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THE DISTANCE LEARNING COURSE IN GEOGRAPHY OF UAB/UNB: REPORT OF AN EXPERIENCE

Regina de S. Maniçoba

Doutora em Desenvolvimento Sustentável pelo Centro de Desenvolvimento Sustentável da UnB. E-mail: regina.manicoba@bol.com.br

ABSTRACT: With the transformations passed in technology and the urban progress (that brought a loss is the living conditions of the population), a new mode of teaching started to highlight itself: Distance Learning. I had a great boost, especially, in the past decades, turning a worldwide trend. The perspective is that a number of students in this mode of teaching increase continuously, for the facilitation it offers. For that matter, the present article comes to report my experience in the distance-learning course in Geography at UAB/UNB where I could practice different duties (Tutor, course manager, research professor) and observe the main struggles faced by the course and the important aspects that must be discussed. That way it can improve and reach the objectives main objective, that is: the decrease of the evasion and improve the quality of the teaching and learning.

KEYWORDS: distance learning, education, and geography.

RESUMO: Com as transformações ocorridas na tecnologia e o avanço da Urbanização (que trouxe consigo uma precarização das condições de vida da população), uma nova modalidade de ensino, passou a se destacar: o Ensino a Distância. Este teve um grande impulso, principalmente, nas últimas décadas, virando tendência mundial. A perspectiva é que a quantidade de alunos desta modalidade de ensino aumente cada vez mais, pelas facilidades que oferece. Nesse sentido, o presente artigo vem relatar minha experiência no curso Licenciatura em Geografia a Distância da UAB/UnB onde pude exercer diferentes funções (Tutor, Gestor de Curso e Professor Pesquisador) e observar as principais dificuldades enfrentadas pelo curso e os pontos importantes que devem ser debatidos para que este possa ser aprimorado e alcançar seus objetivos principais que são: a diminuição da evasão e a melhoria do processo de ensino e aprendizagem.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Educação a Distância, Educação, Geografia.

RÉSUMÉE: Ainsi que les transformations de la technologie et le progrès de l'urbanisation (que remanie une précarisation des conditions de vie de la population), une nouvelle modalité d'apprentissage, a été détaché : l'apprentissage à distance. Celle-ci une impulsion importante, spécialement, dans les dernières années, se tournant tendance mondiale. La perspective ce que la quantité des étudiâtes de cette modalité d'apprentissage augmenter une fois de plus, pour les facilité que donnent. Dans ce sens, le article présent venir rapporter ma expérience dans les cours de License en Géographie à distance de UAB/UNB où je pus exercer différente rôles (Tuteur,

Cours Manager et Enseignant chercheur) et observer les principales difficultés résister pour le cours et les points importants qui doivent être discutés pour améliorer et réaliser cet objectif principal qui sont: La réduction de l'évasion et l'amélioration du processus d'apprentissage.

CLÉ –MOTS: Apprentissage à Distance, Éducation, Géographie

Introduction

Facing the constant transformations resulted of the globalization process; the Distance Education (EAD) presents itself as an alternative to bringing the College education a bigger number of students, independent of their spatial location.

Thus, this study has as an objective discuss the advance in distance teaching in Brazil and report my experience in the Distance Geography degree UAB/Unb where I practiced a number of duties(mentorship, management course, Research professor).

This paper aims to reconstruct my path highlighting the main problems observed in each one of the main problem observed in each one of the functions in how the connection between them can contribute in the whole to improve the course and subsidize the offer of future disciplines.

Thus, this article stands divided into two parts. In the first one was presented a brief discussion about the distance teaching in Brazil and the insertion of the University of Brasilia (UNB) is this new way of teaching. Already in the second chapter is described my path in the course of Distance license in Geography course of UAB/UNB seeking to emphasize the identified problems in each one of the functions and brief notes that can contribute to the improvement of the course.

1. THE DISTANCE TEACHING IN BRAZIL: BRIEF STATEMENT

The developments in the high technology sector, especially in the areas of IT and telecommunication, that took place after the Second World War provided a deep alteration in the society in diverse areas, among them, education.

The connection of the microcomputers in network in the mid 80's, thanks to the advances in telecommunications, and the advent of the internet make it possible that the traditional way of teaching, the presential, can be diversified, now taking place as well in distance.(CASTELLS,1999).

