THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF DISTANCE EDUCATION IN FEDERAL PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES: THE CASE OF THE FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF SANTA CATARINA

A INSTITUCIONALIZAÇÃO DA EDUCAÇÃO A DISTÂNCIA NAS UNIVERSIDADES PÚBLICAS FEDERAIS: O CASO DA UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the current state of Distance Education (DE) at the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC). This is a case study carried out with the coordinators of distance education majors and managers at UFSC. Its contributions are based on fact that this study seeks to describe relevant information for the improvement of this teaching modality by examining this case study. As a result, it was possible to identify a scenario characterized by a fear of the possibility of failure of DE in Federal Institutions of Higher Education (FIHE), in addition to a lack of agreement on some issues among the interviewees. But, on the other hand, as a consensus, there is an extreme need to change the vision of Distance Education at the university by the management of UFSC as well as the Ministry of Education / Coordinating Body for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (MEC / Capes), based on institutionalization of this teaching modality so that it starts to be formally and structurally integrated into the university. Impasses in the relationships between the agents of this process - poles – the FIHE – and MEC/Capes are also often cited.

Keywords: University management. Institutionalization. Distance Education.

RESUMO

Esta pesquisa tem como propósito estudar o cenário atual da Educação a Distância (EAD) na Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC). Trata-se de um estudo de caso realizado com os coordenadores de cursos de educação a distância e gestores da UFSC. Como resultados foi possível identificar um cenário caracterizado por um temor quanto à possibilidade de fracasso da EAD nas Instituições Federais de Ensino Superior (IFES), além da ausência de acordo em algumas questões entre os entrevistados. Mas, por outro lado, como um consenso, a necessidade extrema de mudança da visão da EAD na universidade por parte da gestão tanto da UFSC quanto do Ministério da Educação/Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (MEC/CAPES), baseada na institucionalização dessa modalidade de ensino de modo que essa passe a integrar formalmente e estruturalmente a universidade. Impasses nas relações entre os agentes deste processo – polos – IFES – MEC/CAPES também foram bastante citados.

Palavras-chave: Gestão Universitária. Institucionalização. Educação a Distância.

1 INTRODUCTION

Brazilian higher education has demonstrated progress in terms of offering distance education degrees. These initiatives require the establishment of public policies which translate decrees and resolutions, seeking to better conceive of the field of distance education within higher education as a whole.

According to the Brazilian Association of Distance Education (ABED), distance education with its online methodology permits the creation of new inclusive and open educational methods for offering education at any time and place. However, according to the ABED, making it viable in formative spaces of quality requires the implementation of innovations in school environments, methodologies and the perception of people about access to, and the practices of, education. DE occurs in new spaces and times, outside of schools. Nonetheless, it requires distinct procedures, practices, forms of management and policies, and the particularities of this type of teaching raise various questions in addition to the many paths of academic investigation regarding this subject. (ABED, 2017).

According to data from the Anísio Teixeira National Institute of Educational Studies and Research (INEP, 2017), the volume of enrollments for higher education of this type has increased significantly (an increase of 27.3% between 2016 and 2017 compared to in-person majors which increased by 0.5%) (MEC, 2017). Nascimento and Vieira (2016) address a series of actions taken by Federal Institutions of Higher Education (FIHE) which are advanced with the institutionalization of DE, which are: the inclusion of DE policy in the Institutional Development Plan (IDP) and the Institutional Pedagogical Project; approval of this type of learning for college majors: the conception of a specific directory for DE; the formation and training of professors and administrative technical specialists; the offer of extension school degrees and grants for discipline offerings and research incentives, and positions for the monitoring and utilization of an integrated virtual program with data from the academic system. (NASCIMENTO AND VIEIRA, 2016).

Moreover, in recent years, IFES managers have not spared efforts to consolidate DE actions in their respective institutions. However, we have verified the existence of obstacles which hinder and challenge the insertion of DE in the organizational culture of the IFES. (NASCIMENTO AND VIEIRA, 2016). Thus, this study's objective is to study the current scenario of DE in the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC). This study is opportune because it seeks to provide essential information about the current situation of this type of

teaching in the Federal University of Santa Catarina, as well as presenting and listing the opinions of the diverse individuals involved with this process in terms of crucial issues related to DE.

