Artigo Original

Factors Relating To Permanence In The Distance Graduation Course "Bacharelado Em Desenvolvimento Rural - Plageder" From UAB / UFRGS

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Abstract

This article was done with a goal: develop the knowledge about one of most important phenomena of distance learning, the permanence of students, relating course offer aspects with the students opinion about permanence factors, considering the importance of this modality in the present days. The objective was to understand the way in which organizational and motivational factors contributed to the permanence and conclusion of the third edition of the PLAGEDER distance course, analyzing the influence of factors related to the permanence in the course, identifying and understanding the obstacles of the students to the conclusion of the course. Thus, the following research problem was answered: in what way organizational and motivational factors reflect in the permanence and conclusion of the distance learning course in Rural Development - PLAGEDER, in its third edition. The research involved quantitative and qualitative analysis. Primary and secondary data were used in the data collection. Questionnaires were used both for the students of the course and for the actors involved with the course offer. The work also relied on the use of observation for data collection. The

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results showed a significant difference of the permanence in the different poles where the course was offered, varying from 16% to 54.76%. In general, it was possible to verify that factors related to face-to-face activities were considered more important by the students than the factors related to distance activities for the decision to remain in the course. The relationship between the limited time available for the study and the lack of self-discipline, as obstacles to the completion of the course, compose an interesting find presented in the results.

Keywords: Distance Learning, Permanence, Evasion, Organizational Issues and PLAGEDER.

1. Introduction

Initially, it is noteworthy that this article deals with factors related to staying in a Distance Education (DE) course. This is a widely studied topic, and has been covered by many studies that address distance education, due to its importance. The research that resulted in this work made it possible to understand the circumstances favorable to the development of this teaching modality, in addition to highlighting some relevant factors related to organizational issues and the reasons that lead students to stay in an DE course. From the results, which will be necessary throughout the article, it will be possible to identify some variables that favored the conclusion of the Bachelor in Rural Development - PLAGEDER 3 -, from the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) (DE).

Due to the fact that the dropout rate in this teaching modality is very high, it may be considered necessary to approach different variables, involving academic, organizational, personal aspects, among others. The importance of this theme is highlighted by Li and Lalani (2020), who affirm to be evident, from the Covid-19 pandemic, the importance of the dissemination of knowledge, crossing borders, organizations and all parts of society. For these authors, it is everyone's responsibility to enjoy the benefits of distance education with efficiency, efficacy and effectiveness (LI; LALANI, 2020).

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According to Demarco (2015), some aspects that involve the challenges of the teaching-learning process with the use of new technologies must be considered, they are: the student's autonomy, the type of interaction that happens in distance education, the high dropout rate of courses etc. The enormous dropout rate of students can be considered the main pedagogical challenge of a program. The causes of this situation are multifactorial and can be related to the difficulty of reconciling studies with work and other personal factors (DEMARCO, 2015).

When working as a server at PLAGEDER, since June 2017, I assess that it is important, for the permanence of students of this modality, to have an effort by the academic and administrative team, through a close relationship with the students, through visits to the centers, phone calls , messages through the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), web conferences, etc. In this same sense, flexibility is sought to meet the demands of specific groups of students, represented by the face-to-face support hubs (students are separated by groups according to the hubs to which they are linked), as well as individual demands. It is noteworthy that, in the pedagogical project of PLAGEDER, there is mention of the development of strategies and performance criteria to meet the individual needs of students.

The Bachelor's Degree in Rural Development - PLAGEDER, whose modality is Distance Education, was envisioned by the Graduate Program in Rural Development (PGDR) at UFRGS, a program that works in the areas of teaching, research and extension. From this experience, an opportunity was identified for the training of professionals at undergraduate level, working in local and regional issues, competing for rural development. This research addressed the permanence factors of the students trained in the third edition of the course - PLAGEDER 3 - (which started in 2014), being carried out in a bachelor's degree and offered in 12 on-site support centers (SOBRE…, 2021).

With the focus of analysis on the third edition of PLAGEDER, it is noteworthy that it counted 600 vacancies in the selection process, of which only 434 were filled. Among the students who actually entered, 164 graduated and 270 dropped out. The offer of PLAGEDER 3 counted on the participation of 46 teachers, to teach 34 curricular subjects,

plus the discipline of Course Conclusion Work (TCC). Each discipline had, in the first semesters, 12 distance tutors and, subsequently, 3 to 10 professionals to perform this function.

During the course development, it should be mentioned that there was a certain distribution of face-to-face tutors, according to the poles, which will be analyzed throughout the article. In relation to the team available for the organization of the course, PLAGEDER's graduation committee was composed of the course coordinator, five professors and an administrative technician. In turn, the technical team counted, over time, with three administrators, a systems analyst and four fellows. The course lasted eight semesters (SOBRE..., 2021).

This work was carried out in order to identify the circumstances that favored the conclusion of the Bachelor's Degree in Rural Development - PLAGEDER - course, at UFRGS / UAB, and to improve the attendance to students, according to the profiles to be revealed in the research, valuing the most relevant factors. **In this context, the following research problem was defined: how did personal, academic and contextual issues reflect on the permanence and conclusion of the distance learning undergraduate course in Rural Development - PLAGEDER -, in its third edition?**

In general, the objective of the work was to understand factors (personal, academic and contextual) that contributed to the permanence and conclusion of the third edition of the distance course Bachelor in Rural Development - PLAGEDER - UFRGS / UAB (PLAGEDER 3). Specifically, the following was aimed at:

- identify the profile of students who completed PLAGEDER in its third edition, from April 25, 2014 to December 20, 2017;

- analyze the organizational factors (structure, material, people, etc.) available during the course;

- analyze the influence of personal, academic and contextual issues on the students' permanence in the course;

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- identify and understand students' obstacles to completing the course.

