deficit in social skills could be identified, especially among the youngest ones. The sample's educational level ranged from primary school certificate to a diploma or bachelor GBS, as they were already 16 and thus academically unmotivated to continue their studies in formal education. Elegibility criteria were the following: 1) being in the 16-24 age range (since from 25 they could join other employment workshops, the educational level is an indication of the professional knowledge to be first job claimants under 25 years —registered in the corresponding Employment Service); 2) interests, expectations, educational needs, and other indicators of risk and vulnerability to social exclusion; 3) priority was given to the participation of socially

and culturally disadvantaged groups, who have fewer opportunities for training and were thus awarded grants by the Andalusian Employment Service for their participation in the program; and 4) preference was also given to immigrants, disabled, victims of gender violence, or those belonging to ethnic minorities or dysfunctional families at higher risk of social exclusion.

Tools

Questionnaire of Attitudes towards and Interests in ICT. This instrument was developed by the Andalusian PAI HUM 378 research group. The questionnaire presents adequate psychometric properties and has been used in numerous studies and research such as those by Morales, Infante, and Galindo (2003). Items include issues such as what is known about computers, how useful young people find Internet, where they access Internet from, how often and to what degree they consider viewing videos useful, their use of Power Point and the like in the process of learning and social and occupational integration, as well as many other issues they are asked for, including what the functions of Internet in an educational context are, especially as a means of facilitating their social and occupational integration. Whenever possible new technologies were used not only in these specialties (e.g., Internet for job search) but especially because of their motivating effect on students this age.

End Assessment of Training Action. In addition to the continuous monitoring and evaluation investigating the details of both the content and the training situation, we performed an "End Assessment of Training Action" at the end of the teaching modules as well as an evaluation of the development of vocational training courses. Specifically, in this study we used the *Inventory and Assessment Trainer Course* (Finkbeiner, Lathrop, & Schuelger, 1973). This instrument consists of 42 items to answer on a five-point scale (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree). Although this study only presents the most relevant and meaningful results regarding the same items, the questionnaire also allows to assess five factors: general attitude towards the course and attitudes towards the tests and the method, workload, and trainer/student ratio.

This instrument has been used in numerous studies and has adequate psychometric properties —reliability and validity (Cohen, 1981; Marsh, Overall, & Kesler, 1979). With respect to the evaluation of the EMFE Program, knowledge, procedures, and attitudes are considered. Finally, for the evaluation of work experience in the development of mixed experiences programs and employment training, a qualitative assessment was carried out face to face and through telephone interviews of teachers and students of the course. Teachers were asked to evaluate students on issues such as: a) technical capacity (for example, if the student was able to perform the activities assigned); b) organisational capabilities (for example, if the student attended punctually the workplace); c) relational capabilities (for example, if the student asked for information and help when needed); and d) capacity to respond to contingencies (for example, if the student provided solutions and ideas to the problems, and so on).

Procedure

In order to complete the questionnaires, the youngsters were informed about the privacy of information and the need to respond individually and anonymously and that these tests would allow to assess their level of satisfaction with the development the program. To administer the various tests (questionnaires, telephone interview, etc.) the family and students were informed about the voluntary nature of the participation, ensuring confidentiality of the data at all times through group treatment. The application was developed by a counselor who explained the objectives, giving appropriate instructions to the students. At the test administration, questionnaires were handed out to the different specialties in the same order.

Data Analysis

The program was conducted during the academic years 2002/2003 and 2003/2004. In both courses the teaching methodology was adapted to each course module in terms of skills, knowledge, and relevant skills, i.e. feedback was given at the right time, thereby improving motivation of people involved. Specific websites were accessed for job search related to the specialty, filling in the data.

Results

Attitudes towards and interests in ICT

Below are the most outstanding results of the questionnaire measuring attitudes towards and interests in the use of ICT in the training/guidance of educational activities of this program (Table 1).

Table 1
Internet attitudes and interest of EMFE participants

Do you know what Internet is?	No	15%
	Yes	85%
You knew Internet through:	Friends	30%
	School	40%
	Family	10%
	Television	19%
	Other possibilities	1%
Do you have a computer?	Yes	8%
	No	92%
Internet access from:	High School	3.76%
	University	0%
	Internet coffee	4.76%
	Home	61.90%
	Job or others	5%
Frequency of use:	1 or + times/day	92%
	1 or + times/week	8%
Services:	Email	50.40%
	Chat	17.83%
	Forum	1%
	Searcher	30.77%
	Other	0%
Web page:	Yes	0%
	No	100%
Can you develop Internet addiction?	Yes	60%
	No	40%
Can it be an educational resource?	Yes	91%
	No	9%

Table 1 shows that when asked about how they knew EMFE, most students said they had known about it on Internet, 40% said they had known about it through the school, and the rest through friends, family, and on the television. Most of them did not have a personal computer nor a website. The most commonly used Internet services were: mail (50.40%), search engines (30.00%), chats (17.83%), and forums (1%). The vast majority of respondents (91.00%) believe that the Internet could be used as a teaching resource. As for how useful they found the use of video viewing for easy learning and social and occupational integration the mean score on a scale of 0-10 was 9.57.