2 2 THEORETICAL REFERENCES

2.1 THE SOCIAL FUNCTION OF UNIVERSITIES

In 1996, Law nº 9394 concerning the Guidelines and Bases for Brazilian Education (GBE) with structural traits within the scope of primary education, confirming the four fundamentals of the subjective right to education: completing human development; preparation for becoming good citizens; preparation for the job market; and preparation for entering the highest levels of learning (CARDOSO ET AL, 2016). The first National Plan of Education (2001-2010), based on the successes and errors of the Decade Plan, made significant changes to the guidelines aligned with the concept of the minimal state: administrative and financial decentralization; the prioritization of primary education; the division of responsibility for education; and the municipalization of primary education (CARDOSO ET AL, 2016). However, in the words of David et al (2015):

> The National Plan of Education (2001-2011), oriented by the Constitution of 1988 (Art. 214) and by Art. 87 of GBE No.9,394/96, was reduced to an agenda of measures to be taken by the government from the federal to the municipal level. It defined a group of 295 targets, with a fixed timeframe of execution for each grade and type of teaching. It was a plan of promising horizons, but was stillborn because it was not instituted as a state policy (DAVID ET AL, 2015, P. 126).

Meanwhile the National Plan of Education for the decade 2011/2020 presented a more streamlined structure, based on more defined objectives. It originated from a consultation with the educational bases through meetings with professionals interested in teaching and concluded with a diagnosis which contemplated twenty targets to improve education. (CARDOSO ET AL, 2016). The approval of the new National Plan of Education for 2011/2020 at the end of June 2014 can be defined as a landmark reference for the development of Brazilian educational policy for the following decade. Besides being the result of a strong battle involving the federal executive and legislature, as well as organized civil society, the new NPE encompassed a group of bold targets, whose scope

included great obstacles in Brazilian society (Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada, 2015).

Darcy Ribeiro (1969) discussed the social role of the university citing the establishment of democratic states and the advent of industrial society as the creators of transformations which required a new role for the university in the middle of the 20th century. The author listed and debated the conditions for thinking of a university as having the function of collaborating in the development of Latin American countries and suggested the existence of two plausible paths for university reform in these countries, as follows:

> One of them is reflexive modernization, based on the supposition that, adding certain improvements and innovations to our universities, we will see them approach their most advanced rivals becoming as effective as they are. The other policy, which we can term autonomous growth is based on the supposition that the university, as a substructure inserted in a global social structure, tends to operate as a body that perpetuates social institutions, while it acts spontaneously: and that it can only play an active role in overcoming our national backwardness by intentionally existing and acting to achieve this objective (RIBEIRO, 1969, P. 9).

According to Chauí (2003), the university is a social institution and as such it reveals in a precise manner the way it functions and the structure of society as a whole. That being so, it is possible to verify in this context of university institutions the presence of incompatible opinions, attitudes and projects which reveal contradictions and divisions within society. This internal relationship between society and universities is what elucidates the fact that since they first appeared, public universities have always been social institutions, or in other words, a social practice established by the public recognition of its attributes and legitimacy, in a principle of differentiation, that attributes autonomy to it in relation to other social institutions (CHAUÍ, 2003).

2.2 PUBLIC DISTANCE EDUCATION POLICIES

Decree Nº 5,800 of June 8, 2006 definitively consolidated the distance system as a public policy, presenting in Article I the main objectives of the UAB, including: making available licensing degrees and the initial and continuing training of primary school teachers a priority, offering college degrees for the training of principals, managers and workers in primary schools in the states, the Federal District and municipalities; expanding access to public higher education; diminishing inequalities in the higher education offered

in various regions of the country; consolidating a broad national system of distance education; and stimulating institutional development for distance education (BRASIL, 2006).

Data from the 2016/2017 DE census shows that the most sought after majors are pedagogy, administration, social service, accounting sciences and human resources management. The census counted 561,667 students in entirely remote degrees and 217,715 in semi-in person degrees (CENSO EAD. BR, 2016). Alonso (2010) raises a no less important issue in addressing the fact that the dynamics of expansion and the way in which most higher education institutions are organized, among other factors, express a scenario in which DE, as part of this, perhaps because of its greater visibility, is taken emblematically to be the problematic element in the expansion of higher education:

> This does not mean not knowing the problems due to the installation of degrees and poles from outside of the country. The only catch, in this case, is considering the context, the dynamics and logic implicit in the acceleration of the supply of this type of higher learning (ALONSO, 2010, P.1325).

In 2017, the Ministry of Education published Decree Nº 9,057/2017 which made it possible for higher learning institutions to expand their offering of undergraduate and graduate degrees for distance education. Among the main changes was the creation of DE poles by the institutions themselves and the accrediting of DE institutions without requiring previous accreditation for in-person degrees. The objective of this Ministry of Education policy is to increase the offer of higher learning in this country to attain Target 12 of the National Education Plan, which requires raising gross enrollment rates for higher education to 50% and net enrollment rates to 33% of the 18 to 24-year-old population. The new rule also establishes that the exclusive accreditation of DE graduate *latu sensu* degrees is restricted to government universities (ASSESSORIA DE COMUNICAÇÃO SOCIAL, 2017).

