

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## **MOTIVATING FACTORS FOR DROPOUTS IN DISTANCE LEARNING: A CASE STUDY IN A PRIVATE INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION (IHE) IN THE CITY OF RECIFE/BRAZIL**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The main objective of this study was to identify the main factors related to dropout in distance education undergraduate courses at a private Higher Education Institution in the city of Recife/Brazil. The methodology used consisted of applying a structured questionnaire to 372 students who dropped out of the course before completion and also using exploratory factor analysis via SPSS to treat the results. Thus, with a Chronbach's Alpha of 0.966 for the reliability test of the questionnaire, the results revealed that the courses with the highest number of dropouts were business administration, logistics, commercial management, marketing and management processes. The main reasons for dropout were: difficulty in accessing the content, lack of knowledge about how the modality works, financial problems and various personal, professional and academic difficulties that ended up making it impossible to continue the course.

**Keywords:** Distance Education; Distance Education Dropout; Management Courses.

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# FATORES MOTIVADORES DA EVASÃO NA EDUCAÇÃO A DISTÂNCIA: UM ESTUDO DE CASO EM UMA INSTITUIÇÃO DE ENSINO SUPERIOR (IES) PRIVADA DO RECIFE/PE

## RESUMO

Este trabalho teve como objetivo principal identificar os principais fatores relacionados à evasão na educação a distância em cursos de graduação em uma Instituição de Ensino Superior (IES) privada do Recife/PE. A metodologia utilizada consistiu na aplicação de um questionário estruturado aplicado a 372 alunos que abandonaram o curso antes do término e também da utilização da análise fatorial exploratória via SPSS para tratamento dos resultados. Assim, com um Alpha de Chronbach de 0,966 para o teste de confiabilidade do questionário, os resultados revelaram que os cursos com o maior número de evadidos foram o de administração de empresas, logística, gestão comercial, marketing e processos gerenciais. Sendo os principais motivos para a evasão: a dificuldade de acesso ao conteúdo, o desconhecimento sobre o funcionamento da modalidade, problemas financeiros e dificuldades diversas de ordem pessoal, profissional e acadêmica que acabaram inviabilizando a continuidade do curso.

**Palavras-chaves** Educação a Distância; Evasão em EaD; Cursos de Gestão

# FACTORES MOTIVADORES DE LA EVASIÓN EN LA EDUCACIÓN A DISTANCIA: UN ESTUDIO DE CASO EN UNA INSTITUCIÓN PRIVADA DE EDUCACIÓN SUPERIOR EN LA CIUDAD DE RECIFE/BRASIL

## RESUMEN

El principal objetivo de este trabajo fue identificar los principales factores relacionados con las tasas de deserción en la educación a distancia en cursos de pregrado en una Institución de Educación Superior (IES) privada en la ciudad Recife/Brasil. La metodología utilizada consistió en la aplicación de un cuestionario estructurado a 372 estudiantes que abandonaron la carrera antes de finalizarla y además el uso de análisis factorial exploratorio vía SPSS para tratar los resultados. Así, con un Alfa de Chronbach de 0,966 para la prueba de confiabilidad del cuestionario, los resultados revelaron que las carreras con mayor número de abandonos fueron administración de empresas, logística, gestión comercial, marketing y procesos de gestión. Los principales motivos de evasión son: dificultad para acceder a los contenidos, desconocimiento sobre cómo funciona la modalidad, problemas económicos y diversas dificultades personales, profesionales y académicas que terminaron imposibilitando la continuación del curso.

**Palabras clave:** Diseño Instruccional; Actividades de Aprendizaje en Línea; Metodología De La Investigación; Semiótica Social.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Education is a process that involves values, the transmission of knowledge, and the construction of social relationships. Therefore, it must be directed toward the cultural transformations of society. In order for educational practices to be in line with the demands of our time and truly inclusive, they must be genuinely emancipatory and should foster processes of awareness, critical understanding, and participation (FREIRE, 2011).

