

DISTANCE EDUCATION: OVERALL AND SOCIOECONOMIC PROFILE OF STUDENTS OF THE GRADUATION COURSES OF TECHNOLOGY IN AN UNIVERSITY LOCATED IN THE “CONE LESTE PAULISTA”

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to present the characteristics of Distance Education, and also analyze the general profile and the socioeconomic profile of students at a University of the “Cone Leste Paulista”. To this end, a literature review of the subject studied was carried out and the overall profile and the socioeconomic profile of the students at the referred University were raised through EAD.BR census and a survey with the students of such University. Highlights in this study are the variables that influence the choice in favor of Distance Education and the importance of the qualification for professional compatibility with the labor market.

KEYWORDS: Distance Education; Labor Market; Professional Qualification.

1 Introduction

The growing demand for the Distance Education (DE) courses has caused increasing of optimism of the institutions regarding distance education environment. According to the EAD.BR Census 2013, 82% of the institutions believe that the number of enrollment tends to increase in 2015.

The Distance Education meets the need for qualification for the labor market and the new proposals for study that meet several variables for students with limitations to attend classrooms of classroom teaching courses (NEVES, 2003). It should be noted that distance learning and distance education have been presented as synonyms when referring to a teaching-learning process. However, learning is related to teaching, while education comes to basic training strategies aimed at learning, knowing, thinking, creating, innovating, developing knowledge and participating (MAROTO, 1995).

The demand for the qualification and the socioeconomic variables that limit the access to traditional graduation education influence a considerable part of the population in searching for distance education, as this type of education does not require daily attendance of students in the classroom - the student is able to program his/her class plan according to his schedule availability, combining study and other personal commitments - and its cost is relatively lower than traditional teaching methods.

Salvador and Gonçalves (2006) understand the distance education as a mode of education mediated by technologies and teaching resources, which main characteristic is the spatial and temporal separation between teacher and student. The authors also claim that the synchronous or asynchronous communication is reinforced with the use of information technology, especially the internet, which is currently a synonym of interactivity narrowed the distance and becoming feasible the collaborative learning.

This study aims to present the current characteristics of the labor market and distance education; the profile of students pursuing distance education; the socioeconomic profile and the main characteristics of students opting for distance education at a university in the "Cone Leste Paulista",

justifying with such factors the increasing growth in the demand for distance education.

2 Theoretical Referential

Knowledge is nowadays considered a corporate asset in organizations and many companies have already perceived it as essential element to its management and development. In the current socioeconomic conditions, concern about unemployment has become increasingly higher; thus the faster development of knowledge and skills has been the best antidote to unemployment and precariousness of labor relations. In a hypercompetitive environment, only will survive agile organizations, which are capable to manage knowledge and develop the ability to anticipate changes (CHIAVENATO, 2010).

In the organizations, the need of professional qualification is continuous, and the probability of increasing employability grows in proportion as it enhances knowledge and seeks greater professional development. Kovács and Castilho (1998) assert that changes in productive organizations, especially with the increase of market competitiveness and quality demand from consumers, lead companies to recruit a workforce increasingly qualified.

The DE - born in response to the accumulation of educational needs not fully supplied by the regular education (RAMMINGER, 2006) - presents itself as an attractive option for individuals who are concerned about their professional qualifications and seek to develop their intellectual skills and be more in line to market requirements (BELLONI, 2003), since there are several factors responsible for the difficult to access the traditional graduation education.

Grignon & Gruel (1999) point out that the financial limitation of the family, besides inhibiting access to higher education, can become even a limitation of time for the individual to attend a traditional classroom. Thus, the DE, for Belloni (1999), has primarily aimed at adults who did not or does not have chance to attend a conventional in person educational institution, because of financial and time limitations.

Article 1 of the Decree 2494/98 of the Laws of Directives and Bases of National Education (LDB) defines Distance Education as a teaching mode that allows "self-learning with the mediation of didactic resources systematically

organized, presented in different supporting information media, used alone or in combination", which are broadcast by various communication media.