Considering that the purpose of the work was to analyze the motivational and circumstantial factors of the students' permanence in the third edition of PLAGEDER, the type of research used was a case study, with quantitative and qualitative analysis. This method was justified by the complexity of the issues considered in the study. The processing of quantitative data was performed using the Excel 2007 program, from Microsoft Office. In the research, descriptive statistics were used to verify the importance attributed to each factor of permanence in the course.

Primary and secondary data were also used, and the collection instruments were the questionnaire and observation. The questionnaire included a set of closed questions (with the exception of an open question), made for students who completed PLAGEDER and were willing to participate in the research, and other sets of open questions for the actors involved with the offer of the course, organized according to their respective functions.

The collection with the students was made to obtain information about the reasons that led the graduates to choose the course in question, in order to identify the extent to which the activities developed contributed to stay in the course. The questions addressed to relevant actors involved in the offer of the course had the purpose of analyzing the organizational factors, which are related to permanence.

All questionnaires were applied using the Google Forms instrument, containing, in the case applied to students, in addition to data to identify their profile, the factors that motivated the choice and permanence in the course. In the application of this questionnaire, the Likert Scale (which presents values that can vary from 1 to 5) was used to assess the extent to which some personal and other characteristics related to the course offer contributed to the permanence in the third edition of PLAGEDER.

The invitations to participate in the research were sent by e-mail,

and of the 164 students from the third edition of the course invited, only 26 responded to the questionnaire, within 12 days, during which time it was available. Regarding the actors involved in the PLAGEDER offer, e-mails were sent, according to the functions, to all of them, with 13 tutors, 11 teachers, 2 representatives from the UFRGS Secretariat for Distance Education (SEAD), 2 pole coordinators, 1 member of the course coordination, 1 member of the administrative team and 1 Information Technology (IT) professional answered the questionnaire.

The observation was made from my role as administrator in the third edition of PLAGEDER, from June 22, 2017 to December 20, 2017. With this experience, it was possible to complement some information obtained with the other primary data and with the data secondary.

2. Development And Demonstration Of Results

2.1. Theoretical Reference

In his studies on the history of distance education, Aoki (2012) mentions four stages of distance education, which are: the correspondence phase, in which printed material was sent, and the interaction with teachers was limited to the use of the post office; phase of the use of radio and television as a complement to the printed material, referred to as the "industrial phase", due to the massification of knowledge achieved by the method; phase of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), with the use of multimedia materials, such as CD-ROM; finally, in the fourth phase, there was a dynamic interaction of students among themselves and with teachers on the network, in addition to access to content through ICTs (AOKI, 2012).

Distance education can be understood, according to Alves (2011), as a teaching modality that takes place with intense use of ICT, in which there is physical separation, in space or in time, of teachers and students. Distance education is a very democratic education modality, in certain aspects, since it uses ICTs, overcoming obstacles to the conquest of knowledge (ALVES, 2011). As it is a teaching modality in increasing

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expansion, it is considered one of the alternatives for promoting the development of national education. In recent years, distance education has received a significant incentive from governments at all levels of education, especially from public policies at the federal level (SANTOS, 2011).

Based on the distance learning experiences of public universities in Brazil, at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, the Ministry of Education (MEC) considered the possibility of organizing an Open University. Currently, the Open University of Brazil (UAB) has the support of MEC for the existence of more than 500 hubs in the 26 states of the Federation and the Federal District and has as a priority the provision of initial training to teachers, in effective exercise in basic education public, not yet graduated (BRASIL, 2018).

Despite the expansion of opportunities with the UAB, the circumstantial differences in access and permanence in university courses represent a challenge for education in the country. Zago (2006, p. 228) analyzes students whose families have limited financial conditions and, in the author's words, "reduced cultural capital". The researcher highlights the scarcity of time for this public to carry out extra-class activities, such as congresses, conferences, social gatherings, but also mentions difficulties in carrying out academic work in groups. The main cause of this situation is the time spent by students in professional activities aimed at survival (ZAGO, 2006).

In the same sense, Fanals, Gazo and Silvente (2018), consider the essentiality of the social perspective of higher education, considering it as a guide for the path to be followed by university policies. The whole process must take place in line with the reforms that have been taking place, to make education more inclusive and equal, with the maintenance of excellence (FANALS; GAZO; SILVENTE, 2018).

A UFRGS body, which is in the context of the permanence research at PLAGEDER and is responsible for distance education at the institution, plays an important role in the face of this scenario, as it has among its values social responsibility, inclusion and innovation; this is the Distance Education Secretariat - SEAD. Established in 2002, through

Internal Ordinance No. 2,975, it has a decentralized, plural and inter-disciplinary organizational structure, which increasingly involves academic units in its development and seeks to align DE actions with university policies (SEAD, 2021).

Relevant, also, in the discussion of the relationship between the expansion of higher education and permanence, are the MEC programs for higher education, created in the year 2000, which expressly include in their objectives the incentive for students to remain in undergraduate education. Such programs are called the University for All Program (PROUNI) (which funds undergraduate students in private institutions), the Support Program for Federal University Restructuring and Expansion Plans (REUNI) and the National Student Assistance Program (PNAES) (that fund undergraduate students in public institutions) (ARAÚJO, 2013).