According to Saviani et al. (2012), we are immersed in a society characterized by increasingly literate contexts. Social practices that require proficiency in reading, writing, and arithmetic are becoming more widespread and dynamic, occurring in various settings, including the virtual environment. Alongside access to higher education, there has been an expansion of distance learning, which, in terms of numbers, can be compared to the increased access to resources provided by information and communication technologies in virtually all educational settings.

In this context, pedagogical practices have undergone profound transformations worldwide, particularly regarding the expansion and access to higher education, as well as the integration of new educational technologies into existing processes. Thus, access to formal higher education has become increasingly common in Brazil, as distance learning<sup>7</sup> breaks barriers and allows a greater number of people to gain access. However, despite the increased access, challenges such as student dropout undermine the effectiveness of this inclusion.

According to Pereira and Matte (2010), distance education (DE) should be seen as a space under construction that likely does not fit into a single identity but rather into a diversity that is subject to regulations influenced by at least social, cultural, and technological variables. Its advantage lies precisely in the possibility of personalization, ensured by the flexibility of the digital medium, where interactions between teacher and student, as well as between students, can occur across time and space according to their needs. Additionally, the durable recording of information and the creativity it fosters can support multiple activities, which can be chosen according to individual learning styles.

In this context, despite the challenges posed by the massive increase in distance education courses, it cannot be denied that this is an irreversible process with exponential growth. It is the responsibility of each stakeholder in this sector to create mechanisms to balance outcomes and improve processes. In this regard, distance education offers a fertile ground for the promotion of new ideas and the fostering of work that contributes to the continuous improvement and development of teaching, research, extension, and, most importantly, access to education.

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<sup>7</sup> It is a broader concept that involves not only the teaching dimension but also the creation of comprehensive educational environments. It encompasses the design, management, and mediation of learning processes facilitated by communication technologies.

Therefore, this work is justified by the importance that distance education has been playing in the formative institutions of the country, as well as by the dynamics that this educational mobility fosters in the current context of globalized economies, particularly by enabling the adoption of new pedagogical practices through the use of immersive tools aligned with the new demands of the labor market.

Furthermore, the work has been structured into sections that allow for a deeper and more discursive approach to the topic, taking into account the overall landscape of distance education and dropout rates, as well as the importance of educational management as a key element in the pedagogical practices of distance education. Thus, based on the arguments presented, the following research question is formulated: What are the main factors related to dropout in distance education programs in management courses at a private higher education institution (HEI) in Recife, Pernambuco?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Distance Education

Distance education (DE) emerged in the 19th century when educational institutions began sending study materials by mail to distant students. The first known record of DE in Brazil dates back to 1904, when International Schools launched correspondence courses (HERMIDA and BONFIM, 2006).

Distance education developed with the rise of technologies such as radio, telegraph, and telephone, which marked the beginning of the modern era of telecommunications through interactive means. Thus, with the use of technological resources, it has continuously provided new perspectives on tools that facilitate greater interactivity between teachers and students (MUGNOL, 2009).

Distance education is defined as "planned learning that normally takes place in a location different from the place of instruction, requiring special techniques for course creation and instruction, communication through various technologies, and special organizational and administrative arrangements" (MOORE; KEARSLEY, 2008, p. 2). Therefore, a high-quality distance education course presupposes the involvement of the team responsible for the project, with the goal of fostering cooperation with other professionals (GAIOSO, 2005).

According to Duarte (2011), distance education is a growing modality, primarily due to the globalization of economic, social, and cultural development, as well as educational and technological advancements, thus gaining its space and importance in discussions and studies. Litwin (2001) points out that this modality is characterized by the flexibility of the teaching proposal, which allows for bridging the distances between teachers and students, thereby enhancing their interactions.

The main characteristic of distance education is its strong correlation between collaboration, production, and sharing of both tacit and explicit knowledge. In other words, its knowledge production seeks to prioritize the interaction between the knowledge of students and teachers,

always emphasizing collectivity, the exchange of experiences, and teamwork in its construction processes (RICCIO, 2005). It generates a collaborative network that transcends the physical limits of a traditional classroom, creating potential conditions for interaction and the development of joint projects across different times and spaces (PRETTO and PICANÇO, 2005).

