REFACS

Analysis of the skills of long distance tutors in Health Management courses in Brazil

Análise das competências do tutor a distância nos cursos de Gestão em Saúde no Brasil

Análisis de las competencias del tutor a distancia en los cursos de Gestión de Salud en el Brasil

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This work analyzed the necessary requirements to act as a distance tutor in the specialization courses in Health Management offered by the *Sistema Universidade Aberta do Brasil*. The goal was to analyze the requirements for the position of distance tutor in selection notices. Through a documentary analysis, the calls for selection of distance tutors published between the years of 2013 and 2015 were analyzed. This research presents a quantitative approach of the descriptive and exploratory type. It was possible to localize the notice for the selection of tutors in only 65.1% of the 23 Higher Education Institutos that offer the course. In the analysis of the notices, 66.7% of the institutions required tutors to be trained in the medical field. As for teaching experience, only 46.7% had such a requirement. As for previous experience in distance learning, only 13.3% required that the tutor should have knowledge of it and another 13.3% initially valued having experience in distance learning. It was found that the majority demanded cognitive competences to the detriment of functional, behavioral, political and ethical ones. It is recommended that the educational institutions evaluated improve the selection processes for tutors.
Descriptors: Distance Education; Educational measurement; Mentors.

Este trabalho analisou as exigências necessárias para atuar como tutor a distância nos cursos de especialização em Gestão em Saúde ofertado pelo Sistema Universidade Aberta do Brasil. O objetivo foi analisar exigências requeridas ao cargo de tutor a distância em editais de seleção. Por meio de uma análise documental foram analisados os editais de seleção de tutores a distância publicados entre os anos de 2013 e 2015. Essa pesquisa apresenta abordagem quantitativa do tipo descritiva e exploratória. Dentre as 23 Instituições de Ensino Superior que ofertam o curso, somente 65,1% foram localizados os editais de seleção de tutores. Na análise dos editais, 66,7% das instituições exigiam dos tutores formação na área de saúde. Quanto a experiência docente somente 46,7% apresentavam tal exigência. Quanto a experiência prévia em ensino a distância, somente 13,3% exigiam que o tutor deveria ter conhecimento e outros 13,3% valorizavam inicialmente ter experiência no Ensino à distância. Constatou-se que a maioria exigia as competências cognitivas em detrimento das funcionais, comportamentais, políticas e ética. Recomenda-se que as instituições de ensino avaliadas aperfeiçoem os processos seletivos de tutores.
Descritores: Educação a distância; Avaliação educacional; Mentores.

En este trabajo se analizaron los requisitos necesarios para actuar como tutor a distancia en los cursos de especialización en Gestión de la Salud que ofrece el Sistema de Universidad Abierta en el Brasil. El objetivo fue analizar los requisitos necesarios para el puesto de tutor a distancia en las convocatorias de selección. A través de un análisis documental, se analizaron las convocatorias de selección de tutores a distancia publicadas entre 2013 y 2015. Esta investigación presenta un enfoque cuantitativo de tipo descriptivo y exploratorio. Entre las 23 instituciones de educación superior que ofrecen el curso, en sólo el 65,1% se localizaron las convocatorias para la selección de tutores. En el análisis de las convocatorias, el 66,7% de las instituciones requirió que los tutores fueran capacitados en el área de la salud. En cuanto a la experiencia docente, sólo el 46,7% tenía ese requisito. En cuanto a la experiencia previa en educación a distancia, sólo el 13,3% exigió que el tutor tuviera conocimientos y otro 13,3% valoró inicialmente tener experiencia en educación a distancia. Se encontró que la mayoría requería habilidades cognitivas en detrimento de las funcionales, conductuales, políticas y éticas. Se recomienda que las instituciones educativas evaluadas mejoren los procesos de selección de los tutores.
Descriptores: Educación a distancia; Evaluación educacional; Mentores.

