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## Article

### Affective relationships on interactions in VLE: a study on the interaction in distance education

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#### ABSTRACT

One of the biggest debates about Distance Learning has been the interaction in a virtual learning environment – VLE. This study aims to discuss the learning process at distance and how students develop their abilities in this environment. It started from the interactionism of Bakhtin (1979) and the postulates of Wallon (1968; 1989) and Vygotsky (1998) about the importance of mediation and emotions for learning. It was used a qualitative-quantitative research under the assumption that affection ties tend to be better established in an interaction at distance. Data from a questionnaire answered by 76 students has shown that affection and interaction depended on how the teacher and the tutor led the interactive activities. The results indicated the belief that personal contact brings inhibition and lower performance. It was found that the physical contact of regular classes does not necessarily facilitate the affective relationship. 80% of participants affirm to have more exposure freedom in virtual classes.

**Keywords:** Affectivity. Interaction. Distance Education. Learning.

#### RESUMEN

Uno de los mayores debates en torno a la Educación a Distancia – ODL ha sido la interacción en un entorno virtual de aprendizaje – AVA. Este estudio tiene como objetivo abordar el aprendizaje del estudiante de la distancia y la forma de (des) participación en este entorno. Comenzó desde el interaccionismo de Bakhtin (1979) y postula Wallon (1968; 1989) y Vygotsky (1998) sobre la importancia de la mediación y las emociones para el aprendizaje. Aprobada una investigación cualitativa cuantitativa bajo la suposición de que los lazos de afecto tienden a establecerse mejor en la distancia interacción. Los datos de un cuestionario aplicado a 76 estudiantes mostraron que el afecto y la interacción dependía de cómo el profesor y el tutor llevaron las actividades interactivas. Los resultados indicaron la creencia de que el contacto personal trae la inhibición y el rendimiento más bajo. Se encontró que el contacto físico de las clases regulares no favorece necesariamente la relación afectiva. 80% de los participantes afirmaron tener más libertad de la exposición en las clases virtuales.

**Palabras clave:** Afecto. Interacción. Educación a distancia. Aprendizaje.

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## RESUMO

Uma das maiores discussões em torno da Educação a Distância – EaD – tem sido a interação em Ambiente Virtual de Aprendizagem – AVA. Este estudo visa a discutir a aprendizagem do aluno a distância e a forma de (des)envolvimento nesse ambiente. Partiu-se do interacionismo de Bakhtin (1979) e dos postulados de Wallon (1968; 1989) e Vygotsky (1998) sobre a importância da mediação e das emoções para a aprendizagem. Adotou-se uma pesquisa qualitativo-quantitativa sob a hipótese de que os laços de afetividade tendem a ser mais bem estabelecidos na interação a distância. Os dados provenientes de questionário aplicado a 76 estudantes apontaram que afetividade e interação dependiam da forma como o professor e o tutor conduziam as atividades interativas. Os resultados apontaram a crença de que o contato presencial traz inibição e menor atuação. Verificou-se que o contato físico de aulas presenciais não favorece necessariamente a relação afetiva. 80% dos participantes afirmaram ter mais liberdade de exposição em aulas virtuais.

**Palavras-chave:** Afetividade. Interação. Educação a Distância. Aprendizagem.

## INTRODUCTION

Relationships in Distance Education (DE) have become practices of global reach. Anywhere in the world, online education is linked to an improvement in the education system in order to overcome the borders once limited of traditional classes. The entire presence is the fact that many virtual classes require synchronous meetings. In addition, DE has won, bit by bit, the ingrained belief that there is not a quality teaching and learning in this new mode. Thus, the physical presence gives way, increasingly to a form of interaction in virtual learning environments (VLE) developed on the Internet<sup>4</sup>.

The face to face interaction in Portuguese classroom, for example, has been held for a long time, through written verbal texts, involving exploration of formal and informal forms of language / speech, but in many cases without a systematically foundation about aspects of orality in the classroom and even in oral practices involving the studied texts. In distance education, writing is over, in a way, has been intensified (saved the peculiarities of each interaction), given the need for the teacher and the students to express themselves in writing, both involving the resolution of doubts about the realization of proposed activities.