According to Araújo (2013), these programs reflected in an "expansion of focal policies that emphasized the importance of access and the permanence of the so-called qualitative minorities, from the perspective of inclusion". On the other hand, the author comes to the conclusion that the main focus of these policies is the expansion of access to higher education, consequently attaching little importance to the objective of permanence, which is contemplated only in a focal, not universal perspective (ARAÚJO, 2013).

In the same vein, Veloso and Silva (2016) conclude that REUNI and the Unified Selection System (SISU) - in which public institutions of higher education offer vacancies for candidates participating in the National High School Exam -, despite allowing the expansion of the access to federal universities, do not reproduce the student's permanence in the Higher Education Institution (HEI) nor the conclusion of the course in a reasonable time. The researchers, based on different authors, addressed the phenomenon of permanence considering different perspectives, such as maintaining students in higher education under the following conditions: in another undergraduate course at the same institution; in higher education, but in another HEI; in the respective course, in normal time or beyond the time foreseen for completion. In addition, they considered factors that hinder the completion

of graduation, which may cause dropout, such as unfavorable economic condition and deficit in education in elementary and high school. Veloso and Silva (2016) also believe that permanence involves other aspects of the student's life in society and at the university (cultural, political, sporting issues, access to teachers and the institution's environments, such as laboratories and libraries).

Kemp (2001 apud BIZARRIA; SILVA; CARNEIRO, 2014) portrays permanence as a complex phenomenon, being influenced by innumerable factors, because, throughout their lives, individuals face different situations or events that generate stress, assuming different roles , among them, the student. There are variations from person to person in the reactions to stress and adversity, and some are able to overcome difficulties more easily than others, who often have a negative reaction. In addition, persistence is a requirement for the success of students in the course, in a way that enables the achievement of continuous progress, culminating in the achievement of the diploma (KEMP, 2001 apud BIZARRIA; SILVA; CARNEIRO, 2014). Fiuza (2012) brings in his work several factors related to permanence in distance education and divides them into three types: personal issues, academic issues and contextual issues. They will be explained in the results, below.

Urrego (2015), similarly to Fiuza (2012), considered different factors in the analysis of permanence and found in the results of his research that the students who remained in the course had characteristics similar to those who dropped out in relation to most of the studied variables. However, half of the assessed permanent students considered personal factors such as family and professional development to be important in the decision to continue the course. The author concludes by stating that the improvement of the economic situation and the search for quality of life by students portray something inherent to human character (URREGO, 2015).

It is worth mentioning that Comings (2007), under another approach, found in his study different elements that contribute to permanence; namely, goal setting by students, increased confidence in the ability to perform tasks, the support they receive for the management of positive and negative factors that can influence persistence; the certainty of

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progress in reaching your goals. The mentioned author also identified different persistence paths, which are determined by personal and environmental factors, considering the different means that the programs use to support students, given the peculiarities of each individual, considering the objectives when taking the course (COMINGS, 2007).

Still in the permanence approach, the contact and bonding strategy favors the welcoming, self-confidence and motivation of the student, having a positive impact on the performance of the students in the course. Thus, the integration of the student is fundamental to minimize the effects of evasion, and the institutional bond is more intense when information is passed on clearly and when the characteristics of each class and each student can be analyzed (BIZARRIA; SILVA; CARNEIRO , 2014). On the other hand, Frydenberg (2007) did not find any significant difference between the permanence verified in an extension course held at the University of California, in the distance and face-to-face modalities. The author mentions the possibility that the active participation of tutors in the forums (every 48 or 72 hours, depending on the type of course) may have minimized the gap represented by the lack of face-to-face interaction (FRYDENBERG, 2007).

Regarding the participation of tutors, Urrego (2015) found in the results of his research their abandonment in relation to attending students as one of the biggest factors of dropout, both in the opinion of dropout students and those who continued on the course. Other factors cited as a cause of evasion were the feeling of loneliness, academic factors, lack of time, economic situation and family responsibilities. Regarding the perspective of permanence, the possibility of flexible time and space offered by the courses was evidenced as important in the continuity decision (URREGO, 2015).

In the work of Vieira (2018), it is observed that, for distance tutors, the most damaging factor to the quality of the courses is the students' unpreparedness and immaturity in dealing with the management of study time and the performance of activities online. It also highlights the need for continuing education for all those involved in distance education (students, tutors, teachers, etc.) (VIEIRA, 2018).

Marquez *et al.* (2007) contribute to the idea that knowledge and skills related to the operation of distance education are significant for the good performance of students in this modality, considering in this context the previous training related to the management of technological resources. In the same sense, they mention that the basis for an adequate distance education management model includes simple and accessible mechanisms in the processes relevant to the offer of a course, concluding that the organization's adaptation to the modality involves mechanisms that provide flexibility in its curricular and administrative structure (MÁRQUEZ *et al.*, 2007).

For Aoki (2012), in view of the complexity that involves distance education and the existence of available technologies to carry out activities in this modality, educational institutions need to make adaptations, aiming to provide students with the necessary tools for a personalized service to students. From another perspective, Berge and Cho (2002) show the need to consider the contingency character of possible solutions to structure a DE program, because a system that is the most suitable for an organization may be impertinent in others (BERGE; CHO, 2002).

From a strategic perspective, Berge and Cho (2002) mention that the administrative structure and organizational change are significantly relevant to the success of a DE program, especially when the top of the organization has a culture favorable to that modality. The need to adapt standards and technical resources (skills and infrastructure) to distance education are the main organizational challenges for their development in educational institutions (BERGE; CHO, 2002). In an operational view, when considering the course offer conditions, it is relevant to have a team with knowledge of the processes in a DE course, so that it helps teachers in the production of material, in the use of the virtual environment and, even, in the preparation of activities (PACHECO *et al.*, 2011).

