

Artigo Original

What do inexperienced tutors think about student motivation in Distance Education? A Case Study

O que tutores inexperientes pensam sobre a motivação dos alunos na EAD? Um estudo de caso

¿Qué piensan los tutores sin experiencia sobre la motivación de los estudiantes en la Educación a Distancia? Un estudio de caso

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Abstract

The tutor is an important figure in Distance Education (DE) that has to motivate students to learn. In this study, we aimed to investigate how tutors identify students' motivation to learn and what criteria they use for this. A small group of nine tutors of a distance course, without previous training or experience, answered a questionnaire with four questions, which were analyzed by Discursive Textual Analysis. We found that tutors use the following criteria to identify motivated learners: i) active behavior; ii) the search for information; iii) attendance; iv) explanations to the tutor, when necessary; v) concern with the quality of the activities developed; vi) improvement in grades; and vii) punctuality in the tasks. Many of these criteria are similar to other researches. However, we assume that other factors may be related to the student's motivation in DE and other criteria can be added to these, depending on the investigated context. This research can contribute to other

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studies because it presents new elements for the improvement of the training of the tutor in DE.

Keywords: Distance Education. Instructor. Motivation.

Resumo

Um dos importantes personagens da Educação a Distância (EAD) é o tutor. Entre suas tarefas, destaca-se a necessidade de motivar os estudantes para a aprendizagem. Logo, nesta pesquisa, deseja-se compreender como esses educadores caracterizam alunos motivados para o aprendizado e quais critérios utilizam para isso. Um pequeno grupo de nove tutores de um curso a distância, sem formação ou experiência prévia, respondeu a um questionário com quatro questões abertas, as quais foram analisadas por Análise Textual Discursiva. Desse modo, como critérios para a identificação de estudantes motivados para a aprendizagem, citaram: i) o comportamento ativo do aluno; ii) a busca por informações; iii) a assiduidade; iv) a prestação de esclarecimentos ao tutor; v) a preocupação com a qualidade das atividades desenvolvidas; vi) a manutenção/ evolução de notas; vii) a pontualidade na entrega de tarefas. Verifica-se, assim, que muitos desses critérios corroboram com resultados existentes na literatura. Porém assume-se que outros fatores podem estar relacionados à motivação do aluno na EAD e que novos critérios podem ser adicionados a estes, dependendo do contexto investigado. Acredita-se que esta pesquisa se soma às demais, na medida em que apresenta novos elementos para reflexão e aprimoramento da formação e atuação do tutor nos cursos a distância.

Palavras-chave: Educação a Distância. Tutor. Motivação para aprendizagem.

Resumen

Uno de los personajes importantes de la Educación a Distancia (EAD) es el tutor. Es destacada, entre sus tareas, la necesidad de motivar a los estudiantes al aprendizaje. Por lo tanto, en esta investigación, se busca comprender cómo estos educadores identifican a los estudiantes motivados al aprendizaje utilizan para hacerlo. Un pequeño grupo de nueve tutores de un curso a distancia, sin formación ni experiencia previa, ha

respondido a un cuestionario con cuatro preguntas abiertas, que han sido analizadas por Análisis Textual Discursivo. De ese modo, como criterios para reconocer a los estudiantes motivados al aprendizaje, (los tutores) han citado: i) la conducta activa del estudiante; ii) la búsqueda de información; iii) la asiduidad; iv) proporcionarle explicaciones al tutor; v) la preocupación por la calidad de las actividades desarrolladas; vi) la evolución de las notas; y vii) la puntualidad en la entrega de tareas. Se verifica, de esta manera, que muchos de estos criterios corroboran otros resultados en la literatura. Sin embargo, se asume que otros factores pueden estar relacionados con la motivación del estudiante en la educación a distancia y que a estos se pueden agregar nuevos criterios, dependiendo del contexto investigado. Se cree que esta investigación se suma a las demás, ya que presenta nuevos elementos para la reflexión y para el perfeccionamiento de la formación y desempeño del tutor.

