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DISTANCE LEARNING: TUTOR SKILLS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF TUTORING SUPERVISION

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Abstract: The objective of this article is to describe the work of a distance learning tutor from the perspective of a tutoring supervisor. Distance learning (DL) has gained prominence in the current century, driven by the popularization of technology and the COVID-19 pandemic. This modality allows educational institutions to reach students in remote areas, promoting inclusion and access to quality education. Specialization in distance learning, especially for nursing technicians, offers training and updating opportunities that are essential to meet the demands of the job market. The role of the distance tutor is fundamental, as they monitor and motivate students, facilitating learning in the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). The tutor should be a human presence, promoting a welcoming and stimulating environment, while the Tutor Supervisor acts as a mentor, ensuring that tutors offer adequate support and individualized feedback. Establishing short- and medium-term activity plans is crucial to maintaining group cohesion and student engagement. Clear and effective communication between tutors and supervisors is vital to the success of the courses, as is adapting teaching strategies to the needs of the students. Continuous training for tutors and recognition of their work are essential to ensuring the quality of teaching. In addition, interaction between students and tutors enriches the educational process, reducing dropout rates and increasing completion rates. In summary, distance learning is a powerful tool for professional training, especially in technical areas, promoting the development and updating of skills needed in today's market.

Keywords: Tutoring. Professional Competence. Distance Learning.

INTRODUCTION

Distance learning has proven to be a revolutionary tool in education in this century, with exponential growth in importance and applicability since certain milestones, such as the popularization of computers, the internet, smartphones, and the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic (UNESCO, 2020; BATES, 2020).

These factors, combined and overlapping, have served to multiply the possibilities for distance learning, whether through educational programs from large training centers, such as renowned universities, or through isolated courses offered by private and individual initiatives. Through these channels, formal education and quality information are able to reach distant and disadvantaged places with great capillarity, at the same time as they reach large urban centers. The fact is that the virtual environment of the internet has been consolidating itself as an educational/training environment accessible to all social classes (GOMES, 2025).

In particular, the inclusion of specialization in distance learning for nursing technicians opens up a great opportunity for training and improvement for the country's workforce, with the possibility of short, less theoretical, and more objective courses, filling a gap in the need to update and enhance the skills of these professionals in their various fields of work. For the Ministry of Health in Brazil, since the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, distance learning has been contributing strongly to the continuous training of professionals, as well as keeping pace with the rapid transformation in the world of work and technological tools (BRASIL, 2022).

Distance learning also enables large-scale training, with several simultaneous classes of the same course, each with a significant number of students. For this to work satisfactorily, two equally important figures come into play: the Tutor and the Tutoring Supervisor (ALMEIDA, 2020).

The work of the distance tutor consists of direct and frequent monitoring of each student under their observation. The tutor is a learning facilitator who accompanies the student throughout their educational journey. It is their responsibility, for example, to assist students in navigating the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), monitor their frequency of access to the VLE, course subjects, and assessment activities, and update them on coordination reports. They perform various roles, whether in teaching or monitoring the progress of students, resulting in better performance in the VLE (KOLLING, 2024).

Above all, it is the tutor's responsibility to be the human presence within this virtual world. They are the person to whom students can turn to be heard, understood, and helped. It is therefore up to them to provide a welcoming and individualized environment in a setting designed for automation and collectivity. As Bellodi (2021) says, "the emotional bond, the exercise of empathy, the encouragement to think more and beyond, the sharing of common humanity" sustain the relationship between the teacher and the learner. The ultimate goal is for the student, feeling supported by the tutor, to be more successful in their learning and, consequently, to successfully complete their course.

The Tutor Supervisor is given the role of supporting the development of the work and skills of the tutors they assist, serving as a kind of mentor. Among examples of specific actions, it is the tutor supervisor's responsibility to statistically monitor the progress of classes; ensure the presence and assistance of tutors in the VLE, ensuring that students receive timely correction of activities, adequate and individualized feedback, clarification of doubts, and other demands (SILVA, 2022).