On the same scale, the the extent to which they found the use of PowerPoint in lectures useful was 8.9 and 9.2 was the extent to which they would like to use it.

By and large, most respondents report they had user knowledge of word processors, databases, spreadsheets, and the Internet, whereas they did not have a knowledge of graphic design, animation, or programming. Summary data in percentage are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
General knowledge of standard computers

	Percentage level		
	Do not have	User level	High
Word processors	0	93	7
Database	48.22	51.78	0
Spreadsheets	60.48	39.52	0
Internet	0	100	0
Graphic design	100	0	0
Animation	100	0	0
Schedule	100	0	0

Table 3 shows the results of the role played by ICTs in the educational context on Likert scale indicating the degree of agreement with certain statements. Results highlight the importance of using ICT in teaching/learning as well as the advantages and drawbacks of their use both by teachers and students in this program and in non regulated training to help acquire the skills and achieve objectives. The students and the teachers found Internet and particularly the viewing of videos as technological resources offered by EMFE. Modules were taught about the basics of computer literacy so that students can computerize their resume, a cover letter, and as a guide for accessing different websites –searching general information or specialized information such as searching for employment. Certainly, some students were able to find a temporary job on the Internet thanks to the training on these career guidance modules.

Impact and satisfaction with major socio-orientation activities conducted in EMFE program

Below we can see the results of the descriptive analysis of data from interviews and surveys concerning the main achievements of labor integration and the impact of and satisfaction with major socio-orientation activities conducted in the EMFE program. It is important to note that the surveys, interviews, and questionnaires administered to learn about positive and negative aspects of the program allowed us to conclude that the vast majority of the participants, whether teachers (100%) or students (99%), showed a very high degree of satisfaction with the program and felt that they would like to continue. Very significant achievements and learning were gained in each of the specialties.

Following the training, students set out to find work and many of them foud a job within the field of their specialty, particularly carpentry and local self-employment. Thus, a significant percentage of jobs were found, as is discussed in the next section. Tables 4 and 5 show important facts that can be drawn as well as satisfaction and impact of the program reported by students.

On the whole, the qualitative and quantitative evaluation performed shows that this was a successful experience and satisfactory for all participants: teachers, students, students' families, and the training community. For example, in terms of qualitative research techniques, some positive consequences followed: students

Table 3
ITCs functions in the educational context (%)

	Nothing	Little	Enough	A lot
1. Internet can be used to teach	0	0	74.18	25.82
2. Internet can replace the teacher's role	32.46	67.54	0	0
3. Only the higher intellectual level students know how to use Internet	35.71	42.86	21.43	0
4. Internet can replace the role of books and whiteboards	14.28	57.14	28.57	0
5. Internet can combine with the explanations that the teacher performs in slate	0	7.14	78.57	14.28
6. It would be more useful, fun, and rewarding learning through Internet	0	25.81	61.00	13.39
7. Positive values are transmitted on the Internet	8.29	74.28	17.43	0
8. Internet can only be used today in socioeconomically privileged areas	6.93	52.41	30.86	9.80
9. The socioeconomic status of families that we know influences Internet	0	0	61.00	39.00
10. Internet fosters the ability to relate to others	0	51.47	48.53	0
11. Promotes the use of other languages	0	43.69	56.31	0
12. It doesn't work on improving the relationship between members of the educational community	12.29	58.45	29.26	0
13. Teacher-student relationship is lost with the use of Internet	11.58	34.69	53.73	0
14. Peer relationships is lost with the use of Internet	6.97	40.27	52.76	0
15. Using the Internet helps to make new friends	0	39.00	51.14	9.86
16. Using the Internet isolates people in their environment	0	40	51.22	8.78

Table 4
Satisfaction (%) of students participating in some of the activities in the Mixed Experiences Program of Training and Employment

	Unsatisfactory	Something satisfying	Quite satisfying	Very satisfactory
	%	%	%	%
Travelling training	0	0	5	95
Employment sites	0	0	28	72
Conferences	0	0	29	71
Group activities	0	0	16	84
Video viewing	0	0	24	76
Orientation	0	0	0	100
Tutoring	0	0	0	100

Table 5
Satisfaction (%) of students participating in the Mixed Experience Program Training and Employment, in general terms

Unsatisfactory	Something satisfying	Quite satisfying	Very satisfactory
%	%	%	%
0	0	3	97

in the carpentry specialty completing the course found a job of variyng duration in town.

