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Artigo

Higher education in distance learning and female participation: UFPBvirtual case

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a historical and conceptual perspective both of Distance Education in Brazil and of Cultural Studies, relating the latter to distance learning practices. Conceptions of globalization and cyberspace are discussed, aiming to contemplate the inherent characteristics of distance learning, including it as a category of Cultural Studies. We reflect on women's insertion in higher education, within Distance Education Programs offered at Federal University of Paraíba (UFPBVirtual). Our analysis was based on their participation in the courses: Pedagogy, Mathematics,

Natural Science, Literature, Sign Language, Biology Sciences, and Agricultural Sciences, during the 2010 school year. This paper is originated from management reports, available at a Moodle Virtual Learning Environment, during the above mentioned period. Results are consonant with Distance Education being renewed, providing significant democratization of Education, and contributing to evolve higher school traditional models, moving to expand the opportunities for access to higher education. Moreover, the authors highlight that the culture of digital inclusion through Distance Education can be considered as a way to overcome the barriers of access to technology,

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thereby providing a web of social collaborative mobility aiming for better life conditions.

Keywords: higher education; distance education; gender relations.

RESUMEN

Este artículo presenta una perspectiva histórica-conceptual de la educación a distancia (EaD) en Brasil y del campo de los Estudios Culturales (EC) y sitúa tal modalidad educativa en el contexto de esta escuela del pensamiento. Para ello, se discuten concepciones sobre globalización y cibercultura, buscando contemplar las características inherentes a la EaD, ubicándola como categoría de estudio de los EC. Buscamos reflexionar sobre la participación femenina en la educación superior, teniendo como interface de experiencia los Cursos en la modalidad a distancia de la Universidad Federal de Paraíba Virtual (UFPBVirtual) y analizamos como base la participación femenina en los Cursos de Pedagogía, Matemática, Ciencias Naturales, Letras, Libras, Ciencias Biológicas y Ciencias Agrarias, del año lectivo 2010. Este artículo resulta del acompañamiento de los informes gerenciales disponibles en el Entorno Virtual del Aprendizaje (AVA, siglas en Portugués) Moodle del período mencionado previamente. Identificamos que la EaD se renueva y viene a proporcionar significativas evoluciones en la democratización de la educación y en el modelo de Universidad, pasando a ampliar las posibilidades de acceso a la Educación Superior. Asimismo, evidenciamos que la cultura de inclusión digital a través de la EaD puede ser considerada una forma de romper con las barreras de acceso a la tecnología, propiciando así, vía educación, una movilidad

social colaborativa en red con vistas a mejores condiciones de vida.

Palabras-clave: educación superior. educación a distancia; relaciones de género.

RESUMO

Este artigo apresenta uma perspectiva histórico-conceitual da educação a distância (EaD) no Brasil e do campo dos Estudos Culturais (EC) e situa tal modalidade educacional no contexto dessa escola de pensamento. Para tanto, concepções sobre globalização e cibercultura são discutidas, visando contemplar as características inerentes à EaD que a situam como categoria de estudo dos EC. Buscamos refletir sobre a participação feminina no ensino superior, tendo como interface de experiência os Cursos na modalidade a distância da Universidade Federal da Paraíba Virtual (UFPBVirtual) e analisamos como base a participação feminina nos Cursos de Pedagogia, Matemática, Ciências Naturais, Letras, Libras, Ciências Biológicas e Ciências Agrárias, do ano letivo 2010. Este artigo resulta do acompanhamento dos relatórios gerenciais disponíveis no Ambiente Virtual de Aprendizagem (AVA) Moodle do período citado acima. Identificamos que a EaD se renova e vem proporcionar significativas evoluções na democratização do ensino e no modelo de Universidade, passando a ampliar as possibilidades de acesso ao Ensino Superior. Além do mais, evidenciamos que a cultura de inclusão digital através de EaD pode ser considerada uma forma de romper com as barreiras de acesso à tecnologia, propiciando assim, via educação, uma mobilidade social colaborativa em rede com vistas a melhores condições de vida.

Palavras-chave: ensino superior; educação a distância; relações de gênero.