2.2. Data Presentation And Analysis

The higher course in Rural Development - PLAGEDER, offered in the distance mode, is coordinated and executed by UFRGS, through SEAD, linked to the Universidade Aberta do Brasil System - UAB. PLAGEDER's mission is to provide training at a higher level aiming at training professionals with critical awareness and innovators, who must act in the development, planning and rural management, especially at the regional level, getting involved in the formulation of public policies and on the environmental issue (SOBRE...,, 2021).

In 2006, aiming at expanding access to Higher Education by offering undergraduate courses, created, in 2006, the Special Graduation Program - PEG (Resolution nº 37/2006, of the Education, Research and Extension Council - CEPE / UFRGS). Such program aims to develop the institution's performance in the undergraduate area, through courses that do not have the character of a permanent offer, meeting the emergency and temporary needs of the community, considered and analyzed by the relevant instances of the University. From that perspective, PLAGEDER was born (SOBRE..., 2021).

The 1st edition of PLAGEDER (Technologist in Rural Development) started on October 19, 2007; the 2nd edition of the Course (Technologist in Rural Development), on August 8, 2009; the 3rd edition (Bachelor in Rural Development 2014), whose selection process (entrance exam) took place on March 9, 2014, started in the first semester of the same year, on April 25, 2014, ending on December 20, 2017; finally, the 4th edition (Bachelor in Rural Development 2018) had a selection process in March 2018, with the beginning of classes in May of the year in question.

Graph 1 - Profession of graduates participating in the research
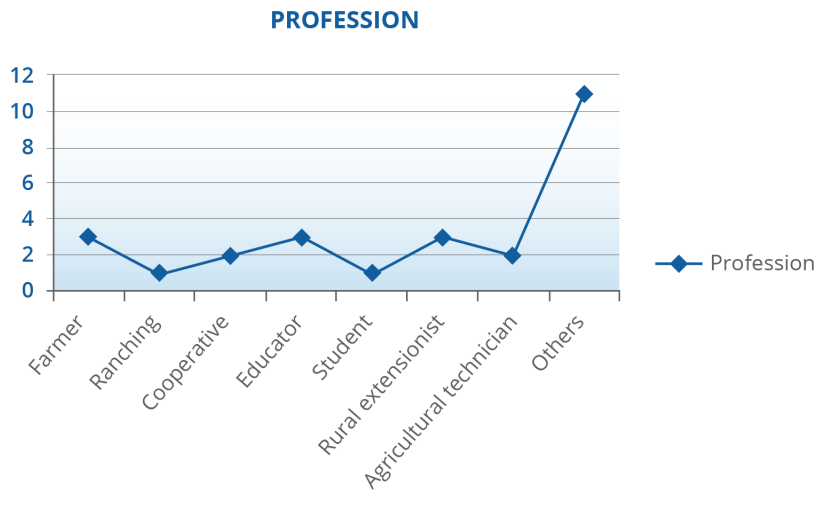
PROFESSION


Source: Prepared by the author.

It was possible to perceive, in Graph 1, that a good part of the components of the sample of the student population works in a professional field directly related to the rural theme, such as farmers, ranchers, rural extension workers and agricultural technicians. Regarding this fact, there was a marked diversity of ties, involving public servants, professionals, public security, attendant, administrative assistant, salesperson or self-employed.

Of the 26 components of the sample, only 2 had no professional occupation (a student and a housewife) and the majority held a position that requires low qualification. This fact brings the public object of research closer to the idea brought up by Zago (2006), who states that students who are less financially and culturally spend a lot of time in search of survival (consider that the main difficulty of students to stay in the course was lack of time, as will be seen below).

When considering the profile of the students of the course, it was also found that, of the 164 graduates, 94 (57.31%) were men and 70 (42.68%) were women. The sample of the 26 survey participants showed an average of 36 years of age. Among them, half are in the range of 31 to 40 years of age, and less than a quarter of them are over 40. In addition, only 2 of the 26 members of the sample were unfamiliar with computer resources before joining the aforementioned distance education course,

which corroborates the idea of Veloso and Silva (2016), when they mention that permanence involves other aspects besides the financial ones, such as cultural, access to technologies, etc.

Figure 1 - PLAGEDER editions by poles
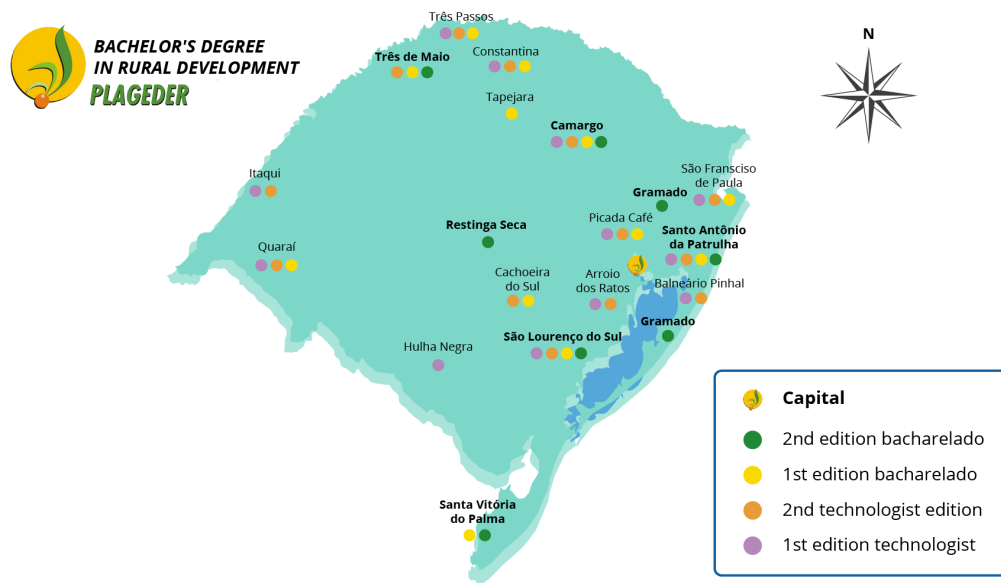
Source: Sobre… (2021, on-line).