Palabras clave: Educación a Distancia. Tutor. Motivación al aprendizaje.

Introduction

Distance Education (EAD), although it seems to be a current innovation, has a long period of history. We can define it as the educational modality in which students and teachers are physically or temporally separated, and for that, it is necessary to use information and communication technologies (MEC, 2018). It is important to say that such an approach differs from “emergency remote education”, as it is developed due to a circumstance that causes a temporary change in face-to-face activities, as occurred during the Coronavirus 19 Disease pandemic (COVID 19), a from the year 2020. In EAD, on the contrary, educational experiences are planned and designed, from the beginning, to occur online (HODGES *et al.*, 2020).

One of the important characters in Distance Education is the tutor. Thus, when the etymology of this word is rescued, its relationship with "protection" and "power" is identified (ALUANI, 2015). However, despite the term referring to an individual who performs functions of recognized importance, this picture is not always materialized in distance learning courses, since it is possible to identify a secondary value

attributed to this function. In this scenario, different studies have been carried out in order to understand the role of the tutor in DE and, with that, the question is: what is being a tutor? What is your background? What is the influence of this for the students of distance learning courses? (ALUANI, 2015; BURNS, 2011; XIAO, 2012).

Botelho and Maffra (2009) believe that the tutor has the same function as a teacher, which is close to the ideas defended by Schlosser (2010). Other authors, such as Becker, Ferretti and Domingues (2019) and Vergara (2007), argue that the role of the tutor is distinct from the teaching role, with the former having, as some of its functions, the monitoring of activities performed by students in virtual learning environments (AVA), the promotion of discussions and the encouragement of students' reflections. As for the tasks of the distance education teacher, the authors cite the elaboration of the pedagogical proposal of a certain discipline and the development of teaching materials to be used in it - a vision also shared by the Brazilian Ministry of Education, found in the Quality Benchmarks for Higher Distance Education (MEC, 2007). It is worth noting that, in Brazil, until today, the "profession" tutor is not regulated by laws, it is up to each educational institution to select the desired profile and training of this educator, as well as to delimit the tasks they will perform in the courses offered (SOEK; HARACEMIV, 2008).

Added to the differences related to the pedagogical functions of the tutor and the teacher in distance courses, some researchers also list, as a duty of the first, an action focused on the emotional aspects of students in this teaching modality. White et al. (2005), for example, cite, as the attitudes expected from a tutor, the ability to be open to students, to be patient and to provide encouragement to students. Moore and Kearsley (2011), in turn, add that good distance education educators must have the ability to understand students' personalities, identifying their emotions. Vergara (2007), Xiao (2012), Castro and Mattei (2008) cite the importance of this educator for the motivational process of learners.

When thinking about the importance of motivation for a student's learning in DE, some difficulties are found in the investigations, one of them related to the fact that the term in question is polysemic: according to Sen, Yilmaz and Yurdugül (2014), the "motivation" may be related to

the achievement of goals – as in the definition of Lindner (1998) – but also to something capable of directing the behavior of an individual – as can be detected in the research by Keller (1999) –, among other possibilities. It is not the focus of this article to carry out a theoretical review of the term, however the definition of Lefrançois (2006) is considered close to the objectives of this investigation. Such researchers relate motivation to an individual's “action”, stating that motives are the causes that produce effects on a subject's behavior.

Based on the above definition, it is considered that the motivation of a student for learning is capable of driving him to develop certain actions that guarantee his learning, which ends up reflecting on his performance in studies, called “good performance” or “good development” in this investigation. This means that, like Pintrich and Schunk (2002), in this study, it is believed that, despite the fact that motivation is not able to be directly observed, it can be inferred from certain behaviors of an individual. In this context, among the actions of a student that culminate in their “good performance” or “good development” during a course and that possibly show their motivation for learning, Cavenaghi (2009, p. 2) states:

[...] Motivation is an important aspect in the classroom learning process, as the intensity and quality of involvement required to learn depend on it. Students unmotivated by school tasks perform below their real potential, are easily distracted, do not participate in classes, study little or nothing and distance themselves from the learning process. Thus, they learn little, running the risk of dropping out of school, limiting their future opportunities. On the contrary, a motivated student is actively involved in the learning process, with effort, persistence and even enthusiasm in carrying out tasks, developing skills and overcoming challenges.

