



ISSN : 2350-0743

www.ijramr.com



International Journal of Recent Advances in Multidisciplinary Research

Vol. 07, Issue 09, pp. 6179-6182, September, 2020

RESEARCH ARTICLE

PERCEPTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS' MOTIVATION IN RELATION TO DISTANCE LEARNING

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 20th June, 2020

Received in revised form

06th July, 2020

Accepted 27th August, 2020

Published online 30th September, 2020

Keywords:

Distance learning;

Motivation;

Higher Education.

ABSTRACT

The various transformations marked by social, economic and political life in the last decades, have given a prominent place to education, both in the education systems and in the institutions themselves as complex and modern organizations. In times of uncertainty, there are several proposals around education. It is also in this scenario that distance education (DE) comes to assume a fundamental role for the development of education itself. Thus, Distance Education emerges as a response to the pandemic situation experienced in our country since March 2020, raising the question of the motivation of Higher Education students in relation to adaptation, motivation and experiences related to Distance Education. Through an exploratory-descriptive investigation of a qualitative approach based on the application of a scale of motivation to learn - EMA-U (adapted), it was our intention to assess the levels of motivation expressed by the students of the Polytechnic Institute of Maia regarding the change for distance learning mode due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

The various transformations marked by social, economic and political life in the last decades, have given a prominent place to education, both in the education systems and in the institutions themselves as complex and modern organizations. In times of uncertainty, there are several proposals around education, as a public cultural space, which seek other scenarios and, above all, lead to the need to "open the teaching systems to new ideas" (Nóvoa, 2009) where "difference and change", the new "conception of learning" and the "strengthening of the public space" are considered the main guidelines of these proposals. Today, for the world to be more open and more accessible in the various cultural aspects, the school must face new cultural and educational challenges, once inserted in an increasingly globalized society, which currently deals with knowledge as an economic resource, but simultaneously it requires "educated, responsible and creative globalized" human beings (Nóvoa, 2015), in a kind of "contradiction" that probably could become one of the "engines of History" in the current century. It is also in this context that distance education (DE) comes to assume a fundamental role for the development of education itself (in a broad sense). Educational institutions, namely those of higher education, with exclusivity in this way, or in a dual perspective (dual mode: face-to-face and distance), already allow a positive and safe balance of their experiences, taking into account that they expand opportunities for individuals and

social groups, confined either by the social agenda (rhythms of life and work), or by space (Moraes, 2010). Today, worldwide, distance education has taken a strategic position. It can be seen as a relevant option to respond to the social and pedagogical demands of education, supported by new information and communication technologies. Censored by some and misunderstood by others, it has been gaining support from educators, seeking an alternative for those seeking access to education. This paradigm shift demonstrates that today's society is moving towards increasing adherence to distance education. In addition to this conjuncture, society has turned to the understanding that learning is not something watertight, determined to happen at a specific time and with a standardized configuration and that, on the contrary, today's education needs to be constantly reviewed bearing in mind that it is available to everyone at any time and place, as long as it finds technological and pedagogical conditions to be present. This context of emergent renewal requires a recurring update of didactic and technological methods to the same extent and intensity that requires a proactive attitude on the part of the teachers involved in the process, who have to be receptive to changes so that their role does not become out of step and dissociated from the real needs of the educational market (Corrêa & Silva, 2015).

Distance Education in Portugal: The signs of distance education in Portugal are evident in the middle of the XX century, through the implementation of the preparatory course of Teleschool29, guiding for the qualifications of elementary or intermediate level (Grosso Correia & Pinheiro, 2012).

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The configurations of distance learning emerge with the development of radio and television and open the way to other forms of modality: "tele-education", which ends up giving rise to a process of massification. In this perspective, it can be considered that, with regard to development, an "indissoluble marriage" between science and technology was established from that date on and schooled education (Moraes, 2010). All of this development has enabled distance learning, that is, teaching outside the traditional classroom. It is within this context that computer-aided teaching emerges in the 1960s. At the international level, this decade also marked the beginning of the implementation of distance learning methodologies at the level of higher education (Grosso Correia & Pinheiro, 2012). In our country, the Open University (1988) was launched in the 1980s with the specific purpose of higher distance education. In this way, and from the mid-1990s, with the emergence of the open potential with the internet, the models of higher distance learning reach a higher rate of expansion and a qualitative leap, and begin to be part of the training offer of several higher education institutions in Portugal.