Within this context we can highlight the importance of the poles, of in-person support, partners in this offering, which are responsible for the infrastructure for making these higher learning degrees viable, mainly in terms of the construction and maintenance of specific laboratories, libraries with specialized archives, internet service that is compatible with distance education, which require a large financial investment (HERNANDES, 2017).

It should be noted that Alonso (2010), in terms of public HEI and due to the way in which distance education majors are financed, points out that the places generated by DE are not counted in the overall total of offers for each of these degrees. In this way, DE students are excluded from the budgetary matrix of public higher education institutions and DE programs are not in fact instituted within them. This ends up generating various distortions and internal problems in these institutions. Among the main problems are related to the financing and overloading of the faculty's work (ALONSO, 2010). The Ministry of Education offers some positions for professors working mainly with distance education majors, but these are not linked degrees in the same way as in-person majors are. They can be wildcard professors (who teach various degree) and IT or multimedia specialists (HERNANDES, 2017).

To Hernandes (2017), since college distance education majors are not financed by the Ministry of Education, public HEI face difficulties in the development of these degrees in terms of opening new classes and new majors which are limited to exams proposed by the Coordinating Body for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel / Open University of Brazil (Capes/UAB). Since the majors are not institutionalized organically, they become secondary activities for the higher learning institution. (HERNANDES, 2017).

Within this context, Weiss (1999) emphasizes that the degree of institutionality of a policy is associated with the historical, cultural, operation, budgetary and regulatory circumstances of public organizations.

According to the Brazilian DE Census (2017), dropping out is one of the main problems faced by Distance Education and most of the learning institutions do not know the reasons for this: among the majors regulated totally as distance education, 59% of the institutions responded that they did not know the reasons or did not answer the question. In majors which are semi-in-person, this number rises to a scary 71% (Associação Brasileira de Educação a Distância (ABED), 2017). The census also lists problems faced by responding institutions, which are listed here in order of relevance: innovation in pedagogical approaches, technological innovation, innovation in administrative processes, high standards of infrastructure, the hiring of trained professionals, continual training, the development of support structures for students, and a complex administrative structure.

National (CAETANO et al., 2016) and international (ANSTINE and SKIDMORE, 2005; KOMARINSKI, 2015;WOMACK, 2010) studies reveal that students linked to in-

person education have a statistically superior performance to students linked to distance education. In terms of the administrative category, the median grades for in person degrees are numerically above distance education majors in FIHE.

2.3 DISTANCE EDUCATION AT THE FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF SANTA CATARINA

Since 1996, Distance education has played an important role at UFSC, and in this manner, it is properly inserted within the university's Institutional Development Plans. The objectives proposed in this document demonstrate the integration of in-person and distance degrees as a way to ensure the quality of teaching on all levels, seeking new levels of academic excellence. Currently at UFSC, the number of students enrolled in undergraduate distance education degrees is 1,488. (PDI-UFSC, 2020). The bases and policies of DE at the university involve various units of learning, departments, majors and laboratories – including the Distance Education Laboratory (LED). In addition, UFSC has a Distance Education Secretariat (SEAD), which is responsible for promoting the human, technical and administrative development of professors and technical administrative civil servants in education with knowledge of the utilization of DE technologies in classrooms and/or daily routines, and supervising the work of the UAB Center (PDI-UFSC, 2020).

Twenty poles located in the states of Santa Catarina and Paraná currently participate in the UAB program in the offering of UFSC distance education degrees. The DE installations at UFSC are divided into two sectors: the UAB Center and SEAD. The UAB Center, located in the Socioeconomic Center of the Florianopolis campus, consists of spaces for the Overall Coordination and its secretariat, having locations for meetings and the development of tutorials (PDI-UFSC, 2020). SEAD, meanwhile, located in the center of Florianopolis, has various environments specially projected for the development of technical work such as IT laboratories, videoconference meeting rooms, an auditorium, recording studios shared with UFSC TV, as well as other spaces dedicated to training (PDI-UFSC, 2020).

In this way, UFSC offers DE as a type of learning in which teaching and learning processes occur through information and communication technologies featuring a qualified technical team, access policies, student support services and evaluations compatible with a variety of actions and integrated distance and in-person academic practices (PDI-UFSC, 2020).