INTRODUCTION

The 1950s started as a time of changes for the term “culture”, giving birth to a new field of study – Cultural Studies. Later on, during the 1970s, some terms have gained prominence, such as: “the right to communication”, “cultural diversity”, “cultural policies” and “dialog of cultures” (Mattelart, 2006). At this time in the 1970s, a new model of teaching gained notoriety for incorporating audio and video technologies to the teaching and learning processes: Distance Education (D.E.). Since the 1990s and with the advent of the Internet, D.E. has been constantly improved.

Today, Distance Education can be characterized as the binomial crossing point between education and technology, as the current technological revolution is not characterized by the centralization of knowledge and information, but by their application for the construction of knowledge. In addition, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) are not simply a tool to be applied, but processes to be developed and, once users and creators can be seen as equals, then users will be able to take full control of the technology, as is the case with the Internet (CASTELLS, 2008)

In the context of Higher Education in Distance Learning, the democratization of access to higher education and the overcoming of gender inequality (one of the Millennium Development Goals) are approached. It is

necessary to notice that gender inequality in education manifests in many forms and in different models, and myths must be deconstructed not only in the access to higher education, but also in the established relationships between professionals and students.

For public policy-makers, it is worth knowing these issues and making them public, striving for the promotion of a non-sexist education, which integrates the principles that helped guide the creation of the National Plan of Policies for Women (2006). In the Plan’s context regarding women access to higher education, D.E. provides great impact in the democratization of Higher Education and the university model, as it multiplies the possibilities of access, and prevents teaching, research and extension to act in accordance to the bureaucracy of departmentalization. The model requires fast decisions and flexibility in actions as far as time and space for learning are concerned. Thus, it becomes a management model that invites all University segments to pave their own paths.

From that perspective, the primary goal of this article is to analyze the growing space women have been conquering in Higher Education, beginning with a brief history on Cultural Studies, access to Higher Education, Distance Education’s role in the context and the most popular programs. More specifically, this article wishes to understand how D.E. may help democratize Higher Education focusing on students from the Pedagogy, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Sign Language, Biological Sciences and Agricultural Sciences programs, from UFPBVirtual. In an attempt to reflect on the

participation of women in Higher Education, we analysed the female participation in those D.E. courses, in 2010 (Virtual UFPBVirtual). The conclusions presented in this article are the result of a monitoring process of the management reports available in the Moodle⁴ Virtual Environment for Learning (VEL) from the above-mentioned timeframe.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

Historical/conceptual approach of Cultural Studies

The construction of Cultural Studies' (CS) theoretical field took place after a series of significant ruptures in the meaning of *culture*, when traditional currents of thought were broken to give way to a renewed scenario of new questions. A historic fact of great relevance to the origin and development of CS would be England's concern with colonial issues after the Second World War, when the British Empire witnessed a dramatic reduction in its territorial power, resulting in an overturn in the country's social imagery. However, some of the contributing intellectuals responsible for redirecting the cultural issues that England began to discuss, were educated according to the British tradition -- outside Britain.

Thus, a new generation of intellectuals emerged, bringing with them new questions, opinions, ideas and criticism that were quite coherent. Such paradigm, known at the time as Cultural Studies, presented culture in its broader sense, leaving the narrowest reflection on the culture-nation binomial

towards intellectual considerations on culture from social groups (MATTELART AND NEVEU, 2004).

For a better understanding of its definition, it is important to highlight that the revolution caused by CS was focused on a territory marked by prejudice. From such territory, comes a quite complex concept of culture, carrying a varied array of significations, which will be discussed in more detail.

Arendt (1979) understands culture as the way humans relate to everything in the world. In a similar, yet slightly deeper way, Fiske (1997) refers to culture as the circulation of these modes of social relationships and meanings, values and their resulting pleasures. In light of such conceptions, it can be concluded that culture comes from the modes of interaction between the individual and the cultural objects, taking into consideration that such relationships are not completely determined by social relations, but will always be connected to them. In that regard, Mattelart and Neves (2004) state that in order to glimpse a broader sense of a group's culture in light of CS, one must first understand that this culture acts as "social order contestation" or, on the opposite extreme, as "form of adherence to the relations of power".