In view of the above, and considering the important role of the tutor in the motivation of students in distance courses, it is considered essential that such an educator is able to identify motivated (and, consequently, unmotivated) learners for learning, developing capable

strategies to help them stay engaged in their studies. Therefore, with this work, it is intended: i) to detect how a tutor characterizes students motivated to learn; ii) establish criteria (based on what the surveyed tutors characterize as “good performance” or “good development”) capable of helping to identify students motivated to learn.

Methodology

This investigation can be characterized as a qualitative research (LANKSHEAR; KNOBEL, 2004), in which the case study was the approach used. Among the characteristics of these types of studies, Lüdke and André (1986) highlight the fact that they aim at discovery, in addition to enabling “interpretation in context” for a more complete understanding of an investigated object. In addition, they seek to report experiences so that the reader asks himself what he can (or may not) apply to his research situation.

The context of this investigation is a course offered at a distance for teachers in the state of São Paulo: the Specialization Course for Biology Teachers (EspBio) of the São Paulo Teacher Training Program (RedeFor). Each RedeFor course lasted, on average, one year, with a total workload of 360 hours, organized into 4 modules comprising two 45-hour subjects. EspBio had approximately 800 students (professors in continuing education) over two offering editions, between the years 2010 and 2013. In each edition, students were divided into about 10 groups, each assisted by 2 tutors.

Thus, the research subjects were the tutors who were part of the pedagogical team of the EspBio course (second edition), and all of them were invited to voluntarily participate in this investigation (approximately 20 tutors). Of these, nine agreed to collaborate with this work and had the following profile: one male and eight female. All were aged between 25 and 35 years old, with a background in the area of Biological Sciences, and one of them had only a bachelor's degree, and the rest were attending postgraduate studies or had completed it. Of this group, four had some previous experience with face-to-face teaching, and seven had worked in the RedeFor program in its first edition (2010-2011),

which is their only experience with distance learning. It should be noted that the only type of training offered to these tutors by EspBio/RedeFor was a 30-hour course for familiarization with the Moodle platform. By specific initiative of the coordination, fortnightly face-to-face meetings were held with the team of tutors to discuss the progress of the course, which was also carried out through a group of emails created for this purpose. In the present study, the investigated tutors performed functions similar to those described by Becker, Ferretti and Domingues (2019), Vergara (2007) and MEC (2007), presented in the Introduction section of this text.

Considering the crucial role played by the tutor for the motivation of students in Distance Education, an open questionnaire was designed, which aimed to show how tutors characterized motivated students and what criteria they used to identify them. Due to the fact that the term "motivation" is polysemic, often making it difficult for individuals to interpret it (SEN; YILMAZ; YURDUGÜL, 2014), and considering the close relationship between the actions of a motivated student to learning and its performance in studies (CAVENAGHI, 2009), it was considered pertinent to include questions related to this last aspect in the research instrument used in this investigation. Thus, the intention was to confirm what the criteria capable of identifying students motivated for learning really would be, according to the perception of the surveyed tutors. From adjustments made after the application of a pilot test of this instrument, the final questions of the questionnaire were:

1. *For you, what is a motivated student (cursista)¹ [for learning]?*
2. *What criteria could you list to identify a student (cursista) who is motivated [to learn]?*
3. *How would you define, in the context of the course you are tutoring, a student (cursista) with "good performance"?*
4. *What criteria could you list to identify a student (cursista) that is showing "good development"?*
The word "cursista" is used throughout the text as a synonym for Distance Education student.