3 METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This study uses a qualitative approach and is classified as a case study. The Federal University of Santa Catarina, the location of this study, is an autarchy of a special regime, linked to the Ministry of Education (Law Nº 3,849 of December 18, 1960 – Decree Nº 64,824 of July 15, 1969), and is also a multicampus institution of higher learning based in the Rector João David Ferreira Lima University Campus in Florianopolis, the capital of the state of Santa Catarina (UFSC, 2017). This study is classified as descriptive in terms of its aims. This research requires information from the investigator about what will be investigated, and this type of study is designed to describe the facts and phenomena of a given reality (TRIVIÑOS, 1987).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with primary data sources. A semi-structured interview is a data collection technique appropriate for obtaining information about non-objective questions, such as cognitive and affective questions (GIL, 1999). In this manner, a script consisting of seven questions was prepared which addressed the theme of distance education. It should be noted that the questions were prepared based on records related to the main problems that appeared during the construction of the references for this study, and the interviews were conducted in person. It addressed these themes, educational public policies and DE. As an example of this construction we can cite the following request: Please cite the greatest difficulties encountered in providing this form of education. This question was prepared based on the contribution of Nascimento and Vieira (2016) who affirm that there are obstacles that hinder and challenge the insertion of DE within the organizational culture of HEI. In terms of the problem of the institutionalization of this form of learning, we prepared the following question: In your opinion what are the main actions that are necessary for the institutionalization of DE? Text Table I lists the references which inspired these questions.

Table I References Used in the Construction of the Survey

References	Questions
Adapted from Hernandes (2017) and Nascimento and Vieira (2016) and Alonso (2010)	**1.** Do you believe that distance education activities are developed in a standardized fashion, with equal regulations and practices for all user units? If yes, do you believe that all of the units meet the required norms? **2.** Please cite the greatest difficulties encountered in providing this type of education.
Adapted from Brasil (2006) and Alonso (2010)	**3.** Do you believe that public educational policies and DE are meeting the real needs of DE poles? (of the youths and adults who look for DE degrees?)

References	Questions
Adapted from UFSC (2018)	**4.** Has this unit ever adopted a model from another university which is related to the management of DE? If yes, which university was selected as the model?
Adapted from PDI-UFSC (2015;2020)	**5.** Do you believe that the support the orientation received by the UAB is effective (the management and control of DE)? Are DE poles consulted about everyday difficulties faced in this type of education?
Adapted from Alonso (2010) and Hernandes (2017)	**6.** In your opinion, what are the main actions needed to institutionalize DE?
Adapted from UFSC (2018)	**7.** Are there specific regulations for distance education or do distance education degrees follow the same regulations as in-person degrees? Do the units have autonomy to elaborate their own regulations in terms of DE?

Source: Material prepared by the Authors, 2019.

The data analysis was performed using the content analysis technique. To Hair et al (2005), content analysis collects information through the observation and verification of content or a written text. In this way, the responses obtained in the interviews were first transcribed and then analyzed in order to arrive at the results and discussion of this study. We would like to emphasize that the answers were analyzed based on the referenced authors, and furthermore, we sought to characterize the main points presented by these authors, which are, for example, the institutionalization, standardization, quality, management, and culture of distance education. The sample contemplated coordinators of the undergraduate majors of biology, philosophy, economics, public administration and letters. Note that the units were chosen to select various areas in order to enrich the results of the study through various perspectives. In addition, the Adjunct Coordinator of UAB at UFSC, the Secretary of DE at UFSC, and the person responsible for the administrative area of this secretariat also participated. To preserve their anonymity, the names of the interviewees are not mentioned.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Here we will present the main factors related to distance education at UFSC based on our conducted interviews as elaborated in the methodological procedures of Section 3. In terms of the standardization of DE activities, with equal regulations and practices for all user units, Interviewee I informed us that it does not function in this manner, but noted a desire on the part of UAB to standardize this area, because a lack of standardization is an impediment to the success of DE. Meanwhile, Interviewee II explained that each major has its own specificities, and thus it's impossible for the activities to be standardized, however the

professor pointed out that standards exist in the systems environment, such as Moodle (a support system for UFSC majors) for example. Interviewee III also believes that there is no standard, and each unit has its own internal norms, given that the scenarios are different. Interviewee IV argues that in relation to legislation and regulations, there is a standard enforced by Capes/UAB, but in relation to administrative practices, each unit has autonomy to make its own. In the opinion of Interviewee VI, this standardization does not exist and informed us that this university works with Resolution 017/CUN/97 to officialize the hour workload for DE undergraduate majors and with 002/CUN/07 – UAB/Capes to assist in the development of totally DE majors.