In general, to overcome the barriers and the “neediness” of face to face interaction, the distance learning courses started creating didactic-pedagogic mechanisms such as discussion forums, debates, virtual meetings, chat rooms, among others, not only asynchronous, but also synchronous. Indeed, the need for written communication was further highlighted, since the lesson activities requiring writing, even involving the opening and the official closing of the virtual classroom, for example, which usually does not occur in classes with physical presence of those involved.

It is not, however, consider the traditional teaching “needy” of written communication, but to reassert, in DE system, this ability as need for interaction, enabling the written record, in virtual rooms, often only oralized. Thus, while in attendance system, the student can attend a class without verbalizing his thoughts on DE, either with the teacher, tutor, or even with other students, for example, the requirement for verbal exposition tends to be larger, perhaps by the need of evaluation and student feedback in every lesson and activity or as a strategy to attract students to participate more actively in VLE.

According to Moran (2007), the online education has covered from fully online to semipresential courses, thereby diversifying

<sup>4</sup>Note that the term internet is here conceived as a space that allows teaching-learning processes.

the teaching and learning routine in many education areas. DE in addition about worrying with specific ways to display content and the evaluation system, the teacher, along with the tutor, look for different ways to motivate and lead the student to concatenate the interplay of relations in VLE and to own DE system. In addition, we need to worry even in making the virtual environment also a resource for deepening of the contents studied, causing the DE student learn to use the virtual media as a source of research, not depending only on school proposals in this type of education. In this sense, Silva and Market (2010, p.184) point out that "Along with partners, it is possible help them interact with the proposed content, seeking motivation and additional information about such content."

With technological advances, the forms of interaction in VLE also have changed, bringing such environments tools able to stimulate the contact and participation in distance learning courses. Thus, the questions and doubts of the students in distance education, before answered a posteriori, due to the lack of face to face interaction, became, in some cases, for a "revolution", from the moment they deployed interaction systems virtual in VLE's, from the advancement of information and communication technologies (ICTs). Despite these new technologies to show innovation tools in education it is the teacher and how he interacts with the students that will enable the success or failure of distance education, similar to what occurs in traditional classes.

The use of new information and communication technologies is shown as a great advantage of the DE. They are computers, webcam, chat, hyperlinks, video conferences, forums, internet, e-book, which make the distance style much more dynamic and attractive. However, we can not forget that all the tools that help the teacher are technologies. (PRADO and ROSE, 2008, p. 177).

Thus, from the analysis of these teaching-learning relationships, we have tried to investigate the forms of affection on the interactions between students and teachers, in order to verify the need of face-to-face or image display at the VLE for effective interaction and student development in the distance learning, starting from the hypothesis that the interaction by means of written communication allows freely participation to the student.

## 1. INTERACTION AND LEARNING IN DE

The Interaction in courses in distance education system focuses on student, teacher and tutor participation. In fact, the teacher of a distance learning course offers activities and interactive forms based on the content taught and the tutor, as claimed Laaser (1997), has the role to correct, answer questions and guide students as to the activities and means and resources offered by distance learning course and the VLE. Thus, the teacher-student interaction is mediated by another actor, the tutor, providing new interactional logic.

During these interpersonal relationships, the student can create emotional ties, both with the teacher and with the tutor, communicating in order to establish relations of mutual understanding or misunderstanding. Therefore, it is possible to observe, by written communication, evidence of these links and forms of interaction in the teaching-learning process. Often the student does not feel comfortable to expose their achievements, abilities, or even their difficulties and weaknesses, for the own performance or the fear of exposing a face communication. In addition, therefore, that the interaction is not, in such cases, effective, and even affective because of the lack of activity. The VLE, in some cases, can encourage social interaction by limiting the student the need of writing something and therefore it must, in some way, engage and share ideas that can be more or less affective. In this sense, therefore, that the student

engages in DE because on the one hand, is exposed to emotional relationships and on the other, practicing interaction and developing their cognitive and his writing ability.