The key feature of distance education<sup>8</sup> lies in the autonomy granted to the student; they truly have the power to decide when, where, and how they will carry out their activities (MOORE and KEARLEY, 2008; ALMEIDA, 2003; CAMARELLA, 2009). Therefore, understanding how this process is constructed and the challenges faced by students during the development of their educational identity is essential for the continuous improvement of this modality (CHAQUIME, 2014; DALFORNO and RODRIGUES, 2018; MARTINS, 2014).

Novello and Laurino (2012) highlight that the specificity of distance education requires multiple communication conditions that enable interaction among those involved (teachers, tutors, and students) across different times and spaces. Therefore, the available communication tools and the organization of materials in a course or subject are of significant relevance to the potential of pedagogical mediation in this modality. Distance learning, thus, involves not only physical distance but also the possibility of delayed communication, where learning occurs without the participants being engaged in the activities at the same time. In virtual education, students study whenever and wherever they want and are able to, controlling their own time (MAIA and MEIRELLES, 2002).

According to Mill (2006), distance education provides a break from traditional pedagogical concepts by introducing an emerging culture in which communication through computers breaks the barriers of time and space, uniting people with a common goal of teaching and learning. Due to all these characteristics, distance education has been widely used for the continuing education of professionals in various fields, giving rise to the process known as virtuality in education, particularly in corporate universities (RAMOS, 2000).

According to Preti (2002, p. 25), "Distance education is, above all, Education; it is human formation; it is an interactive process of heteroeducation<sup>9</sup> and self-education<sup>10</sup>". Thus, understanding distance education through the lens of distance is to prioritize the adjective over the formation of the individual, highlighting that it is not distant, since distance education does not separate individuals but aims to bring them together in the digital world.

This process occurs not only through the integration of new digital technologies but also through human interactions, seeking the development of an inclusive and collaborative network, which is one of the ways to construct knowledge, requiring skills from both the teacher and the student (SANTOS and GIRAFFA, 2016).

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<sup>8</sup> It specifically refers to the act of teaching content to students who are geographically distant. It is, therefore, a more practical and narrowly defined dimension within distance education, with its focus on creating materials, developing assessment processes, and transmitting knowledge in accordance with pre-established objectives and content.

<sup>9</sup> It occurs when influences affect the individual regardless of their will (D.B.L.P.).

<sup>10</sup> A learning process that happens without the help of a teacher, with the learner themselves making the effort to acquire knowledge (PILAR MONTESSORI).

## 2.2 Dropout in Distance Education

Distance education has undergone significant transformations in recent years, many of which were accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought new challenges to traditional face-to-face education systems. In this context, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have led to a leap in the dynamics and quality of this modality, as each year has seen an increase in enrollments in distance education.

Thus, despite all the strategies and government actions, as well as many incentives, distance education (DE) still experiences considerable dropout rates, particularly in higher education institutions (HEIs). It is known that dropout can occur for various reasons, ranging from student disengagement or the need to work, to poor course planning. Therefore, it is essential to identify the causes of dropout in distance education within higher education institutions in order to develop effective measures to reduce these rates (FERREIRA and ELIA, 2013).

According to Santos and Oliveira Neto (2009), dropout refers to the definitive abandonment of a student at any stage of the course, and it is considered a frequent issue in distance education programs. Thus, identifying its causes is crucial in a country with such evident social inequalities, where access to higher education is still a privilege for few, mainly due to the territorial dimension and the country's technological infrastructure. In this context, dropout is defined as "an interruption of a study cycle, where students fail to complete the course or program they are enrolled in. Students who enroll and withdraw before even starting the course are also considered dropouts" (COMARELLA, 2009, p. 51).