In terms of the difficulties of providing this type of education, the responses were countless and quite varied, such as problems of scale for professors, the absence of financial resources, the absence of an administrative structure and investment, a lack of institutional support by UFSC, the absence of an allocation of service workers, student dropout rates and precarious work conditions. It is interesting to note that these allegations match what is envisioned by the UFSC IDPs of 2015 and 2020, as cited in the references for this study. It should be noted that the first two interviewees recently began work at their positions and not due to their own interest, but rather due to an absence of interested applicants. Interviewee II points out that the position is relatively well paid, but that even so there are not many interested due to the uncertain future of DE. Alonso (2010) also addresses the visibility of DE as a problematic issue. Interviewee II fears the planned cuts in July of this year (2019) which will affect all the paid positions in universities, which will make the situation even worse. The described scenario matches the perspective of Nascimento and Vieira (2016), who allege that the managers of this type of education in HEI have made great efforts to stimulate DE, despite the vast gamut of obstacles that challenge its integration.

Cited by the interviewees, and in accordance with the Brazilian DE Census (2017), the dropout problem is one of the main issues faced by HEI, given that most of them do not know the reasons behind this. According to the interviews, this problem has to do with the pedagogical structure, because the majors end up losing the right to have a tutor due to the small number of students. Interviewee II states that upon assuming the role of coordinator, no orientation or instruction was provided in terms of exercising the position's activities. To Interviewee III, the main problems are: a lack of support from administration and personnel in this form of education. To Interviewee IV, the main problem is the absence of the

understanding of the activities of each position within the UAB system. As an example, he cited the following positions: tutor, coordinator, professor and support team, and alleged that often, perhaps because of the lack of institutionalization of this modality, the activities become mixed up so that professionals do not have a clear idea of the array of functions they are responsible for.

According to Hernandes (2017), the Ministry of Education offers some positions for professors who work primarily on distance degrees and specialists in IT and multimedia. However, what is observed in practice is that there is a reduced number of these professionals as well as professionals who have not yet been assigned with the proper priority, according to the DE structure within UFSC. In terms of problematic issues, Interviewees I and II emphasize the human resources situation, divided into two deficiencies: one is a lack of investment in this area, which is made up of just fellowship students and tutors hired by UAB itself. The professors informed us that the entire administration of degrees was due to fellowship students. Interviewee II defended the idea that contrary to what is done now, professionals should be hired by UFSC and that the staff should be composed of public servants as is the case of in- person decrees, through public exams with the requirement of specific types of knowledge. The problematic issues diagnosed in the interviews also confer with those cited by the Brazilian Census (2017) above.

Interviewee I told us that when he assumed the coordination of the major, even with approximately 600 students, it did not have an academic or administrative secretary. In this manner, we verified that most DE majors, the same people who work in the in-person majors also attend the needs of DE. The professor told us that when he received the tutors hired by UAB, he found that they had no type of education in the major. Moreover, the interviewee informed us that there was pressure on the part of private universities, to discourage public universities from the development of DE. In this professor's opinion, this form of teaching has a number of valuable aspects, which makes private initiative eager to become the sole purveyor of this type of education. In terms of the problematic issues, here is an excerpt from an interview: "As you can see, we are physically situated in a small space which was a storeroom, with neither ventilation nor windows. This is the importance given to DE by this university." (Interviewee II, 2019).

In terms of the lack of administrative structure, Interviewee I tells us that when he assumed the position, most student complaints were about the website being out of date,

which had been the case for two years. Interviewee II told us that at the beginning of 2019 all the coordinators of DE majors were called into a meeting, in which they were informed that the trips to the poles would no longer occur due to a reduction in financial resources. Alonso (2010) also argues about the problem of a lack of budgetary resources for DE, in criticizing the way in which distance education projects are financed, in which the positions generated by this modality are not counted in the overall offering of each of the majors. Interviewee II characterized that decision as extremely problematic for the execution and quality of the majors, because visits to the poles were essential to maintain the good functioning and relationships with the personnel in the poles and also students through in-person classes.

On the other hand, the manager informed us that this year 2019 is the first year that the calendar of DE classes needed to be adjusted to the calendar of in-person classes at UFSC, which she considers to be a very significant change. This affirmation has to do with the objectives established by the UFSC IDP (2015) which addresses this issue and highlights institutionalizing distance education activities on all levels of the UFSC environment.

For Interviewee VI, the main problem has to do with the absence of budgetary resources, which leads to a series of other problems. In the manager's perception, since 2014 MEC and Capes have diminished the amount of resources sent, leading to some setbacks such as: the diminishing of in-person meetings at the poles, which to the professor are of extreme importance, and the lack of resources for the production of materials, making it necessary to use previous versions. To Interviewee VII, the problems listed are diverse: in terms of the students, there is a lack of dedication and discipline, because the majority believe that the degree will be easy. There are problems related to behavioral aspects and also impasses in terms of communication. In terms of the administrative issue, there is a lack of personnel given that the professionals are hired by Capes through fellowships.