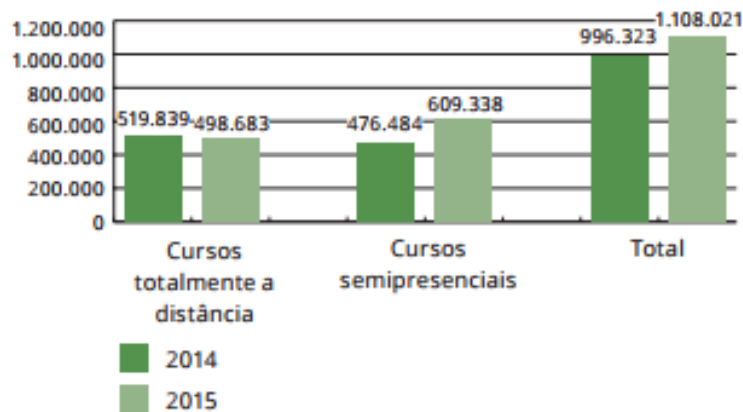
According to the Decree n 5.622(BRAZIL,2005), the distance teaching is an "educational modality in which the didactical and pedagogical mediation in the process of teaching and learning occurs with the use of means and technology of information and communications with students and professors developing educational activities in different places and time".

Many initiatives of EAD developed in Brazil in the decades of 1960 and 1970 starting with the creation of the projects to expand the accesses to education.

In the 90's, several universities have formalized there initiatives EAD having as milestone, in 1996: the creation of the Distance Education Secretary (SEED), of the Ministry of Education (MEC) and the enactment of the law number 9.394, December of 1996 (Law of the guidelines and Bases of National Education), that established that the public power should encourage the development and the propagation of the distance learning, in all levels of teaching methods, and of continuous education.

According to EAD.BR Census (ABED, 2016), the number of students and courses totally at distance had overcome 400 thousand in 2015. Considering as well what was part of the semi attendance causes, this number increases more than a million of students (GRAPHIC 1).

Graphic 1- Students benefited by courses fully regulated by law, distance or semi distance, according to the EAD.BR Census(2014 and 2015- in absolute numbers).



Source : Census EAD.BR (ABED, 2016).

A great boost to the increase in the number of students in the Distance teaching was by the decree number 5800, in 2006, Brazil Open University (UAB) by Ministry of education, jointly with state owned enterprises, to expand and assimilate the course offer, with partnership with state owned enterprises, to expand and internalize the programmes of higher education in the country. Have as a base the offer of distance courses performed by public institutions of higher education, in centers of studies maintained by the municipalities or state governments.

According to data of MEC (2017), currently, the UAB "Has 555 centers (stages one and two) of the 26 states of the Federation and the Federal District. Of this centers, 288 are the first phase (all in activities) and 267 in the second phase (in implantation)".

Unb became part of the programme UAB in 2005 but, the first entrance examination in this just happened in 2007. This year 1048 vacancies were opened in six courses of distance teaching, distributed in 16 centers located in six Brazilian states.

The course of teaching in Geography integrated itself to the UAB programme in 2009 when was realized the second entrance examination. In 2010, were registered in the total of 133 students distributed in 5 centers(Alexânia GO, the city of Goiás-GO, Posse-GO, Itapetinga-SP and Santa Maria-DF). In August of 2017, the course will count with more 120 new students in the Diamantino Municipalities (MT), Santos (SP) and Posse (GO).

2. EXPERIENCE WITH EAD.

Experience as Distance actuator of the Distance Geography course of UAB/UnB

My experience in the Distance Geography course of UAB/UnB began in 2009, when I entered, through simplified selection, to fulfill the mission of Distance tutor. This experience was of great relevance because I could witness the main difficulties faced by these professionals to insert and adapt themselves to this teaching method.

As the directives of UAB(2017) highlighted, the tutor has a leading role in the process of learning of the contents transmitted, being expected to him the correction of potential flaws and the feedbacks that will stages one the good performance of the discipline.

Among the duties of tutors can be emphasized: monitoring the theoretical and methodology of the course; participation on presential classes; correction and feedback sent to the students in the distance evaluations; Help to the presential tutors in theirs doubts; in the service and help to the students in the methodological and theoretical questions of the course (UAB,2017).