Regarding to the historical aspects, Hermida and Bonfim (2006) report that there is not a date that marks the emergence of DE; they understand that writing was the first strategy between interlocutors separated by distance, being so the first form of DE. For some authors, the DE origin is in correspondence courses, emerged late eighteenth century; the post service system, through which the materials were sent to the development of the courses, was the great technological invention that propelled such mode (BASTOS; CARDOSO and SABBATINI, 2000 cited HERMIDA and BONFIM, 2006). Mugnol (2009) points out that, from the end of 1960, the television network had a significant importance in the expansion and the broadcast of the DE; governmental initiatives have encouraged the creation of educational broadcasters and television networks. He also reports that Brazilian universities began to devote themselves to research, to the provision of distance learning courses and the use of new technologies since 1994, when started the expansion of the Internet in universities and the publication of LDB, in December 1996, which formalized and regulated the distance education as a valid mode for all levels of education.

Freitas (2010) states that the study through distance courses requires the student's a high level of discipline in the studies and specialized tutors to meet the specific needs of such students. Such flexibility is also a challenge for institutions offering these courses, because they need to harmonize the needs of students with logistical issues and also to meet the bureaucratic and legal requirements, without losing sight of the quality of education.

It is worthy to emphasize what affirms Neves (2003): DE is not synonymous of reduction of required time to fulfill curricula, courses and programs. It is essential to provide the student with theoretical and practical referential that favour cognitive skills, abilities and attitudes that promote student development. Several designs can be offered in DE courses, through educational and technological resources, but it not acceptable to give up quality references that guide the teaching.

Considering the big challenge of the DE, the Ministry of Education developed a document outlining benchmarks that guide students, teachers,

technicians and managers in the quest for better quality. Titled Quality Benchmarks for Distance Education Courses, it features ten basic items that deserve attention of the institutions that prepare their distance courses. They are: 1- managers' commitment; 2- project design; 3- multidisciplinary team; 4- communication / interaction between agents; 5- educational resources; 6- support infrastructure; 7- continuous and comprehensive evaluation; 8- agreements and partnerships; 9 transparency of information; 10- financial sustainability.

3. Methods

The research methods employed in this study were the bibliographic research and exploratory research aiming to identify the general profile of students choosing the DE and also to present the socioeconomic profile of students at a University of the "Cone Leste Paulista".

The data survey for the research took place from the application of a questionnaire with 26 (twenty six) questions, which 25 are closed and one is open, in order to identify the student profile. The research instrument contains questions related to age, gender, income, housing, occupation, parents' level of education, age when engaged in remunerated activity, number of weekly working hours, among others. The only open question had the objective of identify the expectations of students about the course. The results were compared to the 2013 Census EAD.Br.

4. Presentation and Discussion of the Results

The Brazilian Association of Distance Education (ABED) annually promotes a research in schools that practice or somehow interact with the DE environment through the EAD.BR Census and provides this market information that become elements of analysis and production of vectors that enable the establishment of policies and strategies for the DE.

In order to access the general profile of the students who are object of our study, it was used the survey conducted in 2013, which surveyed 309

institutions throughout the country, which are responsible for more than 15,000 courses and nearly 4 million students, which already presents the relevance of such survey. It was considered in the present study the profile of the students of courses fully regulated as distance courses.

The Chart 1 presents the distribution of students by gender:

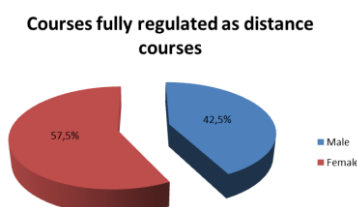


Chart 1: Students profile according the gender
Source: Census EAD.BR 2013

According to the census, there is a predominance of the female audience among students of distance courses; it is worthy to note that such public has taken a considerable part of the labor market, conciliating their professional lives with household activities, children, and others. In this sense, the DE with its variables facilitates the access to professional qualification.