Another positive outcome of this specialized training deepening would be the inminent setup of a cooperative in the town. Participants enjoyed internships in occupations more or less related to the training course —an indication of how people valued the course. This was also a demonstration of the impact the training had on the socio-emotional skills that were enhanced in the Occupational Guidance module aimed at achieving a first job even in occupations not directly related to the profession learned.

The youngsters knew from the start that one of their main job opportunities could be self-employment, one of the targets on which training and guidance was focused. For example, telephone interviews six months after completion of the course showed that 99.49% of trainees considered training and self-employment as

major elements (on a scale where 1 = none, 2 = somewhat, 3 = fairly, and 4 = very much), the main path to access the labor market with greater guarantee of stability. Another example is that of students in the pottery specialty who did not hesitate in trying to use self-employment as a way to access their first job –thanks to the inputs provided by the Vocational Guidance module. The students are very satisfied with their participation in the program, as evidenced in surveys carried out by the Bank and the questionnaires by the Department.

With regard to the assessment of key skills acquired by students, Table 6 shows the results for the total sample in a Likert-type scale (1= never, 5= almost always).

The assessment of the students' attitudes in a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = lowest, 5 = highest degree of willingness) rendered the following results: general attitude towards the course, 4.6; attitude towards the methodologies, 4.2; attitude towards the tests, 3.9; and attitude towards workload, 4.3. As for the assessment of trainers, students rated trainers 4.7 on efficiency and effectiveness in solving problems, and 4.9 on their availability and attention.

Discussion and conclusions

In this study we have presented the structure and fundamental characteristics of a successful EMFE Program. It also examines students' attitudes and interests towards ICT, as important elements of EMFE before making use of various technological means to facilitate the job accessing process. It also provides an assessment of the impact and satisfaction of the major educational activities of this program. Subsequently, the main achievements reached in labor integration that emerge from the quantitative and qualitative data collected in this regard are presented.

One of the elements currently considered relevant to this type of program is achieving the overall strategic planning objectives (goal, monitoring, and control). As predicted in previous planning objectives, the implementation of this program enabled the students to acquire the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to develop the process of job access. Although there is no magic wand in this field, as it is frequently reflected in the literature on Educational Psychology, Human Resources, and Organizational Psychology (Gallego, 1999), it is important to evaluate how this program handled aspects such as resources, interests, social and employment situation,

Table 6
Competencies attained by students in the program reported by EMFE teachers/tutors

Competencies	Mean (SD)*
Technical skills	
It is capable of performing the activities assigned	4.89 (0.83)
Applies appropriate techniques	4.52 (0.65)
Adapts easily to the work	4.48 (0.58)
Provides ideas for process improvement	3.99 (0.59)
Ends the work properly	4.89 (0.51)
Organizational skills	
Attends punctually at workplace	4.90 (0.25)
The productive process is displayed neat and clean	4.79 (0.37)
Performs tasks on time	4.84 (0.34)
Knows how to work in groups	4.69 (0.43)
Has habits of work	4.98 (0.35)
Relational skills	
Asks for information and help when he or she needs	4.58 (0.51)
Cooperates with others when needed	4.53 (0.42)
Integrates into the workgroup	4.70 (0.33)
Interacts with other departments, areas, or specialties	4.34 (0.38)
Behaves like a mature and accountable person	4.73 (0.43)
Ability to respond to contingencies	
Has initiative	4.48 (0.59)
Provides solutions to problems and ideas	4.70 (0.40)
Acts quickly on the contingencies	4.60 (0.56)
Uses the tools	4.86 (0.32)
Reorganises work with diligence	4.57 (0.51)

*SD = standard deviation

motivation, skills, abilities, knowledge, and social skills of students (Rivas, 1993; Sanchis, Pastor, Campos, & Ibañez, 2002; Santana & Alvarez, 1996).

In developing the program, new technologies have been used in order to facilitate social and occupational integration of students, for whom technological resources are especially motivating. These resources are very useful even for learning important values that help facilitate labor integration process (Javaloy, Espelt, & Cornejo, 2001; Morales, Infante, & Galindo, 2003). Thus, computers were used to access websites to both look for contents and search employment. In this regard, different software was used (regeneration strategy of technological resources). As it can be found in current studies, being knowledgeable about computer use and attitudes towards ICT such as those appearing in this study is very important for the students this age (Ademola, 2009).