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The evaluation of the answers was done by Textual Discursive Analysis (ATD), according to the definition of Moraes and Galiazzi (2007). According to the authors, the intention of this method is to deepen the understanding of the phenomenon researched from a more careful investigation of the information obtained. Among its stages, the following stand out: i) “unitarization”: the texts are fragmented, thus forming “units of meaning”, which make it possible to inspect the data in detail; ii) “categorization”: the researcher tries to establish relationships between the fragments obtained in the previous step (units of meaning); iii) “capturing the new emerging”: from the in-depth investigation carried out in the previous stages, the researcher possibly has a renewed understanding of his data set and, with this, describes the final categories detected.

Results

To exemplify the method of analysis used in this study (Discursive Textual Analysis – ATD –), the methodological steps used for the tutors' answers to the first question of the previously mentioned questionnaire will be presented in detail. For the other questions, only the final categories detected will be presented.

For the first question of the questionnaire (What is a motivated student for you?), 11 units of meaning were found from the responses of the surveyed tutors (step 1 of the ATD method: “unitarization”), which were classified into subcategories presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Relation between the units of meaning, present in the tutors' answers to the first question of the questionnaire, and the subcategories created by the researchers

| Answers fragmented into units of meaning | Subcategories |
|---|--|
| <i>It is the one who performs most of the activities that are worth grades.</i> | Participates |
| <i>It is the one who performs most of the activities that are not worth a grade.</i> | |
| <i>Actively participates in online forums, accessing them frequently and giving coherent responses, in addition to commenting on the responses of colleagues.</i> | |
| <i>One who accesses the AVA daily.</i> | Assiduous |
| <i>The one who seeks extra bibliographies.</i> | Research |
| <i>Those who express their impressions of the course / give constructive opinions / suggest modifications.</i> | Gives opinion/suggests/interacts |
| <i>Pays attention when reading the material and when carrying out the activities.</i> | Attentive |
| <i>The one who corrects the activities after receiving the feedback from the tutors.</i> | Corrects |
| <i>Carry out the activities with care, giving in-depth and coherent answers and, often, extrapolating what is requested.</i> | Concerned with the quality of activities |
| <i>It is the one who seeks the help of the tutor / clears up doubts.</i> | Questions |
| <i>It is justified when you cannot do the activity of the week/ it gives satisfaction to the tutor.</i> | Justifies |

Source: Prepared by the authors (2021).

Because they have similarities, the subcategories were regrouped into five broad categories (step 2 of the ATD method: “categorization”), presented in Table 2, below:

Table 2. Categories created by the researchers from the subcategories detected in question 1 of the questionnaire made available to tutors

| Subcategories | Categories |
|---|--|
| Participate Gives opinion/suggests/interacts corrects | Active behavior [in the activities proposed by the course] |
| Searches Questions | Seeks information |
| Assiduous | Attendance |
| Justifies | Provides clarification |
| Concerned with the quality of activities Attentive | Concern about the quality of what it produces |

Source: Prepared by the authors (2021).

Continuing the ATD method (step 3: “capture of the new emerging”), based on the interpretation of the data, the categories created were described and are presented below. For the transcription of the tutors' answers, no grammatical corrections were made.

- **Active behavior in the activities proposed by the course** – course participants who actively participate in what is requested in the virtual learning environment (AVA): do most of the activities, regardless of whether they are graded or not, express their opinions about the course, make suggestions, and participate intensively in the forums online, consistently commenting on the responses of colleagues and making other considerations. In this category, the situation of the student who, upon receiving the activity corrected by the tutor, makes changes in the material, trying to understand what was not clear, was also considered.

“He is a course participant who performs most activities, even optional ones [...]” (Tutor 1).

“A motivated course participant is one who participates in the forum in a constructive way [...]” (Tutor 3).

- **Seeks information** – course participants who seek the tutor to clarify content doubts and ask questions. It also includes those requesting extra materials, seeking additional information, and researching subjects of interest. Here, unlike the attitudes classified as “active behavior” in the activities proposed by the course, attitudes that go beyond what is requested in the course were included.

“[...] when necessary, he also asks the tutor for help for any clarifications or even to ask for support materials or others” (Tutor 5).