Throughout the 20th century, a sort of cultural revolution could be noticed, in which the domains of what is usually described as culture were expanded in a way never imagined by the more elitist societies. Culture can no longer be conceived as mere accumulation of knowledge or as esthetic, intellectual or

⁴Modular Object Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment.

spiritual processes. Mattelart (2006) highlights that the multiplicity of forms as each group or society expressed itself in the world started to be stressed in theory, expanding the unique concept of "culture" to the plural one, "cultures".

In light of these facts, cultures need to be studied and understood taking into account the vast diversity of all that is associated to them and the significant role they assume in all aspects of social life. This is the essence that necessarily forms the research pattern founded on the cultural studies conceptions.

In regards to research, this school of thought brought about important themes, such as gender/sexuality, discourse/context, identity policies, race and ethnicity, inclusion, diversity, multiculturalism, social representation, relations of power, culture, information and knowledge society, institutional pedagogy, cyber culture, globalization, environment and nature, special needs and disabilities, media and a number of other themes that make up the renewed scenario of questions within CS.

The broad and diverse array of themes covered by CS and the correlation potential between them and Education makes it necessary to have clear definition of the topic to be approached. The chosen focus of this article is to approach the gender relations within the D.E. context as an analysis category within the broad spectrum covered by CS. In this context, themes such as female access to higher education in Brazil, D.E. according to the perspective of higher education democratization, female participation in some of the programs at UFPBVirtual and the main results of the study conducted there.

Women's Search for Higher Education in Brazil

According to Bourdieu (2004), the gender division seems to be in the order of things, to speak of what is normal and natural, stating that the force of the male order becomes evident with the fact that it is exempt of justification, and the social order works as a massive symbolic machine that tends to ratify the male domination upon which it is built. Supporting his point, the author points out the social division of labor, the strict distribution of activities between the genders and the structure of space. In that perspective, the author opposes the assembly or market place, reserved to the men, and the home, reserved to the women.

In order to escape this marginal condition delegated to women, Bourdieu suggests a reconstruction of the evolution of historic labor of dehistoricization. That is,

the history of continued (re) creation of objective and subjective structures of male domination, permanently taking place since there have been men and women, through which male order is continuously reproduced through times (BORDIEU, 2004, p. 100)⁵.

In the words of said author, the history of women has to give way to a history of agents and institutions that compete permanently to guarantee male domination through institutionalized power by the Church, State, School, etc., whose relative weight and job might vary, depending on the time. The school, among the other institutions mentioned

⁵ Editor's Note: all quotations are originally in Portuguese and were translated by the RBAAD's translation team for this publication.

by Bourdieu (2004), continues to transmit assumptions of patriarchal representation, with its hierarchical structures, all embedded with sexual connotation, never failing to pass on archaic ways of thinking and models.

However, inequality is not found in the access to school. Inequality lays where access is granted and where it is allowed to exist. Hass (2007) states that access alone will not guarantee equality between men and women because, despite the increasing number of women gaining access to higher education, it is usually left to them jobs that resemble, even if remotely, the traditional definition of female activities. However, education is one of the most decisive principles for change in the relationships between men and women due to the contractions that happen inside it and that are caused by it. The female condition has undergone major transformations, such as the enhanced access to secondary and higher education and, consequently, economic independence and the transformation of family structures (BORDIEU, 2004).

Higher education is a social institution, according to Colossi, Consentino and Queiroz (2001), whose most important role is to form the intellectual and scientific elite of the society it serves. Thus, its importance is in its autonomy, emancipation and social mobility of its students. Higher education is structurally founded upon the norms and values of the group or society in which it is created, and a social institution is, fundamentally, an ideal, a doctrine.

Higher education is therefore organized as a social, stable and long-lasting institution, conceived from the society's norms and values; an ideal dedicated – while integrator of a system – to the professional qualification and promotion of political, economic, social and cultural development. In addition, it is an example of an institution that is part of this system, with the commitment of generating knowledge, which is related to the truth, justice, equality and beauty (COLOSSI, CONSENTINO, QUEIROZ, 2001).

With the purpose of presenting an outlook on the Brazilian reality, the Higher Education Census collects data on the country's education in order to offer detailed information on the sector's current situation and tendencies. The Higher Education Census of 2011 (2001-2010) recorded the participation of 2,377 institutions in the country, 278 of which were public and 2099 were private (Table 1).