The online education mediated by VLE is a mean to facilitate social interaction, enable individual learning through interactions with a group and a way to enable the collective creation of a knowledge also shared. In this model it is possible for each student to interact with the teacher and with computerized knowledge bases, and can also interact with other students, who are in different space-times. (SILVA e MERCADO, 2010, p.185)

The interaction between colleagues, affection of the students end up appearing, most often about friendship, as you can see, in group discussions, exchanges of experience, but also the ability to help in development through knowledge shared between them. Then, VLE becomes a mediating element of knowledge construction. There is no denying that interactions in VLE's are communicative interactions.

Fávero (2010) assesses how unnecessary discussions about linking genres that involve the virtual interaction to spoken forms or written language, arguing that textual genres, educational and casual chat in the virtual environment, in your work, "keep many similarities with the face to face interaction " (FÁVERO, 2010, p. 110), the face to face interaction is a textual genre of "medial gender" conversation. Assign the mediating role of gender conversation seems to be an attempt to give great power to the oral practice in relation to written considering writing as a practice historically, socially and cognitively more recent and therefore, still less present in the life daily and even professional of most people. The assumption is also adopted by Marcuschi (2001) to explain

the importance of the oral / to the inclusion of subjects in practical written / literate. Thus, it can be said that virtual classes, as well as face to face interaction are dialogic creations, in which the participant produces meaning through dialogue with others. The word has, in this context, ends up revealing the contents of an ideological sense.

In the teaching-learning relationship, the teacher is the mediator, that is, the one who guides the knowledge. So there is this relationship involvement consists of beliefs, knowledge and shared values. As pointed out by Van Dijk (2006), society is constituted as human development and results of coordinated and negotiated among stakeholders interactions. In this context, teachers and students have different social roles and thus the discourse of these are also marked by different social representations. Socially shared perceptions, then, the interactive link.

According to Vygotsky (1998), mediation is fundamental to learning, as it is through it that takes ownership of cultural property, also emphasizing that the development of the human psyche is always mediated by the other. It is this relationship with others in the social group that the subject will appropriating the socially constructed meanings. It is not possible to isolate the affection of cognition, so learning and affection are intertwined and social relations, above all, especially the teaching-learning characterized by affective manifestations (aversive or pleasurable), which will affect in any way the student's performance. In this regard, Wallon (1968; 1989) and Vygotsky (1998) point out that the result of this performance depends on the teacher's mediation process. So the way the teacher and / or tutor leads the pedagogical practice in the DE influences on the outcome of the student and the demonstrations of affection which exposes the interactions in the VLE.

## 2. ENUNCIATION AND EMOTION

According to Mari and Mendes (2007), emotion is not a field much explored in modern linguistics, which, for a long time, was based on studies calculations of meaning. The authors believe that emotions should be addressed in addition to these logical hegemonic paradigms, advocating a conception of language as emergency space of emotions that escaped the purposes of calculating the meaning. Another field of study mentioned by the authors is the stylistic, who argued that the expression of language is full of emotions.

Emotion as related to certain lexical choices and the specific functions of language was the perspective of the authors, another approach to emotion that failed by only considering the conditions of the statement, ignoring the enunciation. The enunciation is presented from the perspective of Benveniste, author argues for the importance of *Self* as establisher element of interaction, but dependent on *Yourself*. These are the key players for the existence of the formal apparatus of enunciation, this time depending on the instant it occurs and how each subject now assumes the role of *I*, now the role of *You*. On the other hand, Bakhtin (2006) illuminates the social and historical aspects of enunciation, enabling a reading of the meanings produced in the enunciation and emotion as in a constant process of recovery and modification.

The dialogical aspect of language involves both immediate interaction (with figures *I* and *You*), and as each subject of the interaction contributes to the production of sense and emotions of each other. This relationship between the partners of the interaction is so defining for the emotions that the authors even mention the existence of its own logic of emotions which prepares and provides each interaction with their specificities. Despite a relative view of how emotions affect the interactions, the authors do not dissociate any verbal interaction. The enunciation is what enables establishment of emotion in language.