To Interviewee VII, the lack of interest of professors in working with DE is the greatest obstacle. Interviewee VIII cited obstacles in the form of the situation of the poles in terms of technology and the quality of equipment among other things. According to the professor, the students used to know UFSC and the laboratories, while now there is no more interaction between the students and professors in this manner due to a lack of resources. To Interviewee VII, the greatest difficulty is related to the behavior of the students, and the professor alleges that they still do not have a global understanding of how the DE methodology functions, and he also cited a lack of responsibility.

In terms of DE and public education policies meeting the needs of the DE poles, Interviewee I alleged that they do not meet them and again cited the precarious situation of hiring at human resources, which is performed by UAB in an independent manner. Interviewee II, meanwhile, argues that the educational policies are good, but do not take into consideration some crucial factors that are specific to DE. The manager explains that most of the students live in cities in the interior which are very far from the support poles, and furthermore these students work the entire day, which leads to an absence of proper conditions, in terms of time and financial resources to travel to poles. She suggests that they need financial assistance to pay the costs of this transport as well as fellowships so that students can work less and dedicate themselves more to the university. These arguments are also listed by the ABED, and the institution argues that for DE to remain viable, the implementation and development of innovations in the study environment, methodologies and the perception of people about access to education and its practices is needed.

Interviewee III, meanwhile does not believe public education policies and DE are meeting the real needs of the poles and units, mainly due to the contingent nature of resources. Interviewee VI believes that they do and took advantage of the opportunity to inform us that there is an imminent movement to do away with the poles. Contrary to the perception of Hernandes (2017), who defends the existence of the poles, this manager is in favor of this movement and alleges that it is no longer necessary for students to go to poles to watch web conferences, with the exception of laboratories which she considers extremely important. She also notes that currently there is a difficulty in implementing poles in other locations. Interviewee VIII believes that DE public policies are not meeting the real needs of the community, because there is a limit related to the number of poles if we make a comparison with the number of municipalities. Another restriction raised by the manager is the limit in the number of professors who can teach students, given that this process involves technical visits, resources and labor.

It is interesting to note that many of the interviewees made a point of emphasizing the lack of resources compared to previous periods: in the past Capes provided the equipment and materials used in the poles, while today this is no longer the case, and UFSC itself often has to send materials, and in some units this does not occur, leaving some poles in extremely precarious situations. Interviewee VI points out that these materials were also provided by the municipalities or by the State, and today this no longer occurs. To Interviewee IX, the

partnerships between the State and the municipalities are more and more fragile due to limited financial resources. The situation in terms of educational policies and DE depends greatly on the current managerial profile. The professor emphasized the importance of politics in the DE scenario: "It depends on the management, the profile of the political moment as well as respective interests. This is what determines the situation of the poles, which will be points of investment or abandonment" (ENTREVISTADO IX, 2019). When questioned whether their unit adopted a model from another university in terms of managing DE, two interviewees responded negatively. Interviewee IV informed us that in the past the UAB adopted the Open University system from the United Kingdom as well as the Spanish National University of Distance Education (UNED). He emphasized that the great problem with these models is that they are not updated, and this is why UFSC does not currently follow any model.

Interviewee VII informed us that the major that she teaches will begin to adopt the following universities as references: the federal universities of Paraná, Rio Grande do Norte and Minas Gerais. Many of the interviewees informed us that UFSC has served as a model for various institutions and that some professors have adopted as models foreign references such as the University of Lisbon. Interviewee VII stated that the UFSC's Distance Education Laboratory (LED) has been used as a model. In terms of the support and guidance received from the UAB, and whether the DE poles are consulted about everyday problems in this type of learning, the wide divergence of opinions made it difficult to establish a consensus. Interviewee I informed us that this support could be better and pointed out that this support depends on the management of UAB at the moment. He said that the new manager assumed the position about a month ago and calls him to know what the difficulties are of the coordinators of each major, but it was not always like this.