Table 1: Basic statistics of Undergraduate (traditional and distance-learning) and Graduate programs per administrative category – Brasil, 2010.

Basic Statistics	Administrative Category					
	Total General	Public				Private
		Total	Federal	State	Municipal	
Undergraduate Programs						
Institutions	2,377	278	99	108	71	2099
Programs	29,507	9,245	5,326	3,286	633	20,262
Undergraduate Enrollments	6,379,299	1,643,298	938,656	601,112	103,530	4,736,001
Entries (all forms)	2,182,229	475,884	302,359	141,413	32,112	1,706,345
Graduating	973,839	190,597	99,945	72,530	18,122	783,242
Working Faculty Functions ¹	345,335	130,789	78,608	45,069	7,112	214,546
Graduate Programs						
Graduate Enrollments	173,408	144,911	95,113	48,950	848	28,497
Undergraduate & Graduate Programs						
Total Enrollments	6,552,707	1,788,209	1,033,769	650,062	104,378	4,764,498
Ratio Total Enrollments ² / Working Faculty Functions ²	18,97	13,67	13,15	14,42	14,68	22,21

¹ Refers to the number of employment bonds between faculty and institutions that offer undergraduate programs but are not necessarily limited to them.

² Includes Undergraduate and Graduate enrollments.

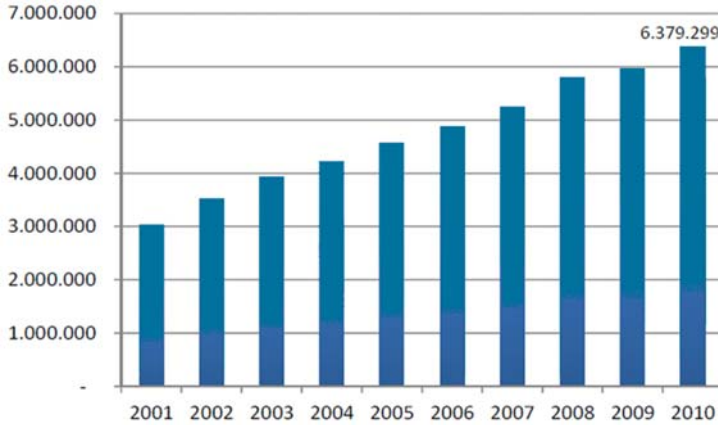
Source: MEC/Inep, 2011.

With regards to the Undergraduate programs, both in the traditional and distance-learning models, which provide bachelor, licentiate and technical degrees, the 2011 Census has revealed 29,507 working programs throughout Brazil. According to the numbers, private Higher Education Institutions (HEI) are responsible for the highest offer of programs in 2010, providing a total of 20,262 programs. Public Higher

Education Institutions provided 9,245 programs, which represent 31.3% of the total.

Graphic 1 analyzes the evolution in the number of enrollments in Undergraduate programs (traditional and distance-learning) and shows an increase of 112.6% between 2001 and 2010, with a total of 6,378,299 enrollments.

Graphic 1: Evolution in the number of enrollments (traditional and distance-learning) in Undergraduate Programs – Brasil, 2002-2010