Despite a relative view of how emotions affect the interactions, the authors do not dissociate any verbal interaction. The enunciation is what enables establishment of emotion in language. The utterance is the starting point for the construction of the meaning of the statement, but the meaning is beyond the utterance. In this reasoning, the feeling can be realized only by the enunciation. Interpretation plays an enunciative scene. Thus, the utterance is not necessarily a complement to interpret, but a the condition – the formal apparatus and a constant motion process.

The subject of enunciation arises in the speech by acting, that is, the way the subject exposes the intention in speech acts, and figurative language, that is, the identity of the interlocutors as enunciative instance, in a time and discursive space. And that's where subjectivity is established. In an enunciation scenario, interpretation condition of any utterance, there is the construction of imaginary relating of a possible world/figurative language.

According Music (2005), emotions have a role more straightforward than the affections and feelings. The affections and feelings are, in many situations, confused. For Damasio (1996), emotions involve external and internal aspects to human, being primarily responsible for training, and the latter by the effect of emotions. Emotions can be primary (innate) – those which are more explicit, and secondary (what is socially acquired in different institutions where the subject goes, as family, school, church, university, etc.).

Emotions are a set of changes in state of the body associated with certain mental images. To be emotional, the body must show changes from a state of mind to the representations of/in social interactions. Thus, the feeling is connected to the result of the mental state of these representations. Thus, emotion is a reflection on the body of a feeling. The affection, in this way of thinking, would then be

the manifestation of feeling into action. For example, yelling at someone in traffic causes an effect of rapid heartbeat. To verbalize some act of language as a curse, the subject manifest in words the feeling.

### 3. AFFECTIVITY ON VLE

In DE, the teacher-student relationship and / or tutor-student, is computer-mediated, it is also mediated by these actions on the programs or so-called virtual learning environments that enable communication. As a modern practice of teaching, distance education was seen as a new way of teaching and learning, which in turn has generated discussions about ways of interaction among participants. At first, the distance relationships can seem cold and distant by the lack of physical contact, which can be observed in real time the caller's responses. However, with the advancement of technology and the expansion of social practices on the Internet, this old vision has given way to a new way of interacting with the world. Thus, the way to express yourself and show affection became mainly writing.

Before analyzing the relationships in VLE, it is necessary to infer the semantic difference between the terms emotion and affection. According Wallon (1968; 1989), emotions comprise organic reactions, accompanied by a biological, i.e., the effect is remarkable in / by the body, and affection is restricted, particularly, feelings, although some physical reaction / biological also manifest. Therefore, it is the communication that can be observed affection in relationships in VLE, since physical contact is replaced by frequent dialogic interaction. In the view of Vygotsky (1998), the affection not only influences social relations but also helps in cognitive processes.

Vygotsky (2008) considers the separation between intellect and affection as a deficiency of traditional psychology. His criticism is supported on the assumption that thought is not an independent flow, decoupled from immediate experiences and personal interests of the subject. What the author considers is the subject as an agent of his thoughts, and not as a mere instrument.

The complexity of the subject is inseparable from his thoughts, and the thoughts are inseparable from the subject. Since the actions are modified when really become an object of reflection, as they are guided by thoughts. Vygotsky (2008) does not accept a separation between affection and thoughts and explains that these two dimensions intersect at all times.

Affection, in this perspective, is related to all interactions established by the subject because, one way or another, affect or lead the individual to position regarding (Vygotsky, 2008). This relationship can be represented by the following scheme: personal needs and impulses ↔ the direction taken by the thoughts, which also involves the relationship between language and thought.

Vygotsky (2008) resumes its clinical method of investigation of children's ideas was based on the assumption that there is an objective interrelationship between the characteristics of thought, which would present its own logic involving a central signifier point. This center of the meaning would be represented by children's self-centeredness that would act as a link between the logic of the characteristics of children and their experiences. Thus, it can be considered that the demonstration of affection is the result of a condition of thinking that will guide the level of the actions of the subject.