Even though one of the targets of UFSC's IPD (2015; 2020) was the issue of the institutionalization of DE, the manager again mentioned the lack of DE's incorporation in the university, which has to do with a certain neglect on the part of the institution. She gave as an example, that before her arrival, decisions dealing with DE were not communicated to colleagues and the leadership as occur in the in-person majors, which denotes a lack of integration of this modality within the institution, which is in line with Hernandes (2017), who relates that DE majors are not institutionalized organically, leading the activities of this modality to become secondary within the context of the institution itself. Interviewee II alleges that this support exists, but it is in the sense of meeting schedules and the requirements

process basically occurs in the following manner: the poles send their requests to UFSC, and what UFSC cannot resolve is sent to the UAB. To Interviewee III, this support does not occur on the part of Capes/UAB, and it also does not occur in the opinion of Interviewee IV. But the professor pointed out that this year has been an exception and that this has often happened due to problems in managing UFSC's DE at the end of 2018, but it never was like that in the past. He informed us that this support only occurs when there are problems in the management of DE, and in a negative manner in the form of pressure and control of his work. The interviewee emphasized that before last year (2018), SEAD had operated for practically twelve years without this control, and operated with great flexibility and autonomy. He also told us that this support occurred more often before 2006, when the poles had extreme importance within the UAB system. He noted that currently the leadership of the UAB at UFSC does not provide any support to the poles, and makes no effort to know the situation that they are in.

Meanwhile to Interviewees V, VI, VII and IX this support occurs as exemplified by the following excerpt: "Yes! In order for a pole to remain, it is periodically evaluated, with MEC/Capes conducting their evaluation of the major, quality in general, structure, materials, and classes. I don't know if these evaluations are still being conducted" (ENTREVISTADO VII, 2019). On the other hand, to Interviewee VIII, in general this support does not exist due to the limitations that education has been suffering due to limited resources: "There is no fixed planning about what will happen, but this is not a local problem. It is rather the current situation of education in this country which affects DE" (ENTREVISTADO VIII, 2019).

In terms of the actions necessary for the institutionalization of DE, Interviewee II informed us that when he assumed his position, he thought that DE was already institutionalized, but cited the integration of the DE academic calendar with the in-person calendar as a great initiative and a step forward in the realization of this process. Interviewee I cited some measures such as: DE majors should be seen as normal majors in the university and not as separate, and should receive the same structure as the in-person majors, such as a professor responsible for interns, monographs, and tutors, and tutorial coordinators should be UFSC civil servants and not working on a fellowship. The opinions of Interviewees III and IV at UFSC follow the same line of thinking, and the civil servants cite the following actions as necessary: the inclusion of DE activities in the overall budget of UFSC (today they are entirely budgeted by the UAB), regulation of DE and the creation of a DE policy which contemplates all the professionals who take part in it. In this sense, Hernandes (2017)

emphasizes that since majors are institutionalized organically, they become secondary activities to the learning institution itself.

To Interviewee V, the most important point is that the MEC needs to recognize that this institutionalization is necessary. The equipping of DE majors in the same manner as in-person majors goes along with this. The professor emphasizes the importance of the power of counting the hours spent teaching DE classes in the Professors' Academic Activity Plans (PAAP). In the opinion of this manager, this impediment is a great problem for the management of DE, and explains that this leads to a great overload of work for professors who teach these kinds of degrees, and that they only maintain themselves in teaching these degrees through the fellowships they receive, but the professor made a point of pointing out: "if it were possible to trade, professors would prefer to count their DE hours to receiving these fellowships" (ENTREVISTADO V, 2019). This statement is in line with Alonso (2010) who emphasizes that the overload of work for professors is one of the crucial points in the execution of DE activities.

To Interviewee IX, what is missing is the political will to improve DE, underlining that those involved with this modality have this will. But he also indicated that the faculty is divided in terms of institutionalization: "many are in favor, others are not, and often there are contrary opinions. Some allege that institutionalization would lead to greater spending by the university" (ENTREVISTADO IX, 2019). The following necessary measures were also cited: the creation of resolutions, the creation of poles on the campuses, the training of professors for this modality of teaching, the creation of unit infrastructure to meet the needs of DE, such as videoconferencing, for example. Interviewee V, meanwhile also argues for the need that tutors be university civil servants, hired specifically for this activity, and that the institution should provide the necessary structure for DE. Interviewee V strongly feels that there is a lack of incentive to make trips to the poles. The professor believes that in-person contact at the poles is an important way to strengthen this learning, and helps it be successful. In fact, it is fundamental to go to the poles. According to Hernandes (2017), the poles are fundamental to distance education. Created in partnership with municipal governments, they offer in-person support to DE students, and normally have laboratories and libraries with specialized archives, together with internet service that is compatible with distance education.

In terms of the existence of some specific regulations for distance education and whether these degrees follow the same regulations as in-person degrees, many of those

interviewed responded that DE degrees have specific regulations, and that the degree itself has the autonomy to elaborate such a document. Two pointed out that each degree has its own specificities, and that there is no way to maintain a standard for all of the degrees, citing differences between Bachelor's and Licensing degrees.