In Figure 1, it can be seen that, although some hubs are covered by the course in all editions, there are always renovations with hubs in different locations from one edition of the course to another. The third edition (1st edition of the Bacharelado and focus of this research) had twelve in-person support centers, which are indicated with a yellow circle. It can also be seen that the hubs are well distributed throughout the state of Rio Grande do Sul. The PLAGEDER coordination team stated that the choice of hubs was a continuation of its previous edition, also contemplating the idea of meeting the demands of other municipalities.

Table 1 - Percentage of permanence in PLAGEDER 3 by unit

UNIT	TOTAL ENROLLMENT	TOTAL EVASION	TOTAL GRADUATES	STAY	EVASION
Cachoeira do Sul	43	27	16	37,21%	62,79%
Camargo	42	19	23	54,76%	45,24%
Constantina	16	13	3	18,75%	81,25%
Picada Café	28	16	12	42,86%	57,14%
Quaraí	18	14	4	22,22%	77,78%
Santa Vitória do Palmar	49	33	16	32,65%	67,35%
Santo Antônio da Patrulha	50	30	20	40,00%	60,00%
São Francisco de Paula	25	21	4	16,00%	84,00%
São Lourenço do Sul	49	24	25	51,02%	48,98%
Tapejara	19	12	7	36,84%	63,16%
Três de Maio	47	29	18	38,30%	61,70%
Três Passos	48	32	16	33,33%	66,67%
TOTAL	434	270	164	37,79%	62,21%

Source: Prepared by the author.

In Table 1, there is a difference in permanence in the different centers where the course was offered, ranging from 16% to 54.76%. In Table 2, below, it is possible to see how the presence of tutors in the respective poles was configured, which may be related to these percentages of permanence.

Table 2 - Number of PLAGEDER face-to-face tutors by unit and period

Unit	Number of tutors who acted	Period of performance of classroom tutors
Cachoeira do Sul	2	Tutor 1 - 01/05/2014 to 30/09/2015 Tutor 2 - 01/05/2014 to 31/12/2017
Camargo	2	Tutor 1 - 01/05/2014 to 30/09/2015 Tutor 2 - 01/05/2014 to 31/12/2017
Constantina	1	Tutor 1 - 01/05/2014 to 30/10/2015
Picada Café	2	Tutor 1 - 01/05/2014 to 30/08/2015 Tutor 2 - 01/10/2014 to 31/12/2017
Quaraí	1	Tutor 1 - 01/05/2014 to 30/10/2015
Santa Vitória do Palmar	2	Tutor 1 - 01/05/2014 to 30/09/2015 Tutor 2 - 01/05/2014 to 31/12/2017
Santo Antônio da Patrulha	2	Tutor 1 - 01/05/2014 to 30/09/2015 Tutor 2 - 01/05/2014 to 31/12/2017
São Francisco de Paula	1	Tutor 1 - 01/05/2014 to 30/10/2015
São Lourenço do Sul	3	Tutor 1 - 01/05/2014 to 30/04/2015 Tutor 2 - 04/05/2015 to 30/09/2015 Tutor 3 - 01/05/2014 to 31/12/2017
Tapejara	1	Tutor 1 - 01/05/2014 to 30/09/2015
Três de Maio	2	Tutor 1 - 01/05/2014 to 30/09/2015 Tutor 2 - 01/05/2014 to 31/12/2017
Três Passos	2	Tutor 1 - 01/05/2014 to 30/09/2015 Tutor 2 - 01/05/2014 to 31/12/2017

Source: Prepared by the author.

It is interesting to notice that, with the exception of the Tapejara center, which had a permanence of 36.84%, the centers that had only one face-to-face tutor (active, during only a certain period of the course) had the lowest permanence, being this number, in Constantina, 18.75%, in Quaraí, 22.22%, and in São Francisco de Paula, 16%. Ahead, where the information regarding the influence of several factors on the permanence of the students appears, it appears that the factors that involve face-to-face activities, such as the presence of the face-to-face tutors, had greater weight in the students' decision to stay in the course.

The influence of each of the permanence factors considered was assessed using a response scale that ranged from 1 to 5, with "1" being the value to designate no influence and "5" to designate very significant influence. To facilitate the analysis, the answers were organized with a corresponding percentage, which represents the influence of the respective factor on a scale from 0 to 100, according to Table 3, which was the basis for the construction of Table 4.

Table 3 - Scale with values and percentages of influence

Value Assigned	Corresponding Contribution Intensity	Percentage Of Respective Influence
1	Did not contribute	0%
2	Contributed very little	25%
3	Contributed a little	50%
4	Contributed in a good extent	75%
5	Contributed a lot	100%

Source: Prepared by the author.