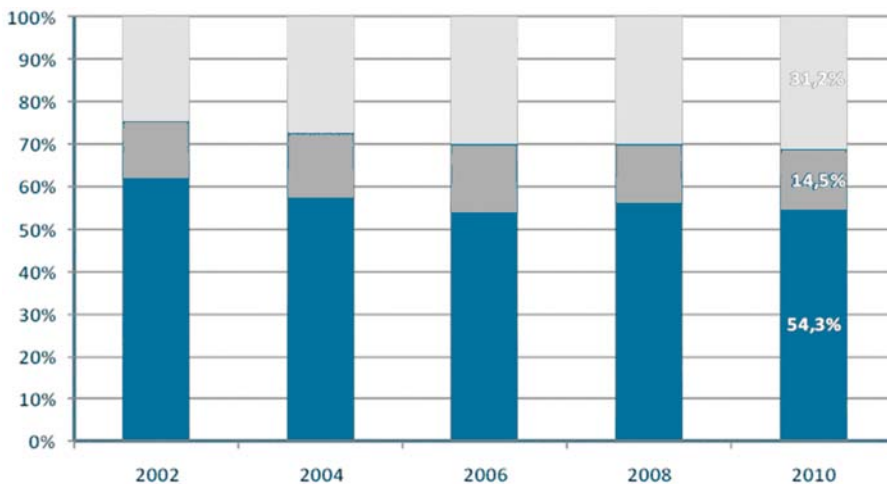


Source: MEC/Inep, 2011

When these nearly 6.5 million enrollments in undergraduate programs are analyzed by academic organizations, it is observed that universities are still the primary program provider, supplying 54.3% of the

current offer, according to the Census. This happens despite the fact that the greatest increase in number of programs took place within Colleges, which supplied 31.2% of the total enrollment offer (Graphic 2).

Graphic 2: Evolution of the Number of Enrollments (traditional and distance-learning) participation percentage per academic organization – Brazil, 2002-2010



Source: MEC/Inep, 2011

With the intention of understanding women's participation in higher education, the publication entitled "Women in the Brazilian Higher Education, 1991 - 2005"⁶, (RISTOFF *et al*, 2007) presents information on gender relations within this particular education system and analyzes these aspects against the relationship between the candidates in the undergraduate programs, newcomers, enrollments, graduating students and faculty by degree.

The organization of data allows verifying where, how and when Higher Education is growing in the past few years and how women's participation is behaving according to this outlook, which permits an interpretation from a gender perspective, vital for the development of public policies. According to the publication, women's participation in Higher Education shows higher indexes than that of men's - both among entry exam applicants and among candidates with access to higher education in Brazil.

The report present by RISTOFF *et al*, (2007) points out the fact that, despite a 1.4% drop in participation between 1998 and 2005, women are still the majority and represent 55.5% of higher education students, while male students represent 44.5% of them.

The same publication analyzes that, in regards to graduating students indexes, an increasing advantage for women can be noticed. In 1991, they were 59.9% of the last-year students; in 2005, they were 62.2% of

them. On the opposite lane, graduating male students have seen their number shrink from 40.1% to 38.8% in the same period.

From the gender relation's point of view however, it is important to follow the labor market for Higher Education professors, because specific areas of knowledge production have a close relationship with the gender division of labor (RISTOFF *et al*, 2007). As a consequence, the classic divisions were built and became what are conventionally referred to as more "feminine" areas, related to the Arts (Humanities) and various other programs in healthcare, and those referred to as "masculine", related to the Sciences and technology-related careers (RISTOFF *et al*, 2007).

According to Table 2, women represent the majority of enrolments - 54.9%. They are also the majority of students in four of the ten largest programs. Women are only under-represented in two of those programs (Engineering and Computer Science), with 20.3% and 18.8% of their enrolments. On the other hand, men are also under-represented in Pedagogy (8.7%), Languages (20%) and Nursing (17.1%).

⁶TN: loosely translated from original in Portuguese: "A Mulher na Educação Superior Brasileira, 1991-2005".

Table 2: List of 10 largest programs per number of enrolments and gender – Brazil 2005

Curso	Matrículas	Feminino	% Fem.	Masculino	% Masc.
Administração	671.660	330.150	49,2	341.510	50,8
Direito	565.705	276.912	48,9	288.793	51,1
Pedagogia	372.159	339.937	91,3	32.222	8,7
Engenharia	266.163	53.946	20,3	212.217	79,7
Comunicação Social	197.068	111.630	56,6	85.438	43,4
Letras	196.818	157.513	80	39.305	20,0
Ciências Contábeis	171.022	86.653	50,7	84.369	49,3
Educação Física	159.484	68.704	43,1	90.780	56,9
Enfermagem	153.359	127.065	82,9	26.294	17,1
Ciência da Computação	110.927	20.853	18,8	90.074	81,2
TOTAL	2.864.365	1.573.363		1.291.002	
MÉDIA			54,9		45,1

Source: Adapted, MEC/Inep/Deaes ⁷

The data on Higher Education in Brazil do not confirm that women are in a marginal condition regarding the social division of labor, as described by Bourdieu (2004). Although some difference can be noticed in the number of enrollments in the ten largest programs when gender is analyzed, Table 2 shows that such difference is only present in two programs: the Engineering and Computer Science programs, with 59.4% and 62.4% of male representation respectively.