Interviewee II points out that degrees have their own special regulations for DE which were created by the departments themselves and are now in their 3rd edition, but indicates that they need to be in accord with the norms of UFSC's regulations. In terms of the responses of Interviewee III and IV, they informed us that there are two scenarios: degrees that follow, or at least try to follow, with small alterations, the regulations of in-person degrees and degrees which have written their own and have the autonomy to do this. Currently UFSC has eight DE undergraduate degrees and two specializations. Interviewee VII explains that DE degrees are governed by projects and that they therefore follow the project's norms. When some exceptions appear, the norms of in-person degrees are used. In this manner, the professor informs us that the rules may originate with a project of the University Board of Directors or the Unit Board of the Center that the degree belongs to. To Interviewee VI, this autonomy does not exist, and the professor informs us that it is 002/CUN/07, which covers distance degrees which are governed by Capes fellowships

The results of the conducted interviews are supported by the teachings of Weiss (1999), who affirms that the degree of institutionality of a policy is associated with historical, cultural, operational, budgetary and regulatory public organizations. Thus, the fragility of distance education in public institutions can be understood from these teachings.

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study offers, as one of its main contributions, the chance to know how managers who work with DE at UFSC think. According to Nascimento and Vieira (2016) it is of great importance to study the institutionalization of distance education, because this makes it possible to present contributions which assist discussions which *a posteriori* can come to make decision making viable in integrating this modality as an institutional alternative to promoting the self-learning process. Some issues are crucial to the proper functioning of this modality and listing them based on practical references is of extreme value. One point that deserves attention, and has been often cited, is the apprehension and fear associated with the freezing of costs, a situation which is already occurring in light of the cancelling of

professors' trips to the poles. From this point of view, it is important to point out that there is a divergence of opinions among the interviewees: some argue for the almost total extinction of the poles, while others allege that this would be extremely prejudicial to the success of this form of teaching.

In fact, the non-institutionalization of DE is a variable of extreme dissatisfaction among all those interviewed. The coordinating professors of the majors argue that the university envisions and considers DE to be something separate, which ends up harming the quality of teaching in various ways. This finding deserves to be highlighted, because it is contrary to the principles described in UFSC's IDPs (2015; 2020), which advocate a large investment in this type of teaching. However, we have verified that there is a lack of investment and attention not only from UFSC, but also from the managing bodies such as Capes, MEC and the municipal governments. Given these findings, it is possible to verify, based on these interviews, a certain lack of hope for the development of DE degrees at UFSC. Various times the lack of interest on the part of professors in assuming positions in DE or working with it has been cited for three main reasons: an overload of work, financial remuneration that does not compensate for this, and the visibility and fragility of DE in the current scenario.

In terms of the issue of a lack of interest on the part of professors in working with DE, Interviewee IV told us that UFSC has had various undergraduate DE majors in the past, and that in 2018 it lost a series of opportunities to open new majors through fellowships due to the disinterest in assuming these majors on the part of professors. No less important is the way in which Capes/UAB relate to the universities. From the point of view of the coordinators of DE majors, this relationship is extremely distant with little involvement and dialogue which consists of a series of regulations imposed by Capes/UAB, which are far removed from the reality required by majors in HEI.

An example of these rules that we can cite is human resources' hiring for DE, which is based on exams which are ready to be disseminated, and which in the opinion of the majority, are not in keeping with the real needs of these majors. The support supplied by the entities that supply the poles was also cited as quite uncertain and oscillating, based on an unpredictable relationship which depends on the current managerial profile as well as political factors. It may be noted that the subject of Distance Education is quite nebulous within the university environment. To the interviewees, the scenario is full of uncertainty, and the future

of this type of teaching in the institution is even more so. The overload of work for professors, the lack of incentives for DE, the absence of institutionalization for this modality, which ends up leading to a series of problems, such as neglect of its infrastructure, a lack of administrative support and the normalization of rules for the good functioning of teaching, are some of the diverse factors which discourage the interviewees.

In this manner, we consider that this work has achieved its proposed objective, because we have managed to study and analyze the situation of DE at the Federal University of Santa Catarina. This study's main contributions are transcribing the current scenario of this process, publicizing the main difficulties found in this journey. Another extremely valid issue that this study addresses is the presence of a divergence of opinions between major coordinators and UAB managers. We can observe a lack of consensus between these visions, which is a factor that makes improving DE more difficult. Finally, we can verify that there is unanimity in the opinion that DE needs to be institutionalized and that mainly this flaw has led to a series of problems in terms of managing this type of learning. Given this scenario, we suggest new studies in other public and private universities which offer DE, so that comparisons may be made between the managerial models. No less important is the need for field research with professionals who work in the poles and the professionals who work at their service providers.

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