## Table 4 - Percentage of influence of factors related to permanence

Factor	Likert Average	Percentage Influence
University and pole structure as a whole (material resources, organization).	4,19	**79,75%**
University administrative support (good service, flexibility, problem solving).	3,62	**65,50%**
Administrative support of the center (good service, flexibility, resolution).	4,31	**82,75%**
Teacher's attitude / behavior (attention, commitment, dynamism and commitment of teachers).	4,04	**76,00%**
Attitude / behavior of distance tutors (assistance, reminders, guidance, incentives and socialization provided by distance tutors).	4,38	**84,50%**
Attitude / behavior of the face-to-face tutor (assistance, reminders, guidance, incentives and socialization provided by the face-to-face tutor).	4,54	**88,50%**

Activities (diversity and characteristics of face-to-face, online and complementary activities).	4,38	**84,50%**
Didactic material / content (didactic material and satisfactory contents).	3,65	**66,25%**
Technological resources (Web conferences, virtual learning environment (Moodle) and other technological resources).	3,96	**74,00%**
Schedule flexibility (schedule availability).	4,04	**76,00%**
Affective / sentimental issues (collegiality, reciprocity, trust and affectivity).	4,23	**80,75%**
Interaction / communication (interaction, interactivity, communication).	4,19	**79,75%**
Motivation / incentives (positive stimuli from family and friends, encouragement).	4,50	**87,50%**
Persistence (persistence, commitment, determination).	4,84	**96,00%**

Source: Prepared by the author.

Based on the criteria previously established in Table 3, Table 4 was elaborated, with consideration of the influence designated by the students participating in the research in relation to each permanence factor, which involve personal (related to the student), academic (related) to the course) or contextual (related to the course and the student). This division and the choice of factors to be designated in this work were made based on the work of Fiuza (2012).

As seen, the division of the factors listed in Table 4 was made as follows: personal issues (motivation / incentives, affective / sentimental issues and persistence); academic questions (teacher's attitude, distance tutor's attitude, classroom tutor's attitude, activities and teaching material) and contextual issues (technological resources, distance learning modality, administrative support, University, administrative support, pole, schedule flexibility, interaction and structure University / pole). Graph 2, next, shows the averages of the percentages of influence of each block of factors.

Graph 2 - Percentage of influence by types of factors
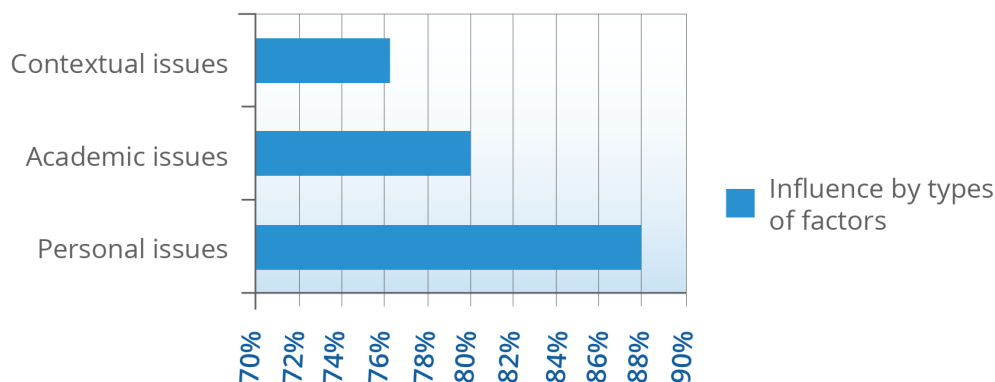
Source: Prepared by the author.

As shown in Graph 2, contextual questions averaged 4.05 on the Likert Scale, or 76.25% influence, academic questions, 4.2, or 80%, and personal questions, 4.52 , or 88%. Significant differences were found when considering the averages of the answers by types of questions, being considered more influential for the students to remain in the course, as explained, the personal questions.

Kemp (2001 apud BIZARRIA; SILVA; CARNEIRO, 2014) indicates that persistence is a requirement for the success of students in the course, so that they achieve continuous progress, which culminates in the completion and achievement of the diploma. Persistence was considered by the students analyzed as the most relevant factor for the completion of PLAGEDER 3, with an average of 4.84 on the scale adopted, representing 96% of influence on permanence and being 15.75% above the average of influence of all the factors as a whole (estimated at 80.25%).

As seen in Longo's work (2009 apud DEMARCO, 2015), the lack of greater affective bonds and the lack of pressure from the group, as well as other forms of social interaction that take place in face-to-face education, are relevant factors in dropping out of distance education courses. as well as the inadequacy to the ICTs used in DE. Based on Table 4, it is possible to analyze that the factors related to face-to-face

activities had a preponderance in inducing the conclusion of the distance education course.

To understand this reported situation, it is enough to verify that the factor "administrative support from the hub" (with a percentage of influence of 82.72%) was more relevant than the "administrative support from the University" (with 65.5%); that the "attitude / behavior of the face-to-face tutor" (88.5% influence), who works in the face-to-face support pole, and the "attitude / behavior of the distance tutor" (84.5%), who visits the center , stood out in relation to the factor "attitude / behavior of the teacher" (76%), which acts only at a distance; that "activities" (with 84.5%), which include "face-to-face moments", had a more expressive relationship with permanence than didactic material (66.25%), which was made available in the Virtual Learning Environment (AVA).

In view of the consideration of academic and institutional factors in the research, it is pertinent to mention the fact that the vast majority of the team related to PLAGEDER 3 who participated in the research believed that, in general, the structure, planning and operationalization of PLAGEDER 3 were adequate for the smooth running of the activities (29 of the 32 mentioned actors believe they were adequate, 2 answered that they did not and 1 did not answer). In contrast, Chart 1 points out the suggestions for improvement pointed out by the team involved with the course.