Distance Learning in the Brazilian Higher Education Context

As previously mentioned in the introduction, Distance Education is causing great impact on the democratization of Higher Education and on the university model, as it multiplies the possibilities of access to it. D.E. in Brazil has a history of successes, despite the lack of public policies for the sector, causing a few moments of stagnation. Great programs

have been created, boosting the sector with valid contribution to the sector and for the democratization of an education of quality, especially to citizens outside the more privileged areas (MOREIRA, 2009).

According to the Higher Education Census (Brazil, 2008), 155 Higher Education Institutions (HEI) offered distance-learning programs in 2008. That represents an increase of 18 HEIs compared to the number registered in 2007, and the number of undergraduate distance-learning programs has also increased significantly over the last few years.

Compared to 2007, 239 new distance-learning programs have been created, which represents a 58.6% increase in the period. The number of available spots increased 10.3% in 2008, which means 158,419 new seats were created. The increase in availability is a tendency that has been observed since 2003. Since then, the number of openings has increased by seventyfold.

⁷ TN: Administração= Business Administration; Direito=Law; Pedagogia = Education; Engenharia=Engineering; Comunicação Social = Media Studies; Letras = Languages; Ciências Contábeis = Accountings; Educação Física= Physical Education; Enfermagem=Nursing; Ciência da Computação=Computer Science.

Compared to 2007, the total number of freshmen students in distance-learning programs has increased 42.2%, as shown in table 3. The total of enrolments in the model has shown exponential increase over the last few years and reached the mark of 727,961 in 2008, nearly double the number of enrolments of the previous year. These results represent 14.3% of all enrolments in undergraduate programs, including traditional models; in 2007, they represented roughly 7%. The number of graduating students in distance learning has also experienced exponential increase of 135% compared to 2007.

Table 3: Evolution in the Number of Freshmen, Enrolments and Graduating Students in Distance Learning, Brazil, 2002/2008

Year	Freshmen	%	Enrollments	%	Graduating	%
2002	20,685	-	40,714	-	1,712	-
2003	14,233	-31.2	49,911	22.6	4,005	133.9
2004	25,066	75.7	59,611	19.4	6,746	68,4
2005	127,014	407.9	114,642	92.3	12,626	87.2
2006	212,246	67.1	207,206	80.7	25,804	104.4
2007	302,525	42.5	369,766	78,5	29,812	15,5
2008	430,249	42.2	727,961	96.9	70,068	135

Source: MEC/INEP/DEED

The historical context of D.E. was greatly impacted by the successful creation of the Open University in England in the early 1970's. At the time, the bill number 1878 proposed the creation of the Open University (*Universidade Aberta*). However, several attempts to approve the project had failed until a new, revised one was proposed under the name Open University of Brazil, or UAB (*Universidade Aberta do Brasil*).

The Decree 5800 of June 8th 2006 establishes UAB, dedicated to the development of the distance education model with the purpose of expanding the offer of higher education programs and courses, through a consortium among federal, state and municipal educational institutions. Among its main goals, the following can be highlighted:

- To offer, primarily, licentiate degrees, and initial and continued elementary education teacher training programs
- To offer higher education programs for capacity-building of leaders, managers and professionals of elementary education of the states, the Federal District and municipalities
- To offer higher education programs in the different areas of knowledge
- To broaden access to higher public education
- To reduce inequalities in the offer of higher education among the different areas of the country
- To establish a nation-wide, distance-learning, higher education system

- To foment institutional development for the distance education model, as well as research in innovative methodologies for higher education supported by information and communication technology

The UAB System fulfills its social/educational goals and objectives in collaboration with the Government and other federal actors by offering distance-learning Higher Education programs, supplied by public education providers articulated with on-site centers for local support. These centers are characterized as operational units for decentralized development of pedagogical and administrative activities related to the courses and programs offered remotely by the higher education institution. The Ministry of Education (MEC), also according to the Decree 5800, has signed agreements with public institutions of higher education for offering courses and programs within the UAB System. In addition, agreements of technical cooperation and partnership with federal entities interested in maintaining on-site UAB System support centers.