2.1.1 Lived Struggles.

During the tutoring time, I could observe that among the main difficulties found were the: lack of autonomy of the tutor in the preparation of the content, because he did not have any participation in the elaboration of the content that would teach in the web environment; the lack of contact with the authors teachers (with the subject) to clarify doubts about the subject and organization of the discipline; and the lack of interaction with the presential teachers that are in personal contact with the students in the centers.

All that difficulties contribute to compromising the quality of the content to be taught to the students. The Distance courses have in that way to, invest in a bigger integration between students and Authors teachers in the planning and development of the disciplines and to encourage Distance tutors and presential tutors to work together so that they can exchange information about bigger issues found by the students and solve them, as well as, so that they could discuss doubts about the discussed contents in the forums in Moodle platform.

In the specific case of the Geography course, I could realize some contents, in the Cartography areas, Geology, Climatology (that need a higher degree of abstraction to be learned), were more difficult to be absorbed by the students. This fact, then required, a bigger actuation of the tutors

in the forums and in the realization of the presential meetings in the centers, time that the author's teachers and the distance tutors could clarify the doubts of the students.

2.2 Experience as Manager of the Distance Geography course

From January 2010 to March 2013, started to practice the job of manager of the Distance Geography course of UAB-UnB. This job was created in the sphere of distance courses in this institution to support the course administrators that, adjunct teachers of UnB, needed to make a lot of effort in the disciplines they taught in the presential course with the activities of the distance course.

Among those activities of the managements of the courses was: know the legislation that rules distance education and the scholarship scheme; control certify of scholarship to be paid to the teachers of the course, keep track of the activities (entry) in Moodle of the teachers- professors and supervisors, distance tutors and presential ones; know the tools of the virtual environment of learning (AVA).

The time in the management of the course was a moment of great learning. That moment, I had the chance to: follow up the development of the course in the distance modality(the financial and administrative procedures); be part of the preparation of the political pedagogical project (PPP); monitor the creation and development of the disciplines in the moodle platform, the process of training of professors and tutors to act in the virtual environment and perform the monitoring of teachers and disciplines.

Allied to this, throughout a long period in the course management, I could work directly with all the actors that compose the team acts in the Distance geography course: Professors, teachers coordinators, pedagogical coordinators, center coordinators, accomplishing to the contact with students of other centers.

Lived difficulties.

Among the difficulties found during the work in the course, management is possible to emphasize, primarily, the definition of the duties of this actor, the course manager, inside the structure of the course. What would be the areas of practice? If it would be more in the financial area, the Coordination of the course and their main proceedings or in the direct action following all the proceedings of the course, working this way, as a support (this is, "right arm") of the course Coordinator ? Over time and after a lot of discussion of the managers of the distance course, were found that in this last era, indeed, the biggest attribution to the course managers.

In the follow up of the of distance Geography course department and there administrative proceedings was possible to determine as the main difficulty, the realization of all activities (such as registration, curricular offerings, preparation of disciplines, preparation of surveys and reports) in the expected deadline established by UAB Unit, that are not always vast. In addition, the fact

that the distance courses are relatively new in UnB, generate to difficulties in the execution of some procedures of the course, which were modified over time and with the gained experience.

In relation to the monitoring of the teachers it was possible to identify as main problems: adjustment of the contents to the distance learning modality and the participation of them in the activities of training developed by the Unit UAB/ UnB (mainly courses about the use of the moodle platform). These aspects directly influenced in the creation of the disciplines in the Virtual environment and in the process of teaching and learning of the students.

In the work with the Distance tutors, one of the identified problems was the difficulties they had in getting in touch, in a short period of time, with the Authors professors of the disciplines, bearing in mind that are the professors that make the technical configuration in the Virtual Environment. Another common problem was the difficulty found by the tutors in the correction of the activities, since they not always had the appropriate knowledge of the content of discipline that they were tutoring nor time enough to provide fast feedbacks of the activities to the students in the platform, once they divided themselves between the tutorship and the work of as Professor in Fundação Educacional of Federal District .

Regarding the presential tutors, although they were graduated in Geography, it was possible to identify that little was added to the teaching of the content of the disciplines in the Virtual Environment, what results in constant conflicts with the Distance tutors that defended that they should act in the process of teaching and learning of the content. In virtue of the countless existing requirements in some locations where the centers are located, could be found a huge diversity in terms of the quality of the formation of these tutors, illustrating the differentiated reality that exists today in the area of Education in the country. For this reason, the importance of the programme UAB/UnB in investing in the higher education of a portion of the population that lives in the countryside and more isolated parts of Brazil.