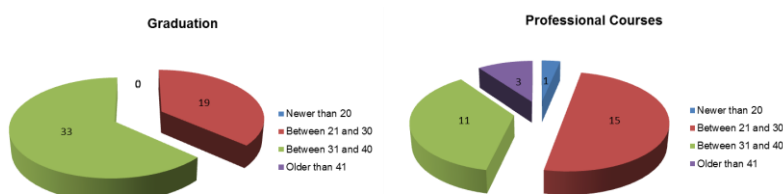


Chart 2: Students of graduation level according age
Source: Census EAD.BR 2013

Gráfico 3: Students of Professional courses according age
Source: Census EAD.BR 2013

Charts 2 and 3 highlight the parameter age for professional and graduation courses; they show that the most common age range of students is from 21 to 40, because at this age people are entering the labor market or have already entered, and they are supposed to improve their professional skills to maintain employability and enable professional development.

Charts 4 and 5 present the students of professional and graduation courses according their professional occupation.

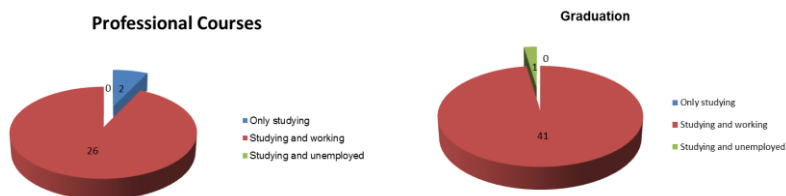


Chart 4: Students of Graduation according occupation
Source: Census EAD.BR 2013

Chart 5: Students of Professional courses according occupation
Source: Census EAD.BR 2013

Practically all the students attending the DE are supposed to combine work and studies, which can hinder them in attending traditional teaching methods and takes them to the choice for distance courses.

For analysis of the socioeconomic profile of the University of the “Cone Leste Paulista”, it was applied a socioeconomic profile questionnaire. Here will be addressed the main characteristics of the profile of the studied population.

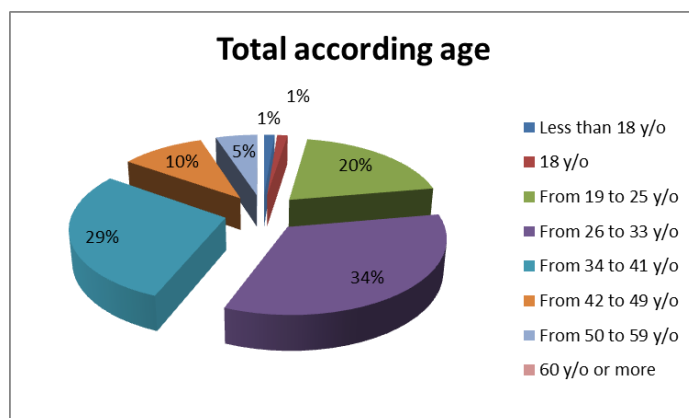


Chart 6: Students profile according age
Source: Authors

The Chart 6 shows that the largest number of students of the studied University is in the age group more present in the labor market, seeking their professional development, similar to data presented in charts 2 and 3 of EAD Census. Br 2013.

Regarding the family gross income and the amount of people that compose the family, Charts 7 and 8 show that the majority of this population has from 1 to 6 minimum wages and has from 2 to 4 people in the family. Such scenario presents itself as a limitation to the high cost of classroom teaching, leading such students to opt for DE as a more affordable way to better qualification and professional development.