The articulation between the higher education distance-learning courses and programs and the on-site support centers is carried out by public notice, published by MEC, which details the conditions for participating and selection criteria for the UAB System. Budgetary allocations annually assigned by MEC and the National Fund for the Development of Education (FNDE) cover the System's expenses, and it's up to the Executive Branch to reconcile the selection of higher education programs and courses with the existing budgetary allocations, observing

the limitations for cash flow, commitment, payment of budgetary and finance program. MEC coordinates the implementation, follow-up, supervision and evaluation of costs within UAB's System.

UFPBVirtual is part of UAB System, offering seven Licentiate distance-learning programs in Mathematics, Languages, Sign Languages, Pedagogy, Biological Sciences, Agricultural Sciences and Natural Sciences. In addition, it also offers two specialized programs: Municipal Public Management and SECAC/MEC/UFPB Development. All nine programs are Internet-based, developed through the Moodle virtual learning environment (VLE), but also using printed materials, CDs, DVDs, virtual libraries and personalized assistance to students at the on-site support Center.

UFBPVirtual's Municipal Centers for On-site Support consist of a structure for decentralized pursuance of some of the program's didactic, pedagogical and administrative functions, and are also the place where the students can watch classes and have access to the library, computer lab and tutors. In short, the center is the "operational arm" of the higher education institution in the students' town, or close to them.

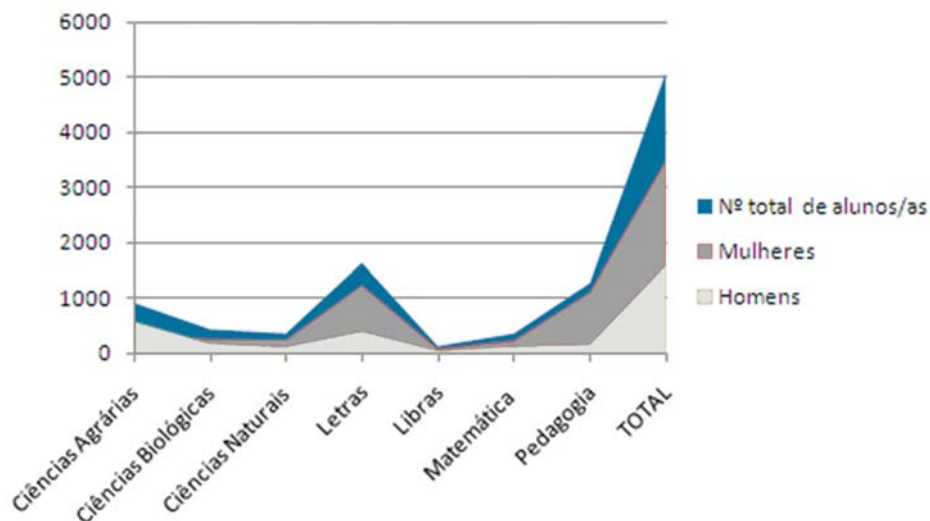
Currently, UFPBVirtual maintains on-site support centers in the following cities within the Paraíba state: de Alagoa Grande, Araruna, Cabaceiras, Campina Grande, Conde, Coremas, Cuité de Mamanguape, Duas Estradas, Itabaiana, Itaporanga, João Pessoa, Livramento, Lucena, Mari, Pitimbu, Pombal, São Bento, Taperoá. In the state of Bahia, UFPBVirtual maintains the following centers: Camaçari, Esplanada, Itapicuru, Jacaraci, Mundo Novo,

Paratinga. In the state of Pernambuco, there are centers in Ipojuca and Limoeiro, and in the state of Ceará, there is a center in Ubajara.

UFPBVirtual's action is focused on the formation (degree) of untrained teachers working in public schools and providing a pathway towards the Public Higher Education for an overwhelming large share of the region's youth and adults who would otherwise have no access to it. For each of these segments, UFPBVirtual dedicates 50% of all its annual openings. Acting in Higher Education, UFPBVirtual provides a distance-learning model of quality in 28 municipal centers in the states of Paraíba, Pernambuco, Ceará and Bahia, offering programs acknowledged by MEC and developed with the quality standards of the Federal University of Paraíba.