The sudden change in the teaching modality: According to the tutelage, higher education institutions and education itself must have the capacity to do more and better and use the covid-19 pandemic as an "opportunity to innovate", the transformation brought about by Covid-19 will allow coordinating strategies for strengthen Portugal's position in Europe, reduce external dependence and "cooperate with third countries". Distance education, thus appears as a response to the pandemic situation experienced in our country since March 2020, representing a teaching modality that constitutes a quality alternative for students unable to attend the higher education institution in person, based on integration of information and communication technologies (ICT) in teaching and learning processes as a means for everyone to have access to education. From one moment to the next, teachers and students found it impossible to continue with face-to-face classes, having to readjust to a new form of teaching.

The Motivation: The Portuguese population has shown a wide variety of concerns regarding the need to adjust to the radical changes that the COVID-19 pandemic caused in the organization of our daily lives. Parents, or guardians, are a segment of this population that has faced a significant demand to adapt to new family, educational and professional dynamics on an uninterrupted basis. The realization of diverse roles simultaneously and in the same physical and psychological space, reveals a state of overcoming and permanent reinvention. In this sense, it was urgent to adjust plans, roles, spaces and time in relation to readjusting professional and family activity (Diaz, 2011; Ramalho, 2018). By taking the IPMAIA students' perspective in this investigation, we intend to contribute to a more in-depth knowledge of their interests and motivations in view of the need and motivation inherent to adapting to the teaching mode in distance education due to Pandemic Covid-19. It is important, therefore, to understand and know how IPMAIA students are facing the distance learning modality and its adaptation to it, in addition to pointing out possibilities for improving academic and organizational management.

Objective, Sample and Methodology

Study Objective

The objective of the present work was to analyze, through the application of a motivation scale, the perception of the students of the Polytechnic Institute of Maia, regarding the advantages / disadvantages that they face regarding the change from the on-site teaching modality to the modality of teaching in distance education due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. Namely, we intend to understand the motivation of these students regarding the frequency of classes in distance learning mode.

METHODOLOGY

The design adopted in the present investigation is of the exploratory-descriptive type with a qualitative approach based on the application of a motivation scale, aiming to assess the students' motivation adapted to the teaching mode in DE created by the pandemic.

The closed questionnaire method used was as follows:

Scale of motivation to learn EMA-U (adapted)

The study population was directed to students attending the Polytechnic Institute of Maia.

A questionnaire consisting of two parts was applied: I - Sociodemographic related data, and II - Specific questions composed by the adaptation of the Motivation scale in view of the need to adapt to the distance education mode due to the Covid-19 pandemic, consisting of 29 questions.

The objective of the questionnaire was to obtain information taking into account the object of study of the present investigation.

Data collection: For systematic data collection, 300 questionnaires were distributed, of which we obtained 243 responses.

Sample characterization: In the present study, a non-probabilistic or non-random sampling process was used, using convenience sampling, focusing on the study of students at the Polytechnic Institute of Maia attending the respective courses in distance learning mode.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Given that we are dealing with the analysis of questions, based on a scale, we chose to proceed with a qualitative analysis. Thus, regarding the first question, *I honestly do not know why I attend distance education classes*, the vast majority of students did not identify with the question (48.1%, no correspondence), showing that they are aware of their role as students and the need to attend classes in distance learning. 29.1% of respondents opted for the moderate correspondence response, 12.7% little correspondence, 6.3% much correspondence and only 3.8% of respondents fully identified themselves with the question (total correspondence). Concerning the second question, *I attend classes in distance education because attendance must be mandatory*, most of the students surveyed identify with the question, with the responses focusing on moderate and total correspondence (43.1% and 17.2%, respectively). 21.4% identified themselves with the option little correspondence, 15.2% with no correspondence and only 3.1% with the option very correspondence. Regarding the third question, *I attend classes in distance education so as not to be missed*, the answers are divided into moderate correspondence (36.7%) and no correspondence (21.5%), 17.7% little

