

TRANSFORMING ELEMENTARY STUDENTS' MINDSET ABOUT LEARNING THROUGH MENTORSHIP: ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF THE DO2GET PROGRAM

H. Jacinto¹, A. Silvestre²

¹ UIDEF, Instituto de Educação, Universidade de Lisboa, (PORTUGAL)

² Centro de Estudos em Educação e Inovação (PORTUGAL)

In today's rapidly evolving world, fostering mental strength—encompassing resilience, positive attitude, willpower, and other beneficial mental strategies—is crucial for navigating life's challenges, particularly for youth from challenging backgrounds. The Drop-out Overcoming to Goal-oriented Empowerment Training (DO2GET) program aims to enhance students' motivation through innovative mental strength strategies and pedagogical tools, including a comprehensive guidebook and dedicated mentors for each student. This project leverages the expertise of different stakeholders to pilot and evaluate the efficacy of the DO2GET program in nurturing students' learning, personal, and social skills. This is aimed at reducing early school leaving and raising overall educational success. This paper presents the preliminary results of a study assessing the impact of the DO2GET program, specifically evaluating its influence on 79 Portuguese and Serbian students in terms of their academic engagement and motivation within the school environment, as well as their perceptions of the mentor's role.

Before and after implementing the DO2GET program, an online survey was conducted which included closed-ended items using a 5-point Likert scale, along with open-ended items. Initial results regarding students' motivation and engagement showed that the items with the lowest average scores were "I work hard at school" and "It is easy for me to communicate my thoughts and ideas" (both with an average of 3.73), indicating students did not consider themselves very hardworking or effective communicators. The highest scoring items were "It is important for me to improve my skills this year" (4.52) and "There is at least one adult in this school I can talk to if I have a problem" (4.50). Post-intervention, the item with the lowest average was "I can learn what is taught at school" (3.81), while the item with the highest average was "I know I will finish high school" (4.50), suggesting that many students had a positive outlook regarding their future in secondary education. Significant improvements were noted in the items "It is easy for me to communicate my thoughts and ideas" (+0.20), "I am a committed worker" (+0.16), and "I work hard at school" (+0.16). Conversely, the items that saw the greatest declines were "I try to do things even if I might fail" (-0.26), and "I take responsibility for working on my goals" (-0.25).

Regarding the participants' appreciation of the mentor's role, about 55% of students reported contacting their mentor three or more times per week, 81% agreed that the mentor helped them

become more interested and perform better at school, 83% felt that the mentor encouraged them to show greater initiative in achieving their goals, and 86% rated the support and guidance provided by their mentors in various fields as good or excellent. Nearly 88% of the students considered having a mentor to be quite or very important to their success in school. Overall, the majority of students valued the mentorship component highly, with significant percentages reporting frequent contact with mentors, improved school engagement and performance, increased initiative, and a strong belief in the importance of mentorship for their overall academic success.

The results of this study provide compelling insights into the efficacy of the DO2GET program, which are further discussed in the paper to explore its broader implications for educational practices and policy.

Keywords: Educational program, Student engagement, Student motivation, Mentorship.

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