- **Attendance** – course participants who frequently access the virtual learning environment to check the activities sent and corrected by the tutors, to find out what is happening in the course or even to plan for the accomplishment of tasks.

“It is a course participant who [...] accesses the AVA daily [...]” (Tutor 1).

- **Provides clarification** – course participants who look for a tutor to clarify any absences in the activities of the VLE and who apologize for not having been able to adequately perform what was proposed.

“[...] when he was unable to perform the activity, he left an apology on the submission page and a brief explanation [...]” (Tutor 8).

- **Concern about the quality of what it produces** – course participants who carry out the proposed activities in depth, using additional bibliographies for their answers and citing their sources correctly. These are students who do not only respond to what is requested, they extrapolate, give their opinion, add, read the content made available carefully, as well as the statements of the questions in the activities, responding in a coherent and complete manner.

“[...] It's that course participant who pays attention to the classes and statements of the questions [...]” (Tutor 2).

“[...] For me, a motivated student is one who develops activities carefully and does them well [...]” (Tutor 7).

As discussed above, ATD was used to analyze all responses from tutors to the available questionnaire. However, for a more fluid reading of this text, from the second question onwards, only the final categories detected will be presented. Thus, in question 2 (What criteria could you list to identify a motivated student?), categories similar to those in the first question were found, and the description of the tutors was often repeated. It is believed that this similarity was due to the proximity of meaning (and interpretation) of the questions asked in the instrument, which was expected. However, for some categories, tutors presented a greater wealth of details in their explanations and definitions, thus improving the description of such categories. In this issue, the tutors also added other criteria, such as “maintenance/development of grades” throughout the course.

- **Active behavior in the activities proposed by the course** – students who perform all activities, regardless of whether they are graded or not. They are also those who frequently access the discussion forums, making pertinent comments, with good arguments, giving their opinion, refuting or adding something to their colleague's response. This group may also include course participants who respond to the initial and final surveys of the course, which assess the student's motivation or promote the student's reflection on their behavior during the course.

“[...] In my group I identify the course participants motivated by participation: they are those who access and read all the course materials [...]” (Tutor 6).

- **Seeks information** – course participants who seek the tutor to clarify their doubts related to the content, in addition to those who seek extra bibliographies or request them. They are interested, curious, questioning students, who argue and interact with the tutor in order to improve their knowledge and learning. It also includes students who question the quality of activities offered in the course.

“[...] Questions not only conceptual doubts, but also the quality of activities and/or the written text. Wants to learn and is not content with pre-defined concepts or too shallow [...]” (Tutor 2).

- **Attendance** – course participants who frequently access the virtual learning environment to find out about the latest course information or to follow the tutor's feedback on posted activities.

“[...] that come in more than once a week [...]” (Tutor 6).

- **Provides clarification** – course participants who are concerned about reporting to the tutor about the impediments that led them to not deliver the weekly activities or not participate in any event of the course, such as tests and face-to-face meetings. It also includes students who notify the tutor of times when they will not be able to access the course and activities.

“[...] Notify the weeks that you will not have access to the course [...]” (Tutor 1).

- **Concern about the quality of what it produces** – students who carry out their activities with care and attention, seeking to add information beyond what is requested. They are attentive to the available texts, often using such resources to support their responses to the tasks. They are coherent and present good arguments. They are students who show commitment and concern to learn.

“[...] develops the activities completely, always adding new topics, sometimes even beyond what is required. He is the one who researches, develops the activity, who demonstrates that he has really been committed and concerned about learning (and not just copying and pasting a certain ready-made answer) [...]. (TUTOR 2).

- **Maintains/Evolves throughput** – students who maintain good grades throughout the course or have great progress over the weeks.

“[...] Evolution in grades taken in the course [...]” (Tutor 8).

In the third question (*How would you define, in the context of the course that you are a tutor, a course participant with "good performance"?*), similarities were also found in the tutors' answers in relation to the first two questions, reinforcing the impressions about the criteria that the tutors actually considered it important to identify students motivated to learn.