School dropout is a phenomenon that is widely recognized and studied worldwide, and it is associated with various issues that surround it, directly affecting educational institutions. In the public sector, public funds are invested without the expected return, while in the private sector, it represents a significant loss of revenue. In both cases, dropout results in the underutilization of teachers, staff, equipment, and physical space (DIAS; THEÓPHILO; LOPES, 2010; SILVA FILHO et al., 2007). It is also synonymous with social, academic, and economic losses, as it affects not only university students who fail to obtain a diploma but also the entire education system and educators who fail to fulfill their mission, society (due to social and economic losses), and the students' families, whose long-term plans are thwarted (CUNHA et al., 2015).

In this context, dropout is treated as the definitive abandonment of the student at any stage of the course, and it can have political and administrative implications. Politically, dropout rates can influence the allocation of resources to the institution. Administratively, discriminatory policies may be observed in the selection of students, which are not outlined in the institution's mission, with the aim of minimizing the financial impacts on the institution's balance sheet (YORKE and LONGDEN, 2004).

According to Costa and Santos (2017), student success in a course brings benefits not only to society, which will have more qualified individuals, but also to the institution and the student themselves. Furthermore, understanding dropout can be useful as it enables the influence of inclusion actions, such as the creation of quotas, granting of scholarships, and can also influence university management, operating from an economic-financial perspective to a pedagogical one (COSTA, BISPO, and PEREIRA, 2018).

We know that the phenomenon of dropout occurs in all modes of education—face-to-face,

blended, and distance education—whether public or private. However, distance education requires greater attention, as it involves a dynamic mediated by digital technologies, which weakens the connections established through the material contact and expressive performance of the student (BRANCO, CONTE, and HABOWSKI, 2020).

According to Bruno-Faria and Franco (2012), dropout should not be seen as something inevitable or inherent to this mode of teaching and learning, but rather as a problem inherent to the management of distance education courses. They emphasize the need for better planning and monitoring of students' learning throughout the course, especially during the adaptation phase. Supporting this view, Biazus (2004) highlights the importance of identifying and understanding the reasons (causes) contributing to dropout, with the aim of minimizing the number of students who abandon higher education.

Therefore, the events that lead to student dropout, whether before or even during the course, are still not fully clarified. In this context, it is the responsibility of the various professionals involved in distance education to adopt a more incisive and specific approach aimed at identifying the real reasons behind this issue, so that it can be addressed more effectively.

### 3. METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This study conducted research with a quali-quantitative approach, employing both descriptive and explanatory methods. According to Gil (2002, p. 75), "descriptive research primarily aims to describe the characteristics of a specific population, phenomenon, or object." Quantitative research is characterized by the use of quantification, both in the information collection process and in the analysis through statistical techniques, ranging from the simplest to the most complex. On the other hand, qualitative research deals with predominantly descriptive data, meaning the information collected by the researcher is not expressed in numbers, or numbers and the conclusions based on them play a lesser role in the analysis (MACONI and LAKATOS, 2021).

Thus, the sample for this research will consist of 372 respondents (dropout students) from the management courses at the analyzed higher education institution (HEI), totaling 10 courses, namely: Accounting, Business Administration, Accounting, Commercial Management, Financial Management, Public Management, Quality Management, Logistics, Marketing, Managerial Processes, and Human Resources. These courses were selected based on the availability of access to information and because they constitute a group of courses with a significant number of entrants, but also where many dropouts occur; the sample size represents those who dropped out for various reasons.

The institution focused on in this research has an extensive data source with email contacts of the dropouts; thus, this database will be used as a starting point. The questionnaire will undergo a pre-test to assess its consistency and applicability as a universal tool for gathering information from the respondents.



Table 1 – Questionnaire Elements

1	Structure
2	Academic/Administrative
3	Tutors/Advisors
4	Pedagogical
5	Personal/Particular
6	Modality/Methodology
7	Professional Aspect

Source: Author's own elaboration, 2023

It is expected that the application of these questionnaires will clearly and objectively capture the main elements that lead a student to drop out of a distance education course from their own perspective. Furthermore, in order to verify the reliability of the responses obtained from the questionnaire, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient will be used.