More than technical supervision, it is about monitoring the tutoring work by someone who also has experience in the same role,

which facilitates the identification of possible adjustments. According to Bellodi (2021), "(...) mentors, through their experience, know some of the 'pitfalls,' the points that deserve extra attention and even possible shortcuts."

Although they work in symbiosis, there are few formal descriptions in the academic literature about the ideal work of a tutor from the perspective of their supervisor or about how the work is established between these two actors. There is, therefore, a gap in the reference material for those starting work in such roles. Considering the expansion of distance education in recent years, it is important that such work processes, which have culminated in successful outcomes, are recorded so that they can serve as a source of reference among peers. According to Kolling (2024), experiences in distance education in the field of training technical workers in the health sector need to be further discussed.

The objective of this article is to describe the work of a tutor from the perspective of the tutoring supervisor, with the intention of pointing out the best paths and solutions to achieve success in the quality of learning and the number of graduates. This report is based on a real-life successful experience with the implementation of a program focused on post-technical professional courses, on a national scale in Brazil, between 2023 and 2024.

THEORETICAL REFERENCE

For Brazil (2022), distance learning is a teaching method that emphasizes the participant, providing autonomy in terms of time and space, enabling interactions, where the student is the protagonist of their learning.

Decree No. 12,456, of May 2025, defines distance learning as "a synchronous or asynchronous teaching and learning process carried out through the use of information and communication technologies, in which the student and teacher (...) are in different places or at different times" (BRAZIL, 2025).

In promoting the processes of interaction and mediation in distance learning, there are tutors, professionals who ensure “success in learning and in the educational model employed, as agents who actively participate in pedagogical practice,” BRAZIL (2022).

Based on the authors’ own experience, the functions of a distance tutor include: promoting effective and meaningful learning of the subject under study; establishing mediation and communication with students; promoting spaces for collective knowledge construction to encourage students to remain in the course; establishing constant dialogue with students and encouraging participation; maintaining an active interaction process, stimulating their motivational and problem-solving potential; responding to student requests within the deadlines set by the institution; regular access to the VLE; effective monitoring of student learning through the use of tools such as chats, forums, questionnaires, games, books, tasks, surveys, and evaluation polls (GOMES, 2023).

In addition to technical activities, the tutor also plays the role of motivator, inspiring students to find “(...) strength and courage to continue on the path, despite the vicissitudes, with the encounters (beauty) and misencounters (horror) of every journey (...)” (BELLODI, 2021). This is because, in distance learning, without adequate mediation, students may feel lonely and unmotivated, which leads to high dropout rates.

Wander, Gomes, and Pinto (2020) list several observations about the work of a distance tutor that imply the success of their work: the quality of student-tutor interaction in forums; motivating factors such as addressing students by name, which makes the conversation more personal and demonstrates interest in what they have to say; a partnership approach throughout the course; affective and open language; a cordial approach; maintaining a friendly environment in the VLE; highligh-

ting the individual and collective growth of the group; mastery of the subjects covered and a good understanding of the group’s interests; exercising the role of teacher, with autonomy to guide discussions.

From the above, the power of communication between those involved in distance learning processes is clear. According to Colussi (2024), communication “(...) fosters interactions between tutors and students, between students themselves, and between students and the content. Timely communication, in which students know they can count on the clarification of pedagogical or technical questions, promotes security, avoiding demotivation and consequent dropout.”

It is important to mention that the regulatory framework for Distance Education, published in Presidential Decree No. 12,456, of May 19, 2025, brings about a change in the nomenclature of the roles of agents in this type of education. According to the decree, the role of the tutor will henceforth be restricted to administrative functions, without direct involvement in the teaching-learning process. The pedagogical functions previously performed by the tutor will now be performed by the Pedagogical Mediator: “a professional with compatible training, who acts in the educational mediation of distance learning activities (especially synchronous mediated activities), with active interaction, attendance control, and a limit of up to 70 students per group.” Institutions will have up to two years to make this adjustment (BRAZIL, 2025).

METHODOLOGY

This article is an experience report on the work of a tutor from the perspective of the tutoring supervisor, based on the authors’ real-life experience with the successful implementation of a nationwide program for technical professional specialization courses developed in Brazil between 2023 and 2024.