- **Active behavior in the activities proposed by the course** – students who perform all activities, whether they are graded or not. They actively participate in the discussion forums and comment on their colleagues' responses coherently.

“[...] The one with a good performance is also reflected in a [...] good participation (delivery of activities) [...]” (Tutor 8).

- **Seeks information** – course participants who seek the tutor to clarify doubts about the content, in addition to requesting extra bibliographies and researching the subjects covered throughout the course.

“[...] In a more practical way, a course participant with good performance is one [...] who answers your doubts about the contents. [...]” (Tutor 7).

- **Provides clarification** – course participants who are concerned with providing clarifications to tutors when they are unable to submit an assignment or when they will not be able to participate in other proposed activities, such as meetings and in-person tests, for example.

“[...] A student who does not blame the VLE often for not being able to do the activity and only report the difficulty in the final minutes or after the deadline to the tutor [...]” (Tutor 1).

- **Concern about the quality of what it produces** – students who carefully read all the material before responding to the proposed activities. They are also those who carefully read the questions in the activities, answering coherently, completely, with good arguments and writing, many times, beyond what is requested. This category also includes students who use the texts made available over the weeks to support and complete their responses to the activities. These are students who are concerned not only with making copies of ready-made texts, but with elaborating their own arguments when answering a given activity.

“I would define that a course participant with good performance would be one who is very attentive to what is requested in the activities, strives to carry out a good activity without copies and who demonstrates that he has carefully read the teaching material available in the class” (Tutor 9).

- **Maintains/Evolves efficiency** – students who present good grade performance throughout the course or those who evolve these grades over the weeks. These are students who have a standard, that is: they get good grades in all activities (or most of them).

A course participant with good performance is one who keeps his grades relatively stable [...]. What I mean by keeping the grades stable is always having an average above 7, not, for example, taking a 10 in one week and plagiarizing the next week, or even not delivering the activity. (TUTOR 3)

Finally, from the analysis of the last question (What criteria could you list to identify a course participant who is showing a “good development?”), a new motivation indicator criterion for the learning of an EAD course participant was identified, according to the tutors surveyed: “punctuality”. As expected, the other categories already identified in the previous questions were repeated, but with some additions of ideas, which contributed to a better description of these.

- **Active behavior in the activities proposed by the course** – students who carry out all or most of the requested activities. They have good interaction in discussion forums, activities that are worthy of note, and activities that are only worth participation.

“[...] Participate in everything: forums, polls, online text activities, etc.. [...]” (Tutor 4).

- **Seeks information** – course participants who seek the help of the tutor to clarify content doubts, ask for additional support material or bibliographies, in addition to those who do additional research on the topics presented over the weeks of the course.

“[...] asking for help and guidance from the tutor, when he feels insecure in his production, so that he can send it correctly [...]” (Tutor 4).

- **Concern about the quality of what it produces** – course participants who are concerned with delivering complete activities, with good arguments, based on extra bibliographies and concerned with quoting the sources used correctly. Here, course participants who are concerned with maintaining the quality of activities delivered over the weeks or even those who evolve in relation to this quality over the course were also included. This category also includes students who respond to the activities without committing plagiarism or fleeing from the proposed topic.

“[...] coherent activity / - referencing sources / - no plagiarism / - without running away from the topic / - answer what is asked [...]” (Tutor 1).

- **Maintains/Evolves efficiency**– students who maintain a pattern of good grades or evolve in this regard over the weeks

“[...] Improvement in activity grades over time [...]” (Tutor 4).

- **Punctuality** – students who are concerned about delivering the

activities within the suggested deadline.

“[...] send activity on time [...]” (Tutor 1).