Chart 1 - Suggestions for improving the PLAGEDER structure

Actors	Required Improvements
SEAD representatives	There may be flexibility in hiring people, in order to meet the real needs of a Distance Education course.
Course coordination	It is possible to facilitate the maintenance of tutors if there is more stability in relation to some parameters, especially those that refer to the performance of these tutors in the course.

Professors.	Moodle (Virtual Learning Environment) can be a more user-friendly platform; students may have more time to complete the proposed tasks, with better synchronization between subjects; the ongoing dialogue between teachers and tutors can and should be improved.
Distance Education Tutors	The workload can be better distributed, with less overhead for tutors compared to teachers; the definition in relation to the role of each team member may be clearer; there could be better use of the Web conferencing tool (more frequent use); it is possible to have a greater decentralization of responsibilities, adding more actors and making a better alignment of operational issues with the coordination of the course; the planning of the discipline can be clearer, with the transfer of all didactic material in advance to the tutors; tutors should have a brief pedagogical training, as many were inexperienced in this aspect, but they were the ones who had direct contact with the students of the course.
IT Professional	It is possible to better distribute tasks among the team, requiring a well-integrated team, with general knowledge of the activities of each member.
Member of the administrative team.	There may be an optimization of expenses with tickets and daily rates in specific situations, for example, reduced number of students in the hubs.

Source: Prepared by the author.

Not all actors related to the PLAGEDER gave suggestions for improvement. The responses of those who spoke were compiled and presented in the previous table. It is possible to notice that the suggestions, in general, were related to the perspectives of each actor or group of actors (agents), and the representatives of SEAD and the coordination of the course mentioned issues related to the management of human resources; teachers, issues that involve the provision of the discipline; tutors, suggestions regarding the distribution and coordination of

tasks, the optimization of resources and tutorial training; the IT professional also referred to the distribution and coordination of tasks and, finally, the member of the administrative team asked a question of resource optimization.

As mentioned, Berge and Cho (2002) consider the administrative structure and organizational change to be significantly relevant to the success of a DE program. In this context, the IT professional and the PLAGEDER tutors stressed the need for better coordination and task distribution. Finally, the improvements that involve this process must be continuous, with the suggestions made by the actors related to PLAGEDER 3 being relevant to the development of this management.

2.3. Obstacles For Completing The Course

Regarding the main difficulties of the surveyed graduates, to remain in PLAGEDER 3, there was a relative diversity of responses, however, as in other questions presented in this work, there were specificities of each pole (which will be presented below). Table 5 shows the frequency of student references in relation to various obstacles to the completion of PLAGEDER 3. An open question was asked both to students and the team involved in the course (Table 5) about the main difficulty encountered by those in completing the course. course. In the table below, we can see some reasons described by the students.

Table 5 - Main obstacles to completing the course from the students' perspective

Obstacle	Frequency	Units
Lack of time.	7	Several units
Distance from the face-to-face support unit.	4	2 students from Camargo, 1 from Santo Antônio da Patrulha and 1 didn't mention.
Organization of the calendar of activities carried out by the course.	4	Several units.

Lack of face-to-face tutor at some point during the course.	3	2 students from Tapejara and 1 from Constantina.
Poor quality of the internet for hosting Web Conferences at the hubs.	3	2 students from Picada Café and 1 from Quaraí.
Difficulty in self-discipline.	3	Several units.
Difficulty with the rules for formatting papers (ABNT).	2	1 student from Camargo and 1 from Picada Café.

Source: Prepared by the author.

In general, one obstacle per student was mentioned, but some students described more than one difficulty to complete the course in their answers. The obstacles systematized in the previous table were the most relevant in the revelation made by the participating students, mentioning, among other factors, the lack of connection of the face-to-face tutor with the subject of the course, the little access to the professors of the disciplines and the difficulty of communication between the pole and the University. Three students stated that they did not encounter significant difficulties during the course.

It was possible to verify some specificities, such as the fact that two students from Picada Café and only one from Quaraí who participated in the research report problems in the Web conferences. On the other hand, two students from Tapejara and only one from Constantina mentioned as the main obstacle to forming the lack of face-to-face tutoring at some point during the course, which corroborates the idea that the performance of face-to-face tutors may be related to the permanence in the course.

The IT professional at PLAGEDER answered in the questionnaire that some hubs, during the course, improved connectivity with the internet and that this improvement was fundamental for carrying out DE and TCC tasks. He also informed that not all hubs were suitable for holding the Web Conferences, despite having previously been evaluated by them.

It is also verified that there is a greater incidence of difficulties involving personal issues, such as lack of time, distance from the face-to-face

support pole and difficulty in self-discipline. The most frequently mentioned obstacles, which can be managed by distance education courses, are the organization of the activities calendar and the lack of face-to-face tutor at some point during the course.

Vieira (2018) points out that, for distance tutors, the most damaging factor to the quality of the courses is the students' lack of preparation and immaturity to deal with the management of study time. This is verified both in the students' reference to the lack of time, as a major obstacle to staying in the course, and in the team's perspective (shown in Table 6, below), with the indication of the lack of self-discipline and the lack of time as main difficulties for staying in the course. The information contained in Table 6 is the compilation of the responses of teachers, distance tutors, on-site tutors, pole coordination and course coordination in relation to the main difficulties of students to remain in PLAGEDER 3. Part of the team indicated more than one difficulty of the students in their response, and the table explains their frequency, as well as the responses by actor.