The Post-Technical Nursing program is a partnership between the Federal Nursing Council and the Professional and Technological Center Technical Health School of the Federal University of Paraíba, with support from the Paraíba Technological and Cultural Education Foundation (FUNETEC), which promotes the offer of post-technical courses for Nursing Technicians, in distance learning mode, throughout Brazil.

With this training initiative, COFEN aims to better prepare its technical professionals in certain areas of nursing and, consequently, reduce the number of ethical violations associated with the most complex and delicate activities of their professional practice. With an initial proposal of five different courses, including Nursing in the Care for the Elderly from a Public Health Perspective, and Emergency Nursing and Pre-Hospital Care (APH), each with a workload of 300 hours, 75 of which are practical and the rest theoretical, the program began its work in the first semester of 2023.

Based on the author's monitoring of these two courses in 2023 and 2024, practices and strategies in the work of tutors that lead to greater engagement of students, better quality of learning, and a higher number of graduates are highlighted.

RESULTS

According to Wander, Gomes, and Pinto (2020), "it is important to conduct studies on the factors that interfere with the quality of distance learning processes and that contribute to the understanding of interactive processes." Such studies help explain how learning occurs best with the support of technology.

For Colussi et al (2024), "tutors develop a set of actions that contribute to enhancing student learning and autonomy, in addition to ensuring their continuous interaction with the teaching system."

In this author's experience, the moment of greatest engagement among students is undoubtedly at the beginning of the course. This is when the tutor should introduce themselves, be cordial, available, accessible, and create and inform students of the communication channels through which they can find them, both synchronously and asynchronously, seeking to establish a connection and be a real reference in the virtual world of distance learning. In his study, Kolling (2024) identified that tutor support proved to be an effective strategy for supporting the acquisition of new knowledge, skills, and competencies in distance learning.

The work of a tutor with their class begins even before the students enter the VLE. This is because many of the problems that arise at the beginning of distance learning courses relate to students' difficulties in accessing and navigating the VLE, such as difficulty registering on the educational platform, lost passwords, loss of access to their own email, unfamiliarity with computer and internet resources, and lack of attention to the start date and progress of the course. Without adequate assistance at this stage, many students feel lonely and incapable and end up dropping out of their studies (SILVA, 2024). In addition, in many institutional settings, tutors are required to undergo training focused on their role in the VLE before they begin working with their classes.

The attention needed in this period before the student enters and engages with the VLE can be provided by actively seeking out students who have never accessed the course and need to be directed there. At this point, it is suggested that the tutor use all available communication channels to locate, raise awareness, and motivate these students to begin their studies (BATES, 2020).

An excellent initiative is to create a direct communication channel between the tutor and their group of students, through messaging apps such as WhatsApp, for example.

When well managed, such groups serve as extremely popular, accessible, and fast communication channels. The danger is losing control of the conversations and the group losing focus, causing intrigue among participants, for example.

To avoid noise and confusion in very large classes, it is suggested that the group be created solely for the tutor to send information to students, not allowing messages to be sent in the opposite direction. Individual questions can be discussed in private conversations on the same app or on the VLE itself. In the messaging app, the tone should always be light, friendly, and positive. It should function as a kind of portal that directs and encourages students to use the VLE, providing a supportive and collaborative environment.

Once the course has started, it is important that students feel encouraged to continue. Cordial and empathetic language in the VLE; messages of encouragement, congratulations for small progress, individualized feedback, given in a constructive and affectionate manner, using the student's first name, convey a sense of connection and constant companionship with the tutor. The interaction between the tutor and the students and the interaction of the students with each other in the VLE make the environment more friendly and real. According to Colussi et al (2024): "Interactions are an important part of the whole process in any teaching system, offering the opportunity to expand knowledge beyond the support material (...)"

For the smooth running of courses, especially longer ones, it is up to the tutor to keep their class informed about the upcoming training itinerary. Notify them of the closing and opening dates for activities and subjects, changes to modules, and clarify new formats for activities to be submitted.