Discussion

From the questionnaires intended for tutors of the EspBio/RedeFor course, it was found that the answers to questions 1 (*What is a motivated student for you?*) and 2 (*What criteria could you list to identify a motivated student?*) presented similar and overlapping contents. The characterization of a motivated course participant was mixed, in many moments, with the criteria that the tutors used to identify him. In the same way, and also as expected, the responses of the tutors who defined and presented criteria for identifying students with "good performance" and "good development" (questions 3 and 4: *How would you define it, in the context of the course you are tutor, a course-taker with good performance? and What criteria could you list to identify a course-taker who is showing good development?*) were similar to those of the first two questions, thus allowing confirmation on the elements that such educators considered important for the identification of a student motivated to learn in distance courses, which were: i) the manifestation of active behavior; ii) the search for additional information; iii) attendance at the course; iv) providing clarifications to the tutor, when necessary; v) the concern with the quality of the activities produced; vi) the maintenance/development of grades; vii) punctuality.

Based on this, it is considered that, although the term “motivation” is polysemic, as highlighted by Sen, Yilmaz and Yurdugül (2014), often making conceptualization and interpretation difficult, the responses of the surveyed tutors approached the definition by Lefrançois (2006), relating the motivation of course participants to their actions in the course. Thus, among the indicative criteria of students motivated to learn (and that approach their actions in the course), the tutors listed the "active behavior" and the "search for information", which is related to the ideas defended by Cavenaghi (2009), cited in the Introduction section of this text: according to the researcher, the active involvement of a

student with studies is something capable of showing their motivation for learning. With similar reasoning, other authors point to results in the same direction, such as Schrum and Hong (2002) and Alcará and Guimarães (2007): the first ones claim that successful students tend to have a strong commitment to put their time and effort into their studies. The second considers that the student motivated to learn seeks new knowledge and opportunities, showing involvement with the learning process, which is reflected in the student's enthusiasm during the performance of the requested tasks and in his willingness to face the challenges that arise. Specifically in EAD, Palloff and Pratt (2002) state that successful students have, as characteristics, self-discipline and an open mind to share their experiences, while Piccoli, Ahmad and Ives (2001) add maturity, technological comfort and epistemological beliefs as specific qualities of a student with good performance in distance learning courses.

Still on the aforementioned criteria, "autonomy" has great relevance for the student's success in EAD (SERAFINI, 2012), possibly being one of the factors capable of triggering the attitudes of students that were termed by tutors as "active behavior" and "search for information". Thus, considering the studies by Xiao (2012), which highlights the fact that, often, the distance learning student is not prepared to be autonomous, the intervention of the tutor in this sense is considered pertinent, helping students in the development of this important competence. For this, one possibility is the creation of orientation sessions in which the student can acquire knowledge that makes him understand his own responsibility for learning. It is also important that the tutor, in these sections, inform the student about what he expects from him, suggestions that are close to the ideas defended by Moore and Kearsley (2011). Added to these, the role of organizers and developers of distance courses stands out, since the teaching methodologies adopted, as well as the technological tools used, can have an equal contribution to the development of the autonomy of the distance learning student (SERAFINI, 2012). Therefore, it is crucial that they are also aware of these elements.

Other criteria used by tutors to identify motivated students were "attendance" in the course and "punctuality" in delivering the requested

activities, which many studies have pointed out as indicative factors of the possible success of the student in Distance Education. In this regard, Moore and Kearsley (2011), based on other investigations, highlight that, when distance learning students deliver the requested tasks on time, or even before the established deadline, there are more chances of completing the course satisfactorily, which may be related to the characteristics that Schrum and Hong (2002) highlight as decisive for the student's success in distance learning courses, that is, discipline and self-organization – which corroborates the ideas of Palloff and Pratt (2002), presented in the paragraphs above. A similar reasoning is defended by Pavesi and Oliveira (2011), who identified the student's lack of individual planning, reflected in their low participation in course activities, as one of the main reasons for evasion of this type of student in distance learning. Thus, to identify possibly unmotivated students in a situation of “danger of dropping out” in distance learning courses, these two aspects (punctuality and attendance) are considered as warning points for tutors.