In regards to male and female participation in the Agricultural Sciences,

Biological Sciences, Natural Sciences, Languages, Sign Languages, Mathematics and Pedagogy programs offered by UFPBVirtual, graphic 1 shows that 3502 students, from a total of 5090, are women. The remaining 1588 are men. A closer look at the women's participation per program will reveal that the Languages program has the highest representation, with 1238 female students; it is followed by the Pedagogy Program (1111), Agricultural Sciences (344), Biological Sciences (258), Natural Sciences (240), Mathematics (23) and Sign Languages (81). It is worth noting that the latter was the only one where a higher male participation was found. We have also identified that the number of female students enrolled in the Languages and Pedagogy Programs corroborates the results of Table 2 – these programs tend to be more popular amongst the female students.

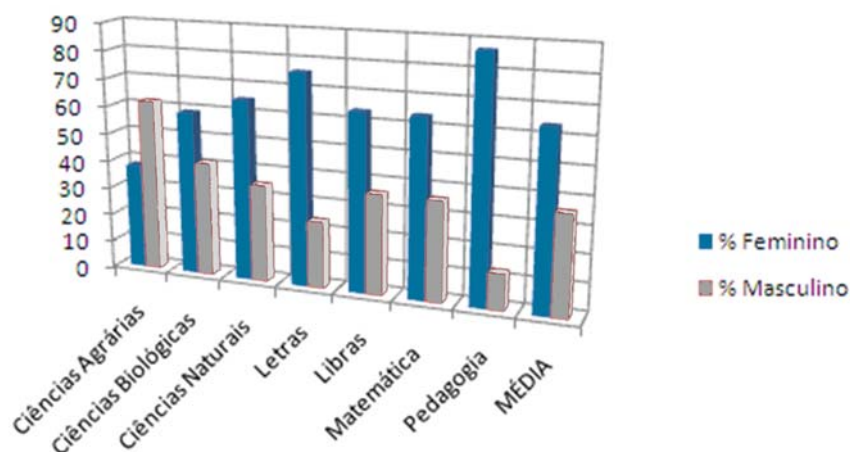


Sources: adapted from Moodles' Managerial Report

Graphic 3 shows the division between male and female participation in the seven researched programs at UFPBVirtual. It is possible to identify that, from the total population of the programs, 64% refers to the participation of women, while 36% refers to men. The Pedagogy program leads in female participation (87%), followed by the Language

program (76%), Natural Sciences (65%), Sign Language and Mathematics (64%), Biological Sciences (59%) and Agricultural Sciences (38%), the latter with the highest male participation. Again, the data analyzed here confirm the ones found on table 2, that show the Pedagogy and Language programs with higher relative and absolute female participation.

Graphic 4: Participation (%) in UFPBVirtual Programs



Source: elaborated by author

CONCLUSION

From the conducted studies, it was possible to conclude that there has been significant increase in the number of new spots offered by Higher Education providers, despite a decrease in the number of HEL. Women's participation in higher education continues to expand, expressed in higher enrollment numbers and with a tendency to dominate a few areas of higher education in Brazil, despite a slight increase in male

participation felt over the last few years. Thus, women are also seeking better qualification and professional acknowledgement.

In the context of access to higher education, these finding confirm what has been founded on the theories of inequalities in gender relations when, according to Bourdieu (2004), the classic divisions were being built between what convention has determined as more "feminine" areas (concentrated on the Arts and several healthcare programs)

and “masculine” areas (exact sciences and careers in technology), despite the fact that women are the majority in distance-learning programs of Higher Education.

The study has made evident that the democratization of higher education has benefited from D.E., as new providers have been created or received authorization to offer programs in the distance-learning model. In addition, the number of available programs has increased, as well as the number of spots offered and graduating students.

Finally, it has become evident that the Pedagogy and Language programs in the distance-learning model offered by UFPA Virtual, resemble their traditional model counterparts regarding the gender division of students – higher absolute and relative participation of women.

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