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INTRODUCTION

In Brazil, the legal basis for the distance education (DE) modality are established by the National Education Guidelines and Basis Law (Law No. 9,394, of December 20, 1996)[1]. In October 2001, the Ministry of Education, through Ordinance No. 2253/2001 and later by Ordinance No. 4,059/2004[2], authorized distance learning being offered in courses in recognized in-class undergraduate courses, with the possibility of DE taking up to a limit of 20% of the total student workload. In another moment, Ordinance No. 1,134/2016[3] revokes Ministerial Order No. 4,059/2004[2], and establishes a new wording for the theme. And, the most current Ordinance No. 2,117/2019[4], which changes this percentage to 40% of the total workload taken by the student.

It was only in 2005, however, that Decree No. 5,622 established a quality assurance policy. Decree 5.622/05 characterized DE:

> *[...] as an educational modality in which didactic-pedagogical mediation in the teaching-learning processes occurs with the use of information and communication means and technologies, with students and teachers developing educational activities in different places or times[5].* (Our translation)

Also in 2005, the *Sistema Universidade Aberta do Brasil - UAB* (Open University of Brazil System) was created by the Ministry of Education, for the articulation and integration of a national distance higher education system, on an experimental basis, formed by public institutions, which led to quality public higher education to Brazilian municipalities in the most different locations[6].

UAB, as a public educational policy, came about basically to fill the lack of places in higher education, promoting democratization of access to education, but what stands out in this work is the interiorization of undergraduate and graduate courses through partnerships signed between the federal government and public universities to work in strategic regions, that is, far from the major educational centers. The UAB System has the priority of offering higher education courses for the training of teachers, managers and workers in basic education in all states, the Federal District and municipalities, as well as courses in the area of continuing education[6].

Thus, the UAB System provides articulation, interaction and implementation of initiatives that stimulate the partnership of the three governmental levels (federal, state and municipal) with public universities and other interested organizations, while enabling alternative mechanisms for promotion and implementation of undergraduate and graduate courses in a consortium way. By planting the seed of a quality public university in remote and isolated locations, it encourages the development of municipalities with low Human Development Indexes (HDI) and *Índices de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica - IDEB* (Basic Education Development Indexes). In this way, it works as an effective instrument for the universalization of access to higher education and for the requalification of teachers in other subjects, strengthening schools in the Brazilian countryside, minimizing the concentration of undergraduate courses in large urban centers and avoiding migratory flow to large cities[7].

DE stands out as advantages: democratization of access, expansion of educational opportunities for student-workers, autonomous learning and individualization of teaching-learning process with tutorial support. Distance education enables the training of a larger number of personnel, in addition to new opportunities for ongoing training, greater flexibility in relation to schedules and also space[8,9].

In this system, the fundamental figure of the tutor appears. They should assume a strategic role in distance learning courses, being responsible for the smooth running of activities. This professional assumes the mission of articulating the entire teaching-learning system. They should accompany, motivate, guide and stimulate the student's autonomous learning, using dialogues, confrontations, discussion from different points of view, taking advantage of diversity and respecting the student's own ways of facing knowledge[4].

The tutor is also an advisor for the individual learning of the DE student, who will periodically need to monitor the conduct of their students' studies and intermediate this whole process. In this way, the tutor is responsible for assisting students in organizing their study time, accompanying them in their learning process and facilitating the use of technological tools available on the teaching platform[10].

This professional must have an excellent academic background, as they need intellectual capacity, mastery of the subject, and knowledge of methodological and didactic techniques[8]. They must also have the ability to plan, monitor, evaluate activities, in addition to motivating students in their studies. Mentoring is necessary to guide, direct and supervise teaching and learning. When establishing contact with the student, the tutor complements their teaching task transmitted by didactic material, discussion groups, lists, e-mail, chats and other communication mechanisms[11].

Thus, it becomes possible to draw a complete profile of the student: through the work they develop, their interest in the course and the application of post-course knowledge. The tutorial support, therefore, intercommunicates the elements (teacher-tutor-student) that intervene in the system and brings together in a triple function: guidance, teaching and evaluation[11].

Regarding the academic function, tutors are selected and trained to facilitate students' learning, but in a different way from a conventional teacher[12]. It should be understood that the tutorial action is a means to help and reinforce the self-learning process, never a simple transmission of information that leads to a relationship of dependency.

