

THE COURSE OF DISTANCE LEARNING IN THE CAPTAINS CAREER SCHOOL OF THE BRAZILIAN ARMY

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ABSTRACT

Through a historic survey of courses offered at the Captains Career School (EsAO) in distance learning, it was shown that the distance learning course (CEAD), after a partnership with Trowpowski Foundation, revolutionized the distance learning approach of the content taught in the captains career course and in the advanced course, which ceased to be mail courses from that moment on. In this monographic study of this partnership, it was remarked that new advanced methods used in the distance learning modality were adopted. These new tools started to be part of the routine in the courses. Some of them are the Virtual Learning Environment (AVA), available in the Brazilian Army Education Portal (EB Aula), WEB Aula and the hypermedia CD. These tools enhanced this teaching modality, which was adopted at EsAO in 1963. This work aims at showing the work carried out by CEAD, its evolution and the tools implemented in this process.

KEYWORDS

CEAD; Evolution; Distance Learning

Introduction

Contrary to what it may seem, Distance Learning is not a novelty in the service of education. The first experiments date back to the 19th century when mail services were used to send information and instruction to students as well as to receive from them the answers to the proposed lessons (ALMEIDA, 2006).

The need to train American recruits during World War II introduces new methods (the experiments carried out by F. Keller to teach the reception of the Morse code stood out among them) that were soon employed in times of peace to socially integrate those affected by war and to develop new labor skills in the huge crowd migrating from the rural areas to the European cities that were being reconstructed (NUNES, 1993).

In Brazil, since the foundation of *Instituto Rádio Técnico Monitor* in 1939, and then *Instituto Universal Brasileiro* in 1941, many experiments were tried and carried out successfully. Both private and state experiments in Brazil were numerous and represented a mobilization of large contingents of resources. The results from the past were not enough to trigger a process of social and state acceptance of the distance learning modality in Brazil. However, reality has changed, and laws and regulations have been established for this education modality in our country.

In the last decades, distance learning has received renewed impetus with the use of traditional mass communication technology, such as radio and television in association with printed material sent by mail, favoring the spread and democratization of access to education in different levels and meeting the demands of a mass of students (ALMEIDA, 2006).

Distance learning was also formalized with the passage of the Law of Guidelines and Basis of National Education (**Art 80 – 9,394, 20th of December 1996**), in conjunction with the regulations of Decree 2,494, Feb 10th 98, which extended distance learning to accredited higher education institutions and brought about the overwhelming adoption of this model by higher education institutions from the year 2000, with an increase of 1000% in the number of higher education institutions accredited to offer distance courses between the years 2000 and 2006. (GIOLO, 2008).

More than 80 countries in the five continents adopt distance learning to educate people with formal and informal programs in all education levels. There is a growing number of institutions and companies that develop training programs for personnel through the distance learning modality.

On the other hand, the harshest critics denounce the risks of deepening the existing educational inequalities when there is a focus on a rapid expansion of “opportunities” measured in terms of strictly quantitative results (BOHADANA E VALLE, 2009).

When comparing and defining distance learning with traditional teaching, the Ministry of Education makes the following statement:

“(...) the basic difference between present and distance learning lies in the fact that through the latter the student build up knowledge, i.e. learn – and develop competencies, skills, attitudes, habits related to his study, profession or his own private life in the time and place most convenient to him, not with an immediate help of a teacher in a formal class, but with the mediation of teachers (monitors or tutors) assisting him either present or from distance and supported by management and logistics systems as well as materials intentionally designed to teach, used isolated or associated with

The higher education system of the Brazilian army comprises the following teaching institutions: Agulhas Negras Military Academy (AMAN), Military Institute of Engineering (IME), Army Medical Corps School (EsSEEx), Army Administration School (EsAEx), Army Advanced School (EsAO) and Command and Staff College (ECEME).