### 3.1. Data analysis

From 120 questionnaires<sup>5</sup> applied and released on the World Wide Web, 76 were answered by students of different distance courses, but all higher level. It should be noted that the questionnaire was developed and implemented in order to verify the relationship between classroom and distance learning in the perspective of the participants, considering the freedom to ask questions, freedom of exposure and the need for physical contact. A quantitative analysis of data showed that when asked about the existence of a facilitating participation in the course, the first question, considering the virtual environment, all from different forms of answers resulted a greater credit to virtual education. Several reasons were exposed, such as: *“the increase of “motivation” of writing practices, “I realized I wrote more and in less time” and improved access to jobs, “Yes, because the tasks are well displayed and the layout makes it easy to use”.*

The answers of the first question dialogue with the latter, from which more than 80% of subjects demonstrated that exists in the virtual environment, the possibility of greater expression and perhaps even greater confidence in interactions in virtual classes. The main motivations to evaluate the virtual system as a space for greater freedom to ask questions were explained in two ways: the first and most present in the responses (more than half) was the claim that the virtual system the student does not *“ashamed”* He is not facing the teacher, as in regular education. The second answer, most recurrent, is linked to an assessment of the dispute by speech is lower because there is a possibility of typing at any time.

The responses of the third question, no participant evaluated as impossible teaching and distance learning, due to the lack of physical contact, but considered it important to be some physical contact. This need was verified the information concerning the answer to the third question in the questionnaire, *“A face to face interaction is essential even in the distance education?”*. More than 80% of participants reported in different ways, the motivation increases when a first physical contact and that seeing the face is important. They said thus: *“Yes, it gives the feeling of”* closing the gap as well *“as distance education does not mean isolation.”*. Another answer was *“Yes. This interaction is important in any mode”*, demonstrating an addiction to the traditional way of teaching. Finally, in answer to the fourth question, *“Do you feel difficulties in distance learning courses?”*, All participants stated in different ways, a desire to show that the difficulties do not exist, even if they already have existed at some point in the course, because they were *“overcome”* demonstrating a certain conflict in the responses of some. When the same student replies *“No.”* but continues *“The only problem is when the platform is awful”*; There is a demonstration of a reading of what difficulty separating what would be the subject and the exterior to it.

However, as the two sources of difficulties are part of the process, the negative answer turns out to point to a track understanding of their role as displaced from the tool performance. Perhaps because it is not who is responsible for the choice and platform maintenance, but it is the choice of the course. Another student, after also show a negative, as the previous one, relativize its position, *“I liked those which occurred chats in scheduled times, between teacher and students.”* Other unlike the aforementioned showed positive justifications, for example, a personal quality which showed *“No. Particularly I have some essential qualities for distance education”*.

<sup>5</sup>The questionnaire was composed of four direct questions in the following order:

- 1) The interaction relationship in the virtual learning environment facilitates your participation? Why?
- 2) Do you feel more freedom to ask and answer questions in the VLE system than face to face?
- 3) The face to face interaction is essential even in the distance education?
- 4) do you feel difficulty in taking distance learning courses?

### 3.2. Analysis of interactions

In addition to the analysis of questionnaire responses, we selected some conversations of students from online courses with their teachers. Messages of students are involved in communicative practices between teacher-student and student-tutor to the demonstrations of affection in these interactions were observed, only from the perspective of those students<sup>6</sup>.

**Table 1:** Interaction (1)

<p><b>Participant:</b> student in distance education Level: specialization</p> <p><i>Good morning teacher, I sent the last three (03) CDs with the monograph my grandfather actually got worse after that day and he passed away and only yesterday got back to normal routine. I would like to thank you for your understanding, help, patience and persistence with me, if you had given up on me, probably would not have courage to present my work. May God enlighten you always and you win all the dreams you aim. xxxx</i></p> <p>Maria</p>
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Source: authors' data

From the student discourse analysis, we can observe that she shows, through language, a sense of gratitude and joy for the encouragement of a teacher. It is noted in that case that the terms “*help, patience and persistence*” reveal the role of the teacher in also express affection toward the student who found herself motivated by those words. Therefore, it is possible to observe that when virtual environments, as well as the relationships between the participants, are built in a constructivist perspective, emphasize interactivity as a key element for learning (PALLOF e PRATT, 2004).