With regard to the impact of the assessment and satisfaction of career guidance activities, they are perceived as very useful and successful by students, the training community and participants' families. They are grateful for the guidance and welcome the social and labor support. Furthermore, the large percentage gains and labor integration achieved support the efficacy and efficiency of this program.

Participants in these program, not only those in social disadvantage but also the smartest ones, needed advice and assistance regarding the development of curriculum and preparation to overcome job interviews, studying strategies, testing, ways of presenting information, etc. Assistance was provided to student learning based on their prior knowledge and their potential, without forgetting that social and labor-oriented activities should be carefully designed to help students understand themselves, their interests, values, and skills and facilitating identification and problem solving.

From the psychoeducational perspective of this program, we evaluated the characteristics of people with disabilities each of them being different and requiring special attention and personalized tutoring.

In short, it is worth noting that this program has contributed to finding satisfactory, efficient, and effective solutions within the process of socialization and social integration, through a more rewarding use of time by the individual and more useful social relationships. This was attempted in some way by adjusting personal characteristics of young people (abilities, interests, personality, etc.) to work demands, considering that the job, tasks, functions, and occupation are in different degree (depending on the consulting approach) fundamental aspects or characteristics to be identified and analyzed.

Finally, an important remark is that this is a pioneer program that has reported numerous benefits and social and labor opportunities for unemployed young people who are at risk of social exclusion, academically unmotivated, and who could not be easily incorporated into other programs.

The ongoing social demand for such programs in the current recession is an additional reason for the continuity and consistency of these programs to provide help and support to young people in their social and labor integration process.

Resumen extenso

Se presenta un exitoso Programa de Experiencias Mixtas de Formación y Empleo (EMFE) que tiene como meta general introducir a jóvenes cuya vida laboral tiene lugar en núcleos rurales. Con vistas a la consecución de dicho objetivo general se han evaluado las actitudes e intereses hacia las tecnologías de la información y de la comunicación (TIC) en el alumnado participante en el Programa EMFE como un elemento importante para optimizar la práctica educativa así como para facilitarles el proceso de inserción sociolaboral en el marco de las cualificaciones necesarias en la sociedad del conocimiento, de la información y de las nuevas tecnologías. Asimismo, se presenta una evaluación del impacto que han tenido las principales actividades educativas para la orientación profesional realizadas en el Programa EMFE, una evaluación de las competencias o capacidades adquiridas por el alumnado y de los principales logros de inserción sociolaboral alcanzados. Los participantes en el programa han sido cuarenta jóvenes pertenecientes a tres especialidades formativas con edades comprendidas entre los 16 y los 24 años de edad, el 46.67% hombres y el 53.33% mujeres, de ámbito rural, de la provincia de Málaga. Entre las características de los participantes están el hecho de ser jóvenes menores de 25 años, sin empleo anterior y sin cualificación profesional. Los datos obtenidos en este estudio permiten analizar las posibles ventajas e inconvenientes que tiene la utilización de las TIC como recurso en este programa en el ámbito de la formación no reglada, de modo que ayude a adquirir las competencias y objetivos previstos. Puede destacarse que el uso de visionado de vídeos y de Internet para la búsqueda de empleo han sido recursos tecnológicos especialmente motivantes y de utilidad para los participantes en el programa. Se realizó una evaluación del impacto y satisfacción de las actividades formativas y de orientación laboral realizadas tanto desde un punto de vista cualitativo como cuantitativo, que pone de manifiesto que las mismas son percibidas como muy útiles y satisfactorias por el alumnado, el profesorado y las familias de los participantes beneficiados, que se muestran especialmente agradecidas por la orientación sociolaboral y apoyos recibidos. Además, los logros y el amplio porcentaje de inserción sociolaboral alcanzado constituyen una de las principales fortalezas que avalan la eficacia y eficiencia de este importante programa. Se trata de un programa pionero que introduce importantes elementos de innovación en el contexto en el que se desarrolló y reportó numerosos beneficios y oportunidades sociolaborales a jóvenes desem-

pleados, en situaciones de riesgo de exclusión social, desmotivados académicamente y que no se podían incorporar fácilmente a otro tipo de programas. Puede concluirse señalando la importancia de este tipo de programas como ayuda a la juventud, para orientarla en su proceso de inserción sociolaboral en el actual contexto de crisis económica.

Conflicts of interest

The author of this article declares no conflicts of interest.

Acknowledgments

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