The DE educator brings together the qualities of a planner, pedagogue, communicator and computer technician. It participates in the production of materials, selects the most appropriate means for their multiplication, and maintains a permanent evaluation, to improve the system itself[13]. It is the professional who answers questions, doubts formulated by the student, in all learning situations proposed by the tools available in the Virtual Learning Environments (VLE), namely, forums, chats, murals, e-mail and others.

Distance education is characterized as an important educational innovation of the last decades, which is based on new pedagogical possibilities, economic opportunities, flexibility and freedom in the action of the actors involved, mainly students, teachers and/or tutors[14].

In this way, the study of competences is opportune, since the teaching-learning process will depend for the effective success of DE. Corroborating Bittencourt[15], there is a need to understand competencies from two perspectives, the first being aimed at qualification, that is, the characteristics that individuals must have to act, and the second, for the subject's effective action. Therefore, the first deals with a potential for action and the second with action itself.

The present work aimed to analyze the requirements of the position of distance tutor in selection notices.

METHOD

This research presents a quantitative approach of a descriptive and exploratory type. It is configured as a descriptive research, as it describes characteristics of a given population or phenomenon[16]. The quantitative approach method represents, in principle, the intention to guarantee the precision of results, avoid distortions of analysis and interpretation, consequently allow a safety margin regarding interference[16].

Thus, the present work discusses the role of face-to-face and distance tutor, with an emphasis on skills: knowledge, abilities and actions contributing to the qualitative improvement of their pedagogical practice in distance education based on the discussion of the essential skills to a tutor's work.

Through research of a descriptive character, the activities that should be developed by the tutor were sought, as well as the skills necessary for them to perform well in their role.

Distance learning invitations were collected for the selection of distance tutors published between the years of 2013 and 2015 for the *lato sensu* graduate course in Health Management offered in a decentralized manner by the *Programa Nacional de Administração Pública - PNAP* (National Public Administration Program) through the UAB System. For inclusion criteria, a search was made for Public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) that currently offer the course. As for the necessary competences and skills, the present study was based on evaluating the criteria[18,19], according to Chart 1.

Chart 1. Teaching competences in distance education, aligned with professional competences*.

Professional skills	Teaching skills in distance learning
Cognitive	Must have a higher education degree in area of expertise; dominate educational technology principles and processes; dominate political and economic context, capable of placing knowledge transmitted; and able to segment the act of teaching; have skills with information and communication technologies (ICTs).
Functional	Must communicate effectively; work with didactics appropriate to distance learning, recreating strategies; create and prepare teaching materials; work in DE management, identifying specific target audience, setting programs, preparing courses, managing programmatic contents of modules and disciplines by area of activity; merge the use of ICT's own resources with traditional teaching materials; guide students in choosing ICT tools aiming their learning; participate and control tasks of achievement; perform tutoring, guidance; teach how to research, process information and learn; make interventions; guide learning path; recognize strengths and weaknesses of each media, using them properly; assess quality of digital content; set up network connections; create strategies that provide reconstruction of the relationships between theoretical knowledge and the knowledge of the "classroom"; guide students in choosing ICT tools aiming their learning; develop appropriate assessment activities.
Behavioral	Must dominate human dimension; encourage students to exchange knowledge, to use ICTs in the management, criticism, synthesis and presentation of the content being teached; develop teams of innovative projects; media coverage; cognitively challenge students; promote interaction; offer psychosocial support.
Political	Must know how to deal with conflicts; know how to decide on the use of ICT's towards learning objectives; participate in learning communities; determine content and learning methods; set for didactic and pedagogical quality meters.
Ethical	Must know how to deal with diversity; make teaching efficient and better; be responsible for curricular content and didactic-pedagogical issues related to the discipline under their responsibility.

Source: *Techio[18] *et al.* & Paiva *et al.*[19]

RESULTS

In the first phase, to outline the present research, the search for the Public HEIs that offer the specialization course in Health Management by PNAP was carried out. A search was then carried out on the website of the *Universidade Aberta do Brasil - UAB* (Open University of Brazil) in which it was identified that in 2015, 23 HEIs offered regular classes in this course (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Public Higher Education Institutions, by state, that until 2015 offered the Health Management course through PNAP, 2015.