Thus, the data were tabulated in electronic spreadsheets and subsequently compiled to facilitate their interpretation, being processed with the help of SPSS. In the end, graphs and tables were generated with the results found, and additionally, specific software may be used to assist in the processing of the information.

## 5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The management courses at the analyzed higher education institution (HEI) have the particularity of being in high demand, both due to the strong employability prospects in the job market and because they offer a curriculum that is more accessible, perfectly suited to the distance education modality and the actual needs of the audience seeking a distance learning degree.

Figure 1 – Analysis of the Structure

Course	Business Administration	Accounting	Logistics	Commercial Management	Quality Management	Financial Management	Public Management	Marketing	Managerial Processes	Human Resources
Total Dropouts	143	6	64	40	13	4	27	34	31	10

Source: Author's own elaboration, 2023.

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Therefore, it is possible to observe in the figure above that the largest number of dropouts occurred in the Business Administration course (143), followed by the Logistics course (64) and the Commercial Management course (40). The Business Administration course is a traditional program that generally attracts students who have not yet made a clear decision about the career they want to pursue. As a result, many students face a reality different from what they expected and end up dropping out of the course in the early years.

Figure 2 – Analysis of the Structure

Subject	Question	Business Administration		Accounting		Logistics		Commercial Management		Quality Management		Financial Management		Public Management		Marketing		Managerial Processes		Human Resources	
Structure	Difficulty accessing the internet	4	3%		0%	3	9%	1	3%	1	7%		0%	1	4%	2	5%		0%		0%
	Lack/difficulty accessing study devices (computer/tablet/mobile)	12	9%		0%	7	20%	1	3%	1	7%		0%	3	12%	4	11%	2	7%	1	10%
	Lack of accessibility in the physical Teaching Center infrastructure (for people with physical disabilities)	2	1%		0%	1	3%		0%		0%		0%		0%		0%		0%		0%
	Difficulty accessing content/materials in the virtual environment	26	18%	2	33%	24	69%	13	33%	6	40%	3	75%	2	8%	9	24%	6	20%	3	30%
	No infrastructure problems	97	69%	4	67%		0%	24	62%	7	47%	1	25%	19	76%	23	61%	22	73%	6	60%
<b>Total</b>		<b>141</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Author's own elaboration, 2023.

This topic analyzed the **infrastructure** aspect and aimed to assess how this element is relevant to learning, as well as how it can function as a motivating factor for dropout in the courses under analysis. It was found that, in the Financial Management course, 75% of the respondents reported having some kind of difficulty accessing the content and teaching materials. Additionally, 40% of the respondents from the Quality Management course also highlighted difficulties accessing the materials. This issue was also reported by students from the other courses analyzed, although to a lesser extent. These results can be explained by the fact that the courses underwent a process of adaptation of the teaching materials, which may have caused access difficulties and information mismatches for the users. These findings are consistent with Silveira's (2012) research, which indicates that the alleged causes of dropout in distance education courses stem from the lack of technical knowledge of computers and the internet, the absence of in-person interaction between professors and students, and the difficulty of expressing ideas through written communication at a distance.

In this context, recent research has shown that individuals who have more difficulties handling the electronic equipment required for the course are more likely to drop out of educational programs (AZEVEDO and OLIVEIRA, 2012; BELUCE and OLIVEIRA, 2012; BJORK, DUNLOSKY, KORNELL, 2013; JOLY et al., 2015; MARTINS, 2012; MARTINS and ZERNI, 2014). Therefore, in addition to the available infrastructure, academic and administrative issues must also be analyzed to better understand the reasons for dropout.