EsAO, which is the focus of this study, was established in 1920 and aims at enabling officers at the rank of captain to command military units and act as non-privative staff officers in the Cadre of Staff of the Brazilian Army. EsAO has worked with distance learning since 1963.

As a military higher institution, it offers specialization and Master’s Degree courses to army commissioned officers, Brazilian navy marines, and friend nations’ officers.

With a faculty of 149 officers, EsAO offers the advanced course to approximately 500 officers every year in the presence course, besides it has around 679 enrolled in the distance course.

With the belief that distance learning is also an important tool in the improvement of the captains of the Brazilian Army, this paper aims at

summarizing the history of distance learning at EsAO, a quality breakthrough originated from a partnership between Trompovsky Foundation and the work carried out by the Distance Learning Course (CEAD) at EsAO.

Method

The historical method consists in investigating [...] institutions in the past to verify their influence on our society, for they get their configuration over time; on the other hand, the comparative methods aims at verifying similarities and differences among groups; a monographic study can comprise the set of activities in a particular groups [...] (MARCONI e LAKATOS, 2003).

Thus a research was undertaken in the historical archives of EsAO to cover the history of the school from its foundations up to the present days, so a embracing view of the evolutionary milestones of distance learning at EsAO could be given; Furthermore, a bibliographic review was carried out to examine the regulatory milestones of distance learning in Brazil in order to establish the time gap between them as well as to study the contracts that have been signed by EsAO and Trompowsky Foundation since 2007.

Development

a) History of CEAD

In 1963 the Brazilian Army created a preparation course for the admission to EsAO (C Prep EsAO), embryo of what is known as CEAD today. Established by Ministry Ordinance n. 1,705, the 30th of September 1963, it was a correspondence course with the aim of preparing AMAN military academy officers for the advanced course.

In 1997, The Distance Learning Section (SEAD) was created. In 1989 the preparation course for EsAO gave place to the Advanced Course (CAO), which turned out to have two phases: the first one from distance and the second one present. They both has an approximate duration of 10 (ten) months. In 2003 SEAD started to be called Distance Learning Course (CEAD), in charge of managing the distance course in the first year (CAO) and CAM.

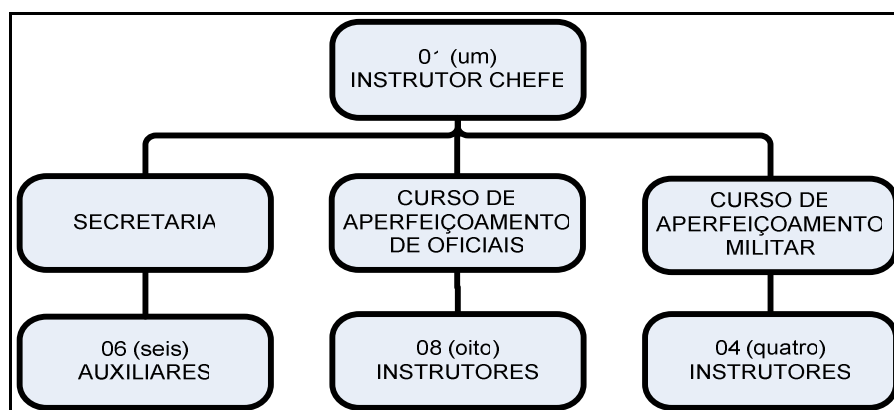
Over the evolutionary process of distance learning at EsAO, there were

very few changes in approaches. However, from 2007, backed by Trompowsky Foundation, an educational foundation attached to the Department of Education and Culture of the Army (DECEX), the courses coordinated by CEAD suffered a restructuring called teaching modernization, which indisputably made them the vanguard of distance learning in the army.

The main changes in this process of teaching modernization were the design of printed material adequate to a distance learning format, teaching material in the new media, a hypermedia CD, and Virtual Learning Environment (AVA) in the Moodle platform, the education portal of the Brazilian Army (EBAula).

b) Structure of CEAD

In order to keep up with the changes made through the agreed partnership with Trompowsky Foundation and to collaborate with the professional improvement of captains in the Brazilian Army, CEAD at EsAO were organized this way:



Picture 01 – CEAD Organizational Chart. Source: CEAD.

