

CONTINUING EDUCATION IN DISTANTE LEARNING: THE GAP IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract: Continuing education in distance higher education aims to enhance the quality of the teaching-learning process. Due to the rapid growth of E-learning, the quality of its instructors has been called into question. This article discusses the challenges faced by continuing education in this teaching modality, including the lack of institutional support that contributes to instructors with average qualifications, leading to a certain level of backlash against this professional group. It concludes that there is a need for professionals committed to educational and technological development and a cultural shift in institutions to encourage continuing education, taking into account the formative and labor needs of tutors, among other methods.

Keywords: Training Programs; Formative Needs; New Technologies.

1 Introduction

Over the past decade, Higher Education in Brazil has grown exponentially, and part of this growth is due to the increased availability of distance learning courses. It was due the Law of Guidelines and Bases of Brazilian Education – LDB 9394/96, along with Decree No. 5,622, dated December 19, 2005, that the Quality References for Distance Higher Education were established, setting the rules for its regulation, supervision, and evaluation.

“Distance learning is a type of independent and flexible education. Independence and flexibility are interconnected in the autonomy that distance learning grants to students, allowing them to work according to their own autonomy, availability of time, organization and learning pace. It also empowers them to choose when to study, how much time to dedicate to their studies and where to do so.” (ARRUDA, 2005, p.184).

Within the classroom, now virtual, emerges a professional who works closely with students alongside the teacher, usually referred as “tutor” (MENDES, 2012), a term adopted in many distance higher education courses in Brazil.

And it is on these actors that all eyes are focused regarding the quality of education and their curricula. From this perspective, there is the need to reflect on and consider continuous professional development, as it should be assumed that pursuing it is, to some extent, autonomous and driven by motivation, whether career-oriented or purely intellectual. These elements should guide this premise, but it is also crucial for encouragement to arise from a collective context.

Bettega (2004) highlights four fundamental pillars of continuous professional development. The first is the constant evolution of innovations and information. Innovation does not follow a linear path; it involves peaks of breakthroughs that impact various sectors. Information, by itself, is acquired knowledge, representing the reduction of uncertainty, serving as an answer to a question.

The second pillar is the integration of technology throughout the development process, while the third focuses on the continuous creation of forms, content and contexts for similar situations, promoting flexibility.

Finally, the fourth pillar refers to the development of didactic transposition, in which learning transforms into teaching action in a reflective and autonomous way.

Belloni (2001) also contributes to the discussion, highlighting continuing education as an expanding

field that requires the general collaboration of social sectors, especially a synergy between the educational and economic areas. This interaction aims to create training structures more connected to work environments, demanding an expansion of educational offerings beyond initial education.

Data from the 2023 Higher Education Census, published by the National Institute for Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (Inep) and the Ministry of Education (MEC), show that in undergraduate teacher training programs, 67% of students were studying remotely.

The number of teachers continues to grow, thus the concern with continuing education to ensure the quality of these professionals remains critical. Considering this, this work aims to promote discussion on the continuing education of teachers in distance higher education, analyzing its importance for educational quality and the characteristics of the distance education professional.

2 Methodology

For the development of this article, a bibliographic analysis was conducted regarding authors who contextualize the distance learning modality and present characteristics related to the profile of this professional. The focus was the subject of the training of teachers regarding the usage of technology and their access to it while in the classroom, allied with contents focused on continuing development of the professionals. A survey of scientific articles and books was carried out, followed by a thorough review of titles, abstracts, and keywords.

3 Results

Continuing education requires teachers/tutors to engage in constant learning, but it often places the responsibility solely on the individual. The growth of distance learning in higher education institutions (HEIs) has created a high demand for professionals, who, in many cases, do not meet the necessary qualification requirements for the profession at the required academic level due to lack of adequate pedagogical and technological training.

Masetto (2008) emphasizes that teacher training should cover four fundamental axes: pedagogical preparation, the teacher as a creator and manager of the curriculum, the relationship between teacher and student, and mastery of educational technology.

This mastery, which has faced challenges since the expansion of distance learning, involves training teachers to effectively use teaching platforms and new technologies. Today, in addition to everything else, part of what a teacher/tutor must master is experience with the potential of digital networks, with the lack of digital skills potentially becoming a barrier to their professional growth.

The lack of adequate pedagogical training is evident in various *stricto sensu* graduate programs, which qualify professionals for higher education teaching but, by focusing more on research than on teaching, often neglect pedagogical preparation [...] (CUNHA, 2008).

Though, Martins (2001) identified a problem in teacher training programs, pointing out that the content is often defined by planners from central agencies, without considering the teachers' initial training or their lived experiences.

Other authors suggest that hiring teachers should also take educational experience into account. For this reason, the interview is a very important step beyond the *résumé* during the hiring process, as a professional may have a high level of knowledge but, without pedagogical experience, may not

be prepared to deliver quality teaching in direct interaction with students.

Although HEIs strive to recruit educators with higher educational quality, it is observed that continuing education policies are practically nonexistent in many of them. One of the topics fueling the debate is situations involving factors such as:

"Overload, such as the accumulation of tasks, grade closure routines, and multiple work shifts, is compounded by professional devaluation and low salaries, leading teachers to abandon formative activities" (MARQUES, NETO, SANTOS, 2018, p.10).

According to Nóbrega (2014), such training should consider the identification of teachers' formative needs, relate theory to practice, and take into account the issue of workload, making time flexible as an incentive for professional development.

Regarding the usage of technology in classrooms, Moura et al. (2019) affirms that, among the group of interviewed teachers that were part of their study, 92% used computers, internet or data shows during their classes, but only 43% had any training about this topic during or after their graduation. This shows that, while technology can be considered as a possibility to improve the results of these teachers' classes, the lack of training on the subject can limit the professional's work. The study by Duarte and Medeiros (2020) reinforces this point, as, considering the teachers in their research, 86,7% affirmed that never or almost never received proper training on technology and its application on education.

This implies that, while many teachers and undergraduates have the notion that technology and learning how to use in favour of classes is important, they may not have enough knowledge and practice to operate it. This can be seen both as an improvement point for the professional and for the graduation courses, as they can include subjects to help improving this ability in their course curriculum.

4 Conclusion

It is concluded that continuing education in distance learning plays an extremely important role in updating pedagogical practices. HEIs in Brazil need professionals committed to didactic transposition across areas, with greater engagement in the scientific-pedagogical and technological fields.

It is important that continuing education programs be promoted primarily by the higher education institutions themselves (and, if possible, with government support) and that, more and more, they include teaching and learning techniques, covering various areas without focusing on a single centralization. The teacher's and tutor's training regarding the basic usage of computers may be a solution to improvement, thus, the addition of subjects regarding the use of technology can be a solution. These programs should always aim to think in a more humanized way, providing space and encouragement for tutors to become better professionals and deliver the desired results that the institution expects.

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