Figure 3 – Analysis of Academic/Administrative Aspects

Subject	Question	Business Administration		Accounting		Logistics		Commercial Management		Quality Management		Financial Management		Public Management		Marketing		Managerial Processes		Human Resources	
Academic/ Administrative Aspect	Service provided by the Central Relationship with Students (CRA) team	31	19%	1	14%	19	22%	7	15%	5	33%		0%	3	10%	9	20%	4	11%	2	20%
	Service provided by the team at the On-Site Support Center (Polo de Apoio Presencial)	9	5%		0%	7	8%	2	4%		0%		0%	2	6%	6	13%	2	6%		0%
	Service provided for solving academic/administrative issues (Academic Secretariat, Financial)	38	23%	2	29%	25	29%	10	22%	6	40%	1	25%	6	19%	8	18%	5	20%	3	30%
	No problems regarding service	86	52%	4	57%	36	41%	27	59%	4	27%	3	75%	20	65%	22	49%	24	69%	5	50%
<b>Total</b>		<b>164</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Author's own elaboration, 2023.

Regarding Figure 3, it was observed that the majority of respondents did not experience any issues with the service they received during their time in the course. However, a significant portion of the respondents reported having issues with the service provided by the CRA and other departments, such as academic and financial services. These results can be explained by the service dynamics offered to the students, which typically begins at the CRA or academic secretariat and continues with resolutions in other departments. In these sectors, students often arrive with problems and dissatisfaction due to uncomfortable experiences they encountered in other departments or even in the classroom. As a result, they end up evaluating the service provided by the sectors they interact with directly (CRA, secretariat, academic, and financial) more negatively.

These results corroborate the research by Bottentuit Junior (2015), who identified the following factors leading to student dropout: personal issues, organizational issues of the course, misunderstanding of the distance learning modality, lack of interactivity (teacher-tutor-student), issues related to infrastructure, lack of internet access, and limited mastery of the technology used.

Figure 4 – Analysis of Tutors/Assessors

Subject	Question	Business Administration		Accounting		Logistics		Commercial Management		Quality Management		Financial Management		Public Management		Marketing		Managerial Processes		Human Resources	
Tutors/ Advisors	I had little or no interaction with the tutor	47	39%	2	40%	25	36%	17	40%	5	31%	1	50%	9	60%	17	61%	8	33%	3	60%
	The communications and guidance were unclear	21	17%	1	20%	13	19%	7	16%	2	13%		0%	2	13%	4	14%	6	25%	1	20%
	Lack of response to questions submitted by students	19	16%		0%	16	23%	4	9%	5	31%		0%	1	7%		11%	2	8%		0%
	Lack of evaluation/feedback on activities submitted by students	11	9%		0%	7	10%	4	9%	1	6%		0%	1	7%	3	11%	2	8%		0%
	Lack of motivational support from tutors	23	19%		0%	6	9%	8	19%	3	19%	1	50%	2	13%	1	4%	5	21%	1	20%
	I had no issues with the service provided by the tutors/advisors	1	1%	2	40%	2	3%	3	7%		0%		0%		0%		0%	1	4%		0%
<b>Total</b>		<b>122</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Author's own elaboration, 2023.

Among the professionals who make up the polyteaching in distance education, the role of the virtual tutor (here understood as the virtual instructor) is central. Due to their proximity to the student and their pedagogical mediation in the virtual learning environment, the virtual instructor is identified with the figure of the face-to-face teacher and thus represents the image of the institution offering the distance education course (CHAQUIME, 2014). It is worth noting that one factor identified as a barrier to the tutoring activity is the high workload, which is related to the way teaching is organized in distance education.

Therefore, it can be observed in Figure 4 that a large portion of the respondents reported having little to no interaction with the tutor/mentor. Another noteworthy point is that 19% of students from the courses in Administration, Quality Management, and Business Management cited a lack of motivational support from the tutor/mentor; in the case of the Business Management course, this percentage rises to 21%. Regarding the guidance and communication provided by tutors/mentors to the students, many reported not receiving such support. Therefore, these data are relevant because they reflect the students' perception of the tutor/mentor, especially as a source of support and encouragement for completing virtual activities and, consequently, finishing the course. Thus, the tutor is an essential link in carrying out activities in distance education; they enable the student to successfully follow the learning paths available in the virtual environment and serve as a guide in the student's progress and retention in the course. Another aspect to consider is the analysis of the pedagogical context of the courses analyzed.