Difficulty	Frequency	Team Members Who Answered
Lack of self-discipline.	10	5 professors, 2 distance tutors, 2 classroom tutors and 1 pole coordinator.
Lack of time.	8	5 distance tutors, 1 professor, 1 face-to-face tutor and 1 member of the course coordination.
Clash between expectation and reality on the level of demand of the course.	8	4 distance tutors, 2 professors, 1 face-to-face tutor and 1 member of the course coordination.
Lack of affinity with the course.	6	2 distance tutors, 1 professor, 1 face-to-face tutor, 1 pole coordinator and 1 member of the course coordination.
Personal problems.	3	1 distance tutor, 2 professors.
Lack of contact with the teacher	3	3 distance tutors.

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The course has a unique offer (Special Graduation Program).	2	I distance tutor, I professor.
Task overload.	2	I distance tutor, I professor.

Source: Prepared by the author.

As stated, the lack of self-discipline and lack of time were the factors most mentioned by the course staff as the main difficulties for students to complete PLAGEDER 3. The main obstacle for students was the lack of time, but there is a line between him and the lack of self-discipline. If there was enough self-discipline, wouldn't there be adequate time to complete the course tasks, or what is there is an overload of tasks in the organization in the course calendar? Would it be possible to improve the distribution of the activities of the disciplines (synchronous and asynchronous), considering the respective calendar, for the fulfillment of the course load (which is 3130 hours), so that students could optimize the use of time?

The IT professional who worked on the course informed that the Web conferences, for example, were accessed exclusively at the centers (there is the possibility of providing access to students to participate in the activity of their homes). It was possible to relate the lack of time more to the students' perspective, the lack of self-discipline to the perspective of the course team, according to the information in Tables 5 and 6. It is worth remembering the statement of Zago (2006), in which the cause of this situation, when students have a precarious financial condition, it is the time they spend on professional activities, aiming at survival.

In the same sense, it is clear that the factors designated by students as obstacles involve, to a greater extent, issues related to the course, for example, the lack of on-site tutors at some point or the organization of the activities calendar. The greatest difficulties of students reported by the team did not involve issues related to the course, as it was possible to see in Table 6, with only three people on the team reporting lack of direct contact with the teacher, two mentioned the one-time course and two others considered it overload of tasks as the main difficulties of students during the course. The team mentioned, in a greater proportion

than the students, the issues related to the individual, such as a shock of expectation in relation to the level of demand, the lack of self-discipline and the lack of affinity with the course.

3. Conclusion

With the accomplishment of this work, it was possible to understand, in many aspects, the way in which the organizational and motivational factors contributed to the permanence and the conclusion of PLAGEDER 3 by the students, identifying the profile of a sample of graduates, analyzing both the organizational factors available for the operationalization of the course regarding the influence of some factors related to permanence. Also, the main obstacles to the conclusion of the course were identified and analyzed, from the students 'and actors' perspective related to the course offerings.

As it was possible to verify, the personal issues (motivation / incentives, affective / sentimental issues and persistence) had a preponderance in the influence of the students' decisions to stay in the course. This fact suggests some ideas, such as: encouraging distance education students to develop the motivation to persist in the course (perhaps, with lectures that involve motivational issues or other extracurricular activities that contribute to increase their self-esteem); enable greater interactions between them, through study groups or other creative means, involving face-to-face meetings (generating collegiality, interaction, affectivity); involve, even if indirectly, the students 'family and friends (possibly through events, such as lectures to the community, involving issues related to the course, or proposing tasks that contemplate the students' family or circle of friends, among others).

From another perspective, factors that involved the presence in the hubs, such as the attitude of the on-site tutors and the distance (they visit the hubs in almost all disciplines), the administrative support of the hubs and the diversity of activities were more relevant to the permanence of the hubs. students at PLAGEDER 3 than factors that involved non-face-to-face issues, such as the teacher's attitude, the university's administrative structure or didactic material. In this sense, it is relevant

to value the face-to-face moments of the distance education course, defining, for example, the obligation and the need to justify absence in all activities that involve the presence of students (such as face-to-face classes or field trips, in addition to face-to-face evaluation activities). When it is financially viable for the course, the maintenance of the face-to-face tutor also seems to be significant in the search for better permanence rates.

The question of the availability of time for students was relevant in the results of this work, in a paradigm that involves, on the other hand, self-discipline. Thus, it is pertinent to assess whether the activities proposed by a DE course (readings, classes, videos, etc.) are in accordance with the workload of each discipline. In addition, it is pertinent to consider how the activities will be proposed, in order to facilitate their performance by the students (synchronous or asynchronous activities, for example, or else the possibility of doing it at home, instead of requiring them to be done at the pole)). It is also possible to instruct students on ways to manage time well and have a good organization. Another solution is the offer of scholarships (through some type of program), as it was seen that the financial issue is closely related to the availability of time.

So that there is a better adaptation to Distance Education, with the consequent attendance of the students' specificities, considering, also, the pandemic conjuncture (due to Covid-19, initiated in 2020, worldwide) and the perspectives of dissemination of the methodology used in this study , it is suggested as a suggestion for future research the comparative analysis of the permanence between totally distance courses and semi-presential courses, as well as the comparison between the cultural and economic aspects of dropout students with those of graduates. In addition, studies that address students' motivational issues related to distance learning (such as preferences in relation to curricular and extracurricular activities, for example) may also reveal possible ways to encourage them to stay until the end of the courses.

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