correspondence, followed by 16.5% with total correspondence and 7.6% with much correspondence, demonstrating that the problem of attendance is interpreted differently by students. Concerning the fourth question, *I attend classes for the pleasure I get when I get involved in debates with interesting teachers*, it was found that 53.4% of the students answered that they identify, in a moderate way, with the question. This is followed by 22.7% of the participants who chose the option little correspondence, 12% no correspondence, 6.7% much correspondence and only 5.2% reported total correspondence. As for the fifth question, *I attend distance education classes to prove to myself that I am capable of finishing the course*, 48.1% of the students answered with moderate correspondence, while 26.6% identified themselves totally with the question. There is little or no correspondence, both with 10.1% responses and 5.1% with a lot of correspondence. In the sixth question, *I attend distance education classes to occupy myself*, the vast majority, 41.2% reported not identifying themselves with the question (no correspondence), with 28.4% indicating a moderate correspondence regarding the question. It follows 24.1% with little correspondence, 3.8% with total correspondence and 2.5% with much correspondence.

With regard to the seventh question, *I feel that I am wasting my time in distance learning classes*, 48.1% of respondents reported not identifying themselves in any way with the question (no correspondence), 21.5% with moderate correspondence, 19% with little correspondence, 6.3% with total correspondence and only 5.1% with much correspondence. As for the eighth question, *I already had good reasons to attend the course, but currently I have doubts about continuing*, 49.4% of the students answered with no correspondence, 22.8% with moderate correspondence, 17.7% little correspondence, 6.3% total correspondence, and 3.8% a lot of correspondence. Regarding the ninth question, *I attend the course to show myself that I am an intelligent person*, the vast majority responded by indicating the option no correspondence (34.6%), with 32% opting for moderate correspondence, 12.8% a lot of correspondence, 11.5% little correspondence and only 9% of respondents responded with total correspondence.

In the tenth question, which concerns *Attendance classes in distance learning because attendance is mandatory*, 22.8% of students answered no correspondence, 20.3% little correspondence, 12.7% total correspondence, 7.6% much correspondence, and the remaining 36.6%, moderate correspondence. As for the eleventh question, *I attend classes in distance education because education is a privilege*, 55.3% of the participants indicated the moderate correspondence option, while the rest were divided between total correspondence (15.9%), a lot of correspondence (13.9%), and 8.9% reported no correspondence. Only 6% indicated the option little correspondence. Regarding the twelfth question, *I do not understand why I should attend classes*, the vast majority of participants (48.7%), said they did not identify with the question (no correspondence), while 20.5% indicated the answer little correspondence and only 5.1% total correspondence. The remaining 25.7% reported moderate correspondence. In the thirteenth question, *I attend classes in distance learning to obtain the certificate of completion*, 58.2% of respondents responded with moderate correspondence, 25.3% total correspondence, 7.6% little correspondence, 6.4% much correspondence and 2.5% no match.

In the fourteenth question, *I attend classes in distance education because when I am successful I feel important*, 41.8% answered with moderate correspondence, followed by the option no correspondence with 22.7%, with only 12.7% being identified with the total correspondence option, 15.2% with little correspondence and 7.6% with much correspondence. Regarding the fifteenth question, *I do not know or understand what I am doing in the course*, 67.1% of the participants identified themselves with the option no correspondence, 12.7% moderate correspondence, 11.4% little correspondence, being that only 5.1% answered total correspondence and 3.7% a lot of correspondence. As for the sixteenth question, *I attend classes in distance education because for me the course is a pleasure*, 60.3% of the students selected the moderate correspondence option, followed by total correspondence with 19%, much correspondence with 12.7% and little or no correspondence not reaching 10% (8%). In the seventeenth question, *I attend classes in distance education because access to knowledge occurs in higher education*, 46.7% of the answers were in moderate correspondence, followed by total correspondence with 16.9% and little or none with 26.3% (12.5% and 13.8%, respectively). Only 10.1% reported a lot of correspondence. With regard to the eighteenth question, *I do not understand what difference it makes or does not attend classes in distance education*, 56.4% of respondents did not identify with the question, having answered with the option no correspondence, followed by a moderate correspondence with 16.7%, little correspondence with 14.1% and total correspondence with only 7.7% and a lot of correspondence with 5.1%.