Among the 23 Public HEIs that offer the Health Management course at PNAP, when conducting the documentary search for distance tutor selection notices, only 15 notices were found (65.1% - UFSM, IFSC, UFPR, UEPG, UEM, UNIFESP, UFES, UFJF, UFSJ, UNIVASF, UFT, UFPI, UEG, UEMS, UFMS).

In the evaluated notices, the concern with training in the area to act as a distance tutor was evident, since ten HEIs (66.7%) required training in the area of Applied Social Sciences or in the area of Health to work in the area of Health Management.

In teaching experience (basic or higher education) only seven HEIs (46.7%) had such a requirement. Regarding previous experience with distance education, only two notices (13.3%) required that the tutor should have prior knowledge of distance education and two other HEIs (13.3%) initially valued having experience as a DE tutor or teacher.

In the initial skills and abilities present in the selection notices for tutors in the PNAP Health Management course, it appears that all 15 evaluative notices are limited to cognitive professional competence.

Only four of the evaluated HEIs (26.7%) described in their public notices that they conduct a personal or collective interview to assess the competencies and skills to act as a tutor.

As for previous experience with distance education, only two notices (13.3%) required that the tutor should have prior knowledge of Distance Education and two other HEIs (13.3%) initially valued having experience as a tutor or teacher in Distance Eearning.

DISCUSSION

With the analysis of the notices, what can be seen is that most HEIs do not advertise their notices of selection of DE tutors, which can show that the selection occurs in a

convenient way. Thus, there is a need to rethink: *What is the kind of tutor sought after in Distance Education so that an effective teaching-learning process can really takes place?*

The tutor must be a teaching professional who acts as a learning advisor, a motivator that streamlines the student's personal, learning and affective relationship[19]. They act in the affective relationship through empathy with students who have time and space restrictions and often need support for interaction and, above all, trust. Therefore, in addition to pedagogical functions to guide and monitor the intellectual development of students, with practical activities, theories setting and use of computer tools, the tutor also develops functions that go beyond their specific training[20].

The entry of new technologies in distance education courses ended up requiring a new training for the role of tutor, in which they have to be a subject totally interconnected with the mechanisms and tools that the internet provides. Also to be a tutor, this function must be performed by a professional who brings with them the knowledge acquired during their training as an educator[21]. This professional must have an excellent academic background, as they need intellectual capacity, mastery of subject, and knowledge of methodological and didactic techniques[8]. They must also have the ability to plan, monitor, evaluate activities, in addition to motivating students in their studies.

As for the teaching experience, less than 50% of the notices indicated this need. However, there is concern with a recommendation from UAB that puts as a substitute for this previous teaching experience, the fact of being a student in a *stricto sensu* graduate program. This was verified in 14 selection notices. Technical-scientific knowledge and pedagogical and didactic elements are essential to contribute to answer questions, interact and monitor students' difficulties[19].

In the present study, few calls for proposals required that the tutor should have prior knowledge of distance education or initially valued having experience as a tutor or teacher in distance learning. In another research, which evaluated tutors, they found that many of those who are at the forefront of the Distance Education scenario did not have experiences in such training in their training[22]. When they find themselves working in this environment, a field of new discoveries and challenges is configured, but with the facing of some difficulties.

In the initial abilities and skills present in the selection notices for tutors in the PNAP Health Management course, it appears that all 15 evaluative notices are limited to cognitive professional competence[23]. Only one HEI initially requests training to interact with groups under its supervision, stimulating the learning process and another HEI presents in its notice of selection of tutors as a competency to have ease of communication, leadership and collaborative spirit to work as a team.

In a study that also evaluated teaching skills, ideal and real, in distance education, in the perception of students and professors of an undergraduate course in Administration at a particular Brazilian institution, it was found that the skills based on the cognitive component were those that presented the best results in the assessment of students, indicating that the domain of formal knowledge and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are present in the faculty[24].

The other components (functional, behavioral, ethical and political) did not present themselves to the same degree, putting the effectiveness of the former at risk, which implies that the "professional competence" is not legitimized, since it is a multidimensional concept, depending on all components and not just one or the other to be recognized[24].