Regarding the criterion “maintenance/graduation evolution”, it can be said that, in this study, it was considered as closely related to what some researchers define as “extrinsic motivation”. Boruchovitch (2008), for example, explains this type of motivation as one that is driven by the external rewards that the individual will obtain when developing certain actions. On the contrary, the author explains that “intrinsic motivation” occurs when the individual's behavior is driven by the gain (often immaterial) that such subject will obtain from the learning acquired in a given situation. In this context, some authors, such as Araújo, Silva and Franco (2014), consider that extrinsic and intrinsic motivations are neither watertight nor necessarily excluding: there is a correlation between them, indicating that they tend to develop together, with effects positive about learning. The authors also add that it is difficult for students to have a pure motivational orientation, that is: they usually carry out activities for the value of learning inherent in them, but also for obtaining grades and subsequent approval in the subject. Therefore, corroborating the ideas defended by the aforementioned authors, the maintenance/evolution of grades is considered as a pertinent indication and related to a student possibly motivated to learn.

Having made these considerations, although the "grade" factor was considered by the investigated tutors as a possible indicator of the student's motivation for learning, in an indirect instance, it can also be considered as a possible indicator of the view of these tutors on the teaching-learning process, focused on summative assessments and aspects that approach the so-called "traditional teaching" – as defined by Leão (1999). As many of the tutors were recent graduates in Biological Sciences, few with specializations in the Licentiate/Education area, it is believed that, possibly, many of them still carried with them marks of traditional teaching, very common in higher education courses, as pointed out by Lourenço, Lima and Narciso (2016) and Barbosa (2019). Based on this, and considering the important role that the tutor plays during the student's learning (including for the student's motivation), it is considered that distance learning institutions must train their tutors properly so that they are aware of these issues, enabling the development of the teaching-learning process more focused on the student, with the latter having a leading role in the construction of their own knowledge. It is worth mentioning that the training of tutors is also defended by other researchers (BURNS, 2011; ALUANI, 2015; TELLES; ESQUINCALHA, 2017), and, in the specific case of the Specialization course for Biology Teachers (EspBio), it is believed that just the 30-hour course to familiarize these educators with the Moodle platform was not enough for their performance focused on the centrality of the student during learning or even related to the motivational aspects and development of the autonomy of the DL student. Therefore, this research, by giving voice to EspBio tutors, can contribute to the discussion about the role of these professionals and their training, supporting future distance learning courses of a similar nature.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that, although motivation is considered as something intimately related to the subjectivities of each individual, it is the role of distance education institutions, and consequently of their tutors, to know what motivates students of this modality, providing opportunities for processes more appropriate and coherent with their expectations, which is also reported by other researchers, such as Garcia and Bizzo (2011) and Barbosa and Ursi (2019).

Final Considerations

It was not the intention of this research to present generalizable results for all scenarios of distance learning courses, since it is recognized, as a limitation of the present investigation, the fact that the analyzes are based on a case study carried out with a small number of inexperienced tutors, participants of a given teaching context. However, it is considered that this work adds to other research in the area, bringing new elements capable of promoting reflections in this field, especially related to the tutor and its important motivational role for the distance learning student.

By giving voice to this important character, possible criteria capable of helping to identify motivated (and non-motivated) students for learning were detected. Thus, from the bibliographic searches carried out in this investigation, it was found that some of these criteria had not yet been reported in the literature, such as the "student's concern with the quality of the activities they produce" and the "providing clarification to the tutor" (when the student finds himself in unforeseen situations that prevent him from participating in the activities provided for by the course).

Ultimately, elements that can improve the training of tutors were detected, as well as possible factors capable of minimizing evasion in distance learning, which are related to the role of such educators. Therefore, it is believed that this investigation will support strategies and actions of institutions that offer distance learning, aiming to promote more adequate courses that are closer to the expectations of their learners.

In conclusion, it is worth reaffirming that, in this research, it is clearly assumed that other factors may be related to the motivation of the adult student in distance learning courses (such as the quality of the course; the availability of time the student has to dedicate to their activities of study, the expectations of students with the learning offered in the course, among other possibilities) and, therefore, other criteria can be added to those revealed in this investigation. Thus, it is considered that this research presents only some possibilities for reflection and that further studies are needed to complement the evidence identified here.

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