As one can see in the organization chart, CEAD has a chief instructor, a function performed by a senior officer (major, lieutenant-colonel or colonel) who has the Command and Staff College course (ECEME).

CAO possesses eight combatant instructors in the rank of captain and CAM, in its turn, has three captains as instructors and they are also from Agulhas Negras Military Academy (AMAN) and one from the Army Medical

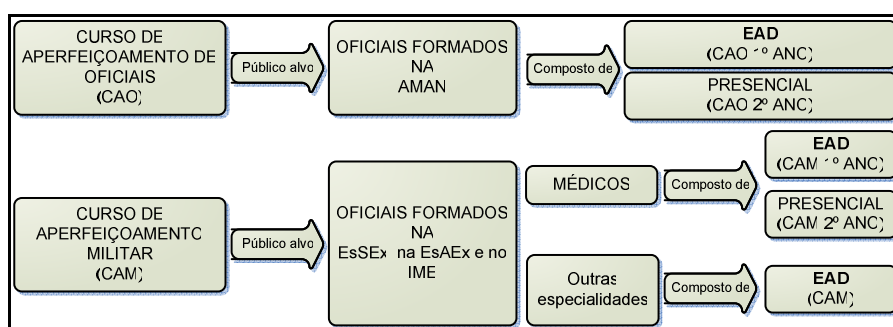
Corps School (EsSEx). These instructors are chosen among the captains who did the Advanced Course and excelled in it.

CEAD relies on the support of a sergeant and five privates, who work at the desk, which is in charge of the administrative routines, that is, shipping of exams, teaching material and course guides to the many military organizations of the Brazilian Army, as well as acceptance of documents and examinations done by officers.

The layout of the instructors' working stations were remodeled in a way that a spacious place that was adequate for the project designed in 2007 could be available to meet ergonomic and logic requirements compatible with new information technologies implemented in CEAD.

c) CEAD courses

With the aim of meeting the peculiarities of each career, EsAO courses are currently divided according to the chart below:



Picture 2 – Courses offered by CEAD. Source: CEAD, 2010

CAO is course made of two phases: the 1st year, in the distance learning modality, with 720 hours (40 weeks), and the 2nd year, the in-presence modality with 379 hours (12 weeks) (DECEX, 2009).

CAM, for officers of non combatant branches, is the only institutional course of the Brazilian army that is completely developed in one phase, which is distance learning with 375 hours (25 weeks) (DECEX, 2009).

In the current year, the 1st year of CAO is running with 439 (four hundred

and thirty-nine) officers and there are 234 (two hundred and thirty-four) students enrolled in CAM. That amounts approximately 63% of EsAO faculty.

The tutoring given by CEAD instructors is carried out from distance through internet applications, such as Skype, MSN and EB Aula (Education Portal), or FAX or mail. If the student is able to go to EsAO, he can be tutored in presence (EsAO, 2010).

Besides receiving tutoring from CEAD instructors, each student has an assigned local tutor who already did the advanced course at EsAO. This tutor, who is assigned by the commander of the military unit where the student is serving, must assist him in the organization of his study program, supervise school tasks and check diagnostic and formative evaluations (EsAO, 2010).

EsAO adopts the following evaluation modalities for all courses:

- diagnostic evaluation (AD) – verifies the knowledge of the learners in relation to the teaching goals established in the course and their difficulties in terms of prerequisites with suggestion of activities to overcome them;
- formative evaluation (AF) – makes use of the information of the diagnostic evaluation, identifying achievements and improvement needs, helping learners who do not reach the objectives in the new activities, replanning the teaching and learning processes; and
- summative evaluation (AS) – judges the results obtained the learners at the end of each teaching blocks.