Establishing a short- and medium-term plan for carrying out activities with the class helps maintain a sense of cohesion within the

group. Example: set a goal for everyone to complete their subjects from the first module by the weekend before Carnival, so that the group can maintain the pace of their studies and rest during the holiday (GARRISON, 2021).

Monitoring the individual progress of each student is essential. Actively seeking out students who are absent should happen as soon as possible, not letting them go too many days without logging into the VLE. This search does not consist solely of ordering the student to resume the course. Before doing so, it is important to find out the reason for their absence and what the tutor can do to help the student resume their study routine. Offering help, understanding, and support are more effective than demanding results without empathy. Always remember that on the other side of the screen is a worker with their own personal life, and that each student is unique.

Understanding the educational and cultural level of students, without judging their basic education or vocabulary, can be a challenge for some tutors who are used to a higher level of education, especially when it comes to tutoring in technical and vocational courses. It is necessary to be open to receiving what the student has to offer in the language they are able to formulate, making the necessary corrections, but without diminishing the value of their contribution. The regional differences of a country as vast as Brazil need to be taken into account and, for this reason, as far as possible, it is a good idea to group supervisors, tutors, and students from similar geographical locations. According to Kolling (2024), the tutor "(...) must have the ability to adapt theory to the reality of each student's context in a didactic and pedagogical manner that promotes critical thinking through theoretical and practical reflection and the ability to encourage students in their self-learning process."

Mastery of the tools and technologies involved in the work, as well as technical and

scientific knowledge of the content being covered in the course, are essential requirements for selecting people to tutor online courses. It is equally important that tutors are willing to learn/review what is being covered in the course by attending classes, reading the proposed materials, familiarizing themselves with the assessment activities, and everything else related to the course.

Souza (2021) states that the role of the tutor is extremely necessary in the learning context and that this professional can develop strategies for students to learn and build their own knowledge.

With this important role, Costa and Scadelai (2022) argue that the tireless efforts of tutors should be noted and valued by institutions, the academic community, and society as a whole, since these professionals provide an extremely important, constant, and facilitating service, answering questions and being available whenever they are called upon.

While it is important for tutors to have a good relationship with their students, the relationship between tutors, tutoring supervisors, and course coordinators is also important for achieving good results. It is important that there is a clear and smooth flow of information between these bodies, and it is the tutoring supervisor who acts as a bridge within the team. Here, once again, communication is key. Weekly meetings between the supervisor and their group of tutors and the course coordinator are recommended, as well as monitoring their group of tutors via a messaging app. According to Colussi et al (2024), “the relationship between course colleagues, especially (...) at a distance, is a very valuable practice, capable of helping to prevent isolation and maintaining a stimulating process that motivates learning, facilitates interdisciplinarity, and promotes attitudes of respect and solidarity towards others.”

As this is a work project, there are formalities and rules that must be followed in a timely and satisfactory manner by tutors and their supervisors, such as submitting reports in accordance with the proposed standards and participating in training courses. From the outset, the goals to be achieved by the group (such as the percentage of graduates in each class) must be clear, and strategies for achieving them must be outlined and continuously reviewed.

It is necessary to open a space for dialogue among team members to discuss the progress of the work and provide updates on the course developments; preparation of spreadsheets and reports to monitor activities; sharing of problems encountered by tutors throughout the journey, team creation of strategies to enhance learning; to improve student adherence, retention, and recovery, in order to contribute to the completion of courses with quality.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Distance learning expands opportunities for professional development, as it brings scientific updates to places far from major technological centers. Due to its flexibility, it fits well into the routine of professional-level healthcare workers.

Within distance learning, the work of a tutor supervisor consists of monitoring, supporting, and guiding tutors in the development of their actions, with the aim of always improving student retention and success rates in the course. In order to achieve this goal, the role of the supervisor towards their tutors, at a strategic, managerial, and operational level, is an important tool in the pursuit of knowledge and the updating of knowledge in order to improve the quality of work of technical professionals.

In this chain of teaching and knowledge, the role of the tutor supervisor can be summarized as that of a key link in communication between students, tutors, and course coordinators. It is

an effective and efficient channel of communication, which requires commitment, responsibility, ethics, and willingness on the part of the professional who performs it.

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