2.3 Experience as a Professor of the Distance Geography course.

From 2010 to 2013 and 2016 until this year, I acted an Author Professor, Reviewer and Supervisor (called " Professor researcher" for MEC/ CAPES) of the following disciplines of the Distance course of Geography: Regionalization of the world space, Public Politics and environment, Culture and space, Initiation to the Geographic Science, Pedagogical practice in Geography 1, Pedagogical practice in Geography 2, Pedagogical practice in Geography 3, Public politics and environment, Methods and techniques of research in Geography.

According to the resolution n 26/2009 (Brazil,2009), among the attribution of the Professors researchers highlight: elaborate and deliver the contents of the developed units over the course in the specified period; adjust contents, didactic material, media and bibliography used for the development of the course to the language of the distance modality; participate and/or act in the activities of qualification developed in the education institution; coordinate the academic activities of the active tutors in disciplines or contents under their coordination; develop the system of evaluation of the students, by means of the resource and methodology provided in the course plan; attend the activities of teaching in the curricular disciplines of the course.

About the experience as a Researcher teacher was possible to: have contact with the content of the course; the best way to condense the key points of the content for the creation of the disciplines in the Virtual Environment; the importance to solve the doubts of the tutors about the inquiries made by the students in the platform; the need to guide the tutors about the correction of the activities in the moodle platform; and, the relevance to adjust the content delivered in the presential disciplines, in the distance teaching.

Lived Difficulties

In the work as Professor Researcher, I could count with the knowledge of the virtual environment acquired during the action as manager of the course to explore more easily the countless existing tools in this virtual environment, create the disciplines, exploring most of what this environment of learning offers.

When acting in authorship, review and supervision of the discipline of the Geography course of UAB/UnB, make it clear one of the main difficulties that a Geography course taught on the distance modality has, that is: How to teach abstract and technical contents without the direct interaction between professor and student as in the class in the presential learning?

Besides that, in the linked disciplines, especially, the Physics Geography, were clear the struggle to make the practical activities, as the field works, characteristic in the Geography courses and that help the teachers to unite theory and practical, using to this the reality of the students.

In the first years of the Distance Geography course it started to be clear that to perform the field works, among the obstacles found highlighted: lack of knowledge of the Professors and tutors in Distance, the environmental characteristics of the locations where the centers were located(as soil, vegetation, terrain, local environmental problems etc.), since the job of choosing the places where the sites are, usually, under the responsibility or presential tutors (and/or center coordinators) that not always, were prepared to make this diagnostic of selection of sites.

Nowadays, the course team has been investing in the change of this context. As the site of EAD-UnB (2017), in the practice what has been conducting the course is the concept of interdisciplinary, especially the field trips. The teachers are creating correlations between the contents. " In the discipline of Geomorphology, for example, when the students go to the rural area, the path between the center and the destiny is worked correlating the theme of the research with other disciplines, checking landscape transformation process, being for their water resources, agricultural activities or even environment degradation"(NASCIMENTO apud EAD-UnB, 2017).

Allied to this difficulties, it should be noted, others that harm the process of teaching and learning in the Geography course as: lack of infrastructure in the places that the cents are; inexistence or quality of internet connection (what make it impossible the realization of Web Conferences) in some centers; the lack of appropriate physical space and materials(as GPS,camera, video camera,

maps, topographic maps, Datashow) to the realization of the field activities or even the presential classes and the lack of basic books to conduct the discipline and tutors.

Concluding Remark

The present paper was centered on the case study of the Distance Geography teaching course of University of Brasilia (UnB)- Open University(UAB).

Was presented my professional path in the course where I worked in the years of 2009 to 2013 and 2016 until the present, different function (Tutor, Manager of the course and Professor Researcher) and could see this experience the main problems found and some strategies to solve them.

As main problems can be emphasized : The lack of interaction between presential tutors and distance ones; difficulty to adapt the contents of the Presential teaching to the Distance teaching; the difficulty to teach the contents, especially in the area of physic Geography (more abstract) in distance; the lack of infrastructure and material resources (as materials, books, internet of good quality) in some centers.

Acknowledgments

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