As to CAO and CAM for medical corps officers, the AS corresponding to the content taught in the distance learning modality is applied when the in-presence modality starts.

The other evaluations, such as tasks and simulated examinations are available for students in the Education Portal of the Brazilian Army. – EbAula (www.ensino.eb.br), a virtual teaching environment adopted by EsAO.

Officers of the other branches have 3 (three) AS that are given in the military units where the students are serving, under the supervision of a Committee of Examination (CAF).

The distribution of military organizations in the Brazilian Army in diverse corners of Brazil is certainly an important differential factor in EsAO courses, for it enable students to have a crucial support that is necessary for the students that are users of distance learning linked to the Brazilian Army.

d) Teaching materials and tools

It is known that, from the student's point of view, studying the printed material is more useful because it is familiar, easy to manage and carry, and allows to be annotated and read in any place at any time, taking into account his learning pace (MINISTÉRIO DA EDUCAÇÃO, 2007).

Thus CEAD sends to students every year a series of printed publications containing the topics taught in CAO and in CAM.

Up to 2007, all publications were checked and diagrammatized by the instructors themselves with internal printing resources. As a result, the graphic format was not the most suitable for those activities. After the agreement signed with Trompowski Foundation, all publications were professionally proofread and diagrammatized, so the content proposed by instructors could be properly translated into a distance learning language and printed professionally.

The students also receive a hypermedia CD that contains a study guide of the syllabus of CAO and CAM as well as the aims of each discipline. Besides the guides, the hypermedia CD contains digital archives of the publications sent by mail and a powerful tool: Web-Aula.



Picture 03 – CAO and CAM Publications e hypermedia CD, Source: CEAD, 2010.

WEB-Aula came to light in 2007 in order to troubleshoot a very old complaint made by students: difficulty in visualizing military maneuvers. Thus, there came up the conception of a flash tool that shows the students the visualizations of military maneuvers in three dimensions using pictures and animation.



Picture 04 – WEB-Aula in *flash*. Source: CEAD, 2010

In distance learning, a network of computers enables the creation of a virtual teaching and learning environment, allowing the integration of available content into other media in association with interactivity, the creation of study

groups, collaborative production and communication among teachers and students. These conditions allied with resources maximize the autonomy of students in the learning process (MINISTÉRIO DA EDUCAÇÃO, 2007).

In consonance with this reality, CEAD has been using the Army Education Portal (EB Aula) a lot since 2007. That has brought innumerable gains in the instructor-student relation, along with an adequate, efficient and timely guidance to the main user of this process, the student, as well as to provide instructors with diverse tools to monitor teaching, such as online tasks, simulated examinations, forums, etc.

The outstanding results provided by the model adopted by CEAD in partnership with Trompowski Foundation were indisputably successful and became a benchmark against similar projects in other military organizations of the Brazilian Army, such as the Army Central Hospital and the Army Sergeant Major School (FUNDAÇÃO TROMPOWSKY); However, this partnership is essential to keep the standards of distance learning at EsAO high for the future.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be verified that EsAO has been offering distance course 1963, and they had changed very little in terms of effectiveness up to 2007. Distance learning in Brazil had its inflection point in the regulatory points in the Law of Guidelines and Basis of National Education/1996, which caused a rapid increase in supply of courses offered by higher educations institutions from 2000 on. Facing this new reality, EsAO sought to keep up with this staggering evolutionary dynamics and found a model to promote an effective evolution of distance learning at EsAO in the partnership with Trompowsky Foundation in 2007.

As a natural consequence of the outstanding results of the steady evolution in distance learning, this partnership has become crucial. The maintenance of the quality standards obtained in EsAO courses and the constant evolution of distance learning in the Army can be in jeopardy without it.

The diversity in teaching material and intercommunication media enables

the student to accompany the proposed content despite of any existing technological constraints. Besides, the massive presence of the Brazilian army all over the national territory provides a crucial support to the construction and consolidation of knowledge, i. e. the availability of local tutor to clear out doubts.

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