Regarding the nineteenth question, *I attend classes in distance education because I want to show myself that I can be successful in studies*, 48.2% opted for the moderate correspondence option, followed by little or no correspondence with 27.8%, total correspondence with 15.2% and a lot of correspondence with 8.8%. As for the twentieth question, *I attend classes in distance education because I like these classes very much*, 49.4% of the participants opted for the moderate correspondence option, 43% divided between little (21.5%) or no correspondence (21.5%), 5.1% a lot of correspondence and only 2.5% opted for total correspondence.

In the twenty-first question, *I attend classes in distance education because I believe that the attendance record is necessary for learning*, 50% of the participants opted for the moderate correspondence option, followed by no correspondence with 17.1%, little correspondence with 15.8%, a lot of correspondence with 13.2% and total correspondence with only 3.9%. In the twenty-second question, *I attend classes in distance education because I want to avoid people seeing me as a sloppy student*, most respondents did not identify with the question, opting for the answer no correspondence (36.3%), followed the option moderate correspondence with 35.1%, total correspondence with 11.3%, little correspondence with 9.8% and much correspondence with 7.5%. Regarding the twenty-third question, *I make the connection because the frequency of classes in distance education is mandatory*, 41.6% of the participants answered with moderate correspondence, 22.1% with no correspondence, 19.5% little correspondence, 11.6% total correspondence and only 5.2% much correspondence. As for the twenty-fourth question, *If attendance was not mandatory, few students would attend classes*, the vast majority, 60.1% answered with the moderate correspondence option, followed by 16.7% with total correspondence, 10.3% with no correspondence, 7.7% with

little correspondence and 5.2% with much correspondence. In the twenty-fifth question, *I attend classes in distance education because studying broadens horizons*, 57.6% of students opted for the moderate response, 22.5% total correspondence, 12.4% much correspondence, 5% little correspondence and only 2.5% no match. Regarding the twenty-sixth question, *I attend the course because that's what I chose for myself*, 53.9% of the participants referred to the moderate correspondence option, followed by 40.3% with total correspondence, 11% with a lot of correspondence and 3.8% with little match. As for the twenty-seventh question, *I attend the course because while I am studying I do not need to work*, the vast majority of students did not identify with the question, having chosen the answer no correspondence (60.8%), followed by moderate correspondence with 17.7%, little correspondence with 13.9%, and a lot and total correspondence both with 3.8%.

In the twenty-eighth question, *My friends are the main reason why I attend the course and classes in distance learning*, 45.6% of respondents reported no correspondence, not identifying themselves with the question, followed by moderate correspondence with 35.5%, little correspondence with 12.7%, much correspondence with 3.8% and total correspondence with 2.4%. As for the twenty-ninth question, *I attend the distance learning course because that's what is expected of me*, 40.5% of the participants answered according to the option moderate correspondence, 20.3% little correspondence, 19% no correspondence, 11.4% a lot of correspondence and 8.8% total correspondence.

Conclusion

After analyzing the results obtained, it was possible to conclude that students do not feel any kind of obligation to attend classes in distance learning, doing so because they consider their frequency important to acquire new knowledge/learning and not because they feel some kind of obligation to attend them. We were able to conclude that the greatest motivation of students to study is related to the objective of completing the course to demonstrate to themselves and to others that they were able to complete the cycle of studies, being also aware of the importance of completing it for their professional career.

It was also possible to verify that, despite the exceptional moment that is lived due to the Pandemic Covid-19, responsible for the great change that occurred in the education system, alternating between in person and distance learning, students maintained their motivation to the frequency of the course they chose not having been compromised by the change in the way of teaching. Finally, it was possible to verify that the vast majority of students reported continuing to study, as they consider education a privilege.

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