Thus, in an integrative review carried out by researchers in the area on the profile defined for the position of tutor, taking into account the set of knowledge, skills and attitudes that it requires, that is, the skills that the position requires. To facilitate understanding, skills were classified as technical and behavioral, as shown in Table 2[18].

Table 2. Ideal technical and behavioral skills for tutoring*.

Technical skills (actions)	Behavioral skills (knowledge and abilities)
- Organization and Planning; - Proactivity; - Self motivation; - Ability to synthesize and analyze; - Empathy; - Emotional balance; - Flexibility; - Attendance; - Commitment; - Leadership; - Creativity.	- Knowledge of work routines; - Knowledge in basic computing/virtual teaching-learning environment; - Full knowledge of the discipline; - Knowledge about distance education/ about the course; - Interpersonal relationships; - Communication (oral/written); - Team work.

Source: *Tecchio *et al.*[18]

Something that caused concern was the fact that there was no interview in most of the notices (only four do it), since it is evident that even if the tutor does not meet in person with the students, they must present a desired profile to act as a tutor in the course . Of these four, only two HEIs clearly describe what will be assessed in this selection interview: knowledge in the areas of the course subjects, skill and familiarity with ICTs, interpersonal communication skills and demonstrated motivation to work in the program.

Also, none of the HEIs in their selection notices have requested an argumentative or dissertative text from the candidate to tutor with their interests in the selection process. This could be useful both to assess their profile and also to check argumentative and writing style, since in most cases the tutor will communicate in writing. Research with tutors has shown that it is essential to have simple technical skills such as writing a text[25]. The clarity of the text, its writing, can determine a better communication with the students.

In the present study, all selection notices indicated as essential skill having basic or advanced computer knowledge. Computer knowledge has been essential, because despite being a more technical and basic competence, it is one of the crucial means for the tutor-student connection[26].

One of the challenges for the tutor in the teaching and learning process at VLE is to avoid the student's loneliness and promote collaborative participation and debate in forums and chats. In this sense, the teacher-tutor must assume an open reflexive posture with the students in the VLE, establishing a learning culture based on self-observation, self-diagnosis and self-transformation leading students to learn as a team and to change for themselves[26].

Faced with distance education, the teacher used to the classroom with no previous experience in Distance Education may make some mistakes when they assume the role of tutor: too concise information, few illustrative examples, use of complex concepts and vocabularies, too much repetition, absence lesson plan, disorganization in class time, distance between theory and practice[27].

When the tutor does not have qualification, training or teaching experience, this can be the triggering element of dropout in DE, due to communication difficulties, lack of stimulation, delay in the feedback of exercises, lack/little participation of the tutor in the interactive tools of the virtual learning environment. Communication between teacher and student takes place almost exclusively through asynchronous written verbal mode[28]. Most of the time messages do not happen in real time, and for this reason, it is necessary to pay attention to the writing of messages to be sent by e-mail or made available in the discipline's environment, with care in the choice of terms and content of messages[28].

CONCLUSION

In the present study, it was found that among skills and abilities required in the selection notices for tutors, there is an appreciation of cognitive skills. There is also a concern

on the part of most HEIs that require prior training and qualification of tutors in specific areas of expertise. However, teaching experience or in distance learning did not appear as a relevant competence in the present selective processes of tutors in distance education applied to the specialization course in Health Management.

HEIs accredited in the UAB System, in the future, should improve the selective processes of tutors for specialization courses in Distance Education, mainly in the strategic areas as it is explained in the proposals of the courses offered by PNAP, precisely to guarantee the longed for qualified and differentiated training of human resources (alumni) for the country, as tutors are fundamental in conducting the entire teaching-learning process.

The study had as limitations the characteristics of online availability of notices for tutors in Health Management courses, as well as the analysis of notices built in heterogeneous ways, which would need to be more detailed and homogeneous to avoid wrong inferences. Therefore, it is suggested that more studies be carried out in order to better understand how the distance tutor's choice and skills process works.

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CONTRIBUTIONS
Rafael Gomes Ditterich participated in the conception, collection and analysis of data, writing and revision. **Ruann Oswaldo Carvalho da Silva** contributed to data analysis, writing and revision.

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