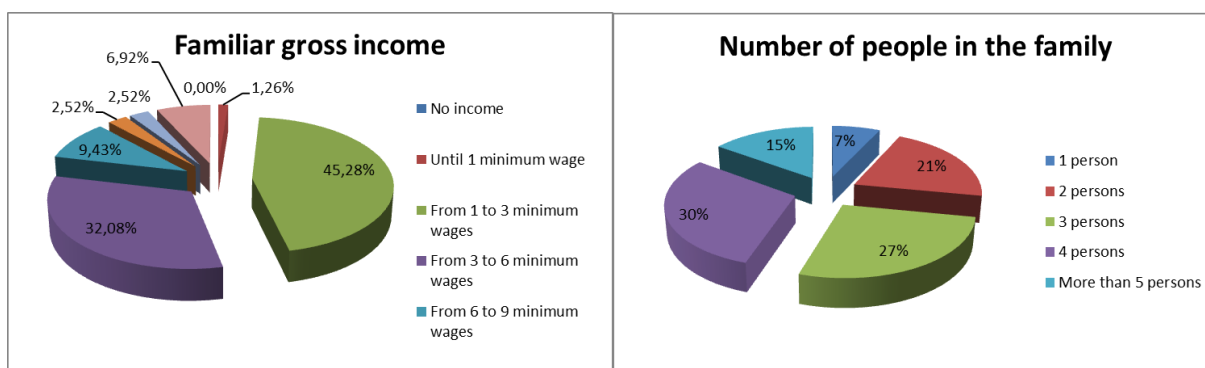


Chart 7: Familiar Gross Income
Source: Authors

Chart 8: Number of people in the family
Source: Authors

The data presented in Chart 9 reinforce the economic characteristic of DE students in the studied University; almost 50% of respondents are responsible for their own sustenance and must then reconcile the expenses related to study with their own daily budget.

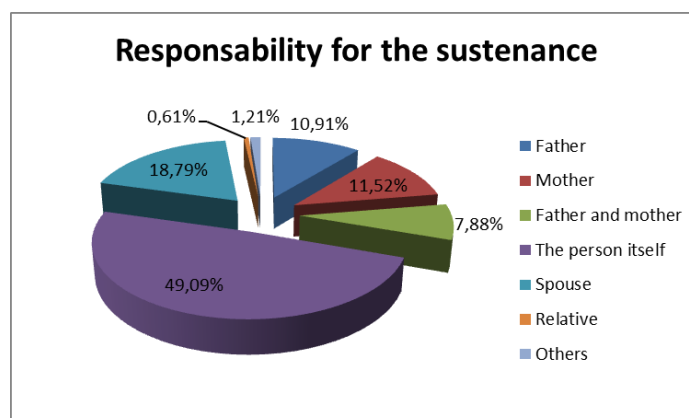


Chart 9: Responsibility for the sustenance
Source: Authors

5. Conclusions

This study, whose theme is Distance Education, in presenting the socioeconomic profile of the students of the graduation course of Technology of an University of the “Cone Leste Paulista”, has demonstrated the increasing need for professional qualification as well as the limitations of most students to join the traditional graduation education due to lack of financial resources and / or time limitation.

As shown in Chart 9, 49.09% of respondents are responsible for their own sustenance and must then reconcile the study expenses with their own daily budget.

Thus, it is noted that on one hand are the organizations qualification requirements used to select, retain and develop their employees and on the other hand, the barriers that must be crossed by those who wish to improve their professional skills in order to remain able to meet the requirements of the organizations.

Chart 6 presents that the largest number of students of the studied University is in the age group more present in the labor market, seeking their professional development. These data are similar to those presented in the Charts 2 and 3 of EAD Census. Br 2013.

When comparing the Chart 9, which presents the economic characteristics of students at the researched University, with data from Charts 4 and 5 of the Census EAD. Br 2013, it is possible to verify that the information are similar. This reinforces the importance of social inclusion that the courses allow to the community, providing the expansion of knowledge and the access to graduation education.

The conclusion is that the results of research conducted at the University have similarity with the results of EAD.BR.2013 Census and that remaining data from the survey that were not presented have not shown significant changes. However, although the research has shown similarity to the distance education student profile presented in EAD.BR .2013 Census, it is essential that each institution know the profile of its student to guide the definition of more appropriate teaching strategies to the teaching-learning process.

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