Figure 5 – Pedagogical Analysis

Subject	Question	Business Administration		Accounting		Logistics		Commercial Management		Quality Management		Financial Management		Public Management		Marketing		Managerial Processes		Human Resources	
Pedagogical	Lack of planning to monitor studies	25	15%	3	38%	4	5%	10	22%	4	29%	2	33%	4	13%	8	19%	4	12%	1	9%
	Lack of guidance on the methodology	24	15%	2	25%	20	26%	8	17%	2	14%	1	17%	3	10%	5	12%	3	9%	1	9%
	Content and activities were too easy	1	1%		0%		0%		0%		0%		0%		0%		0%		0%		0%
	Content and activities were more difficult than expected	13	8%		0%	7	9%	3	7%	1	7%		0%	3	10%	3	7%	5	15%		0%
	The course did not meet my expectations	21	13%	1	13%	13	17%	6	13%	3	21%	1	17%	3	10%	6	14%	4	12%	1	9%
I did not have problems regarding the pedagogical aspects of the course	80	25%	2	25%	34	44%	19	41%	4	29%	2	33%	17	57%	20	48%	18	53%	8	73%	
<b>Total</b>		164	100%	8	100%	78	100%	46	100%	14	100%	6	100%	30	100%	42	100%	34	100%	11	100%

Source: Author's own elaboration, 2023.

It can be observed in Figure 5 that the majority of students in the courses of Administration (49%), Business Management (41%), Public Administration (57%), Marketing (48%), Process Management (53%), and Human Resources (73%) did not have issues regarding the pedagogical aspects of the course. However, it is important to highlight that a significant number of respondents reported dropping out of the course due to a lack of planning to follow their studies, a lack of guidance regarding the methodology, or because the course did not meet their expectations. Thus, these results reveal the importance of clarifying to students how the course works, including the evaluation activities and, most importantly, the methodology to be used in the Virtual Learning Environment. These results are confirmed by Peixoto, Braga, and Bogutchi (2003), who link dropout

rates to academic performance, specifically to students' grades in the early semesters of the course, highlighting that dropout is not directly related to the student's socioeconomic and cultural background.

Thus, based on the results observed, it is essential that the institution clearly inform the student, prior to the start of the course, what they will be studying and how the synchronous and asynchronous activities will be conducted, in addition to clarifying all the requirements for completing the course and obtaining the diploma. The following are analyses of the personal reasons that lead students to drop out of the course.

Figure 6 – Analysis of Personal/Individual Aspects

Subject	Question	Business Administration		Accounting		Logistics		Commercial Management		Quality Management		Financial Management		Public Management		Marketing		Managerial Processes		Human Resources	
Personal/Individual	Health problems	36	22%		0%	20	28%	16	35%	7	41%	2	40%	5	16%	6	15%	7	23%	1	9%
	Family issues	3	2%	1	17%	3	4%	1	2%	1	6%		0%	1	3%	1	3%		0%		0%
	Financial difficulties	95	59%	2	33%	35	49%	23	50%	5	29%	1	20%	23	72%	25	64%	16	52%	7	64%
	Difficulty finding time to study (balancing work/other activities)	14	9%	2	33%	10	14%	3	7%	2	12%	1	20%	2	6%	5	13%	4	13%	2	18%
	I did not have personal/individual issues	13	8%	1	17%	4	6%	3	7%	2	12%	1	20%	1	3%	2	5%	4	13%	1	9%
<b>Total</b>		161	100%	6	100%	72	100%	46	100%	17	100%	5	20%	32	100%	39	100%	31	100%	11	100%

Source: Author's own elaboration, 2023.

Lack of time, personal issues, financial problems, difficulties related to the content, challenges attending in-person activities, enrollment in another course, and the belief that the course would be easy were reasons cited for dropping out of distance learning courses, according to various authors (VELLOSO, CANELLA, and DIAS, 2014