In “*would not have courage to present my work*” also indicates that there was a cognitive development in the reaction of the student

by the words of the teacher. In this context, pleasurable affection of the student excels not only in action to present the activity, but also the wishes expressed at the end of the message “*May God enlighten you always and you win all the dreams you aim*”. Thus, we can understand that how the teacher or tutor interacts with the student influences both the performance of this in academic activities and in view of the social role of teacher and affection in these relationships. In “*if you had given up on me*”, a belief it is observed that the withdrawal would be natural by the teacher to the student who does the activity. In this sense, the sense of wonder/admiration also underlines the affection in the student speech. It is very common also the personal account in the interactions in VLE, especially when the student feels at liberty to expose personal problems, often to justify any lack of participation in the environment, such as: “*my grandfather actually got worse after that day and passed away, only yesterday got back to normal routine*”. The same can be seen in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Interaction (2)

<p><b>Participant:</b> student in distance education Level: specialization</p> <p><i>Hello teacher, I'm going through the sleepless nights, because of the baby ... LOL. Losing concentration because of the late sleep ... LOL, but I'm enjoying a lot, Angelo is beautiful! Worth it!!! Now about the monograph I'd appreciate if I can present it on the next six months, it is very important for me to finish this course.</i></p> <p>xoxo, Jane</p>
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Source: authors' data

Indeed, it can be understood that the affection is also built on relationships in VLE, in order to cause, perhaps, the same effects as in the classroom activity. Strictly speaking, what changes in these relations is only the support, that is, where the speech or communicative practice is established. The aversive affective

<sup>6</sup>For ethical purposes, the names have been hidden.



way also appears in relations in VLE. Often these reactions refer to situations in which the student questions or claims something, either by developing the course, either by some difference of opinion.

**Table 3:** Interaction (3)

<p><b>Participant: student in distance education</b> Level: specialization</p>
<p><i>Dear Professor, I do not understand the activities. I'm in enough trouble. No I'm adapting well to the virtual course. I miss the physical contact to ask questions. I am unable to follow the dynamics of the course. Please help me. Kelly</i></p>

Source: authors' data

In this case, it is observed that the aversion present in the discourse of the student focuses on the frustration of not being able to understand the activities and the need for physical contact, which shows a lack of skill with the practice of distance education. In the context, fails to follow the course dynamics.

In general, the doubts in VLE, are answered by the tutor or teacher, by e-mail, within a period of time provided by the rules and organization of the course, except in cases where there is interaction in chat rooms to strip doubts of the participants. Thus, an immediate anxiety response may cause, in some cases, this aversion to such learning mode.

However, worth remembering that adaptation to distance education is personal, and the lack of physical contact, safeguarding ICTs exceptions using image transmission resources, reveals the student unprepared for distance education. In such cases, the teacher manages the situation in order to show the students how to participate and takes away doubts in the online system. Moreover, proposals of activities and language interaction in VLE should be exposed clearly, so that

difficulties are circumvented. In this regard, consistent teaching methodology and affection in the interaction can be a good strategy for the student (des) involvement in the distance, so that the teaching-learning relationship is more enjoyable and effective. After all, cyberspace is a model of education through the development of collaborative learning communities (MORAN, MASETTO e BEHRENS, 2000).

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Data analysis and studies show that affection is part of the virtual environment with teaching and learning objectives in different ways, and in different human interactions. The data shows that, from the perspective of participants, participation in the virtual environment is more facilitated. They also feel more freedom to "ask questions" in this space. However, the data for the three and four questions show a conflict in trying to divide the virtual education and face to face, chosen endeavor also by the questionnaire adopted in the research. The attachment to the need for some face to face interaction and difficulties "virtual environment" or even some courses, demonstrate motivating aspects for further research that can be verified by means of new data collection methods if affection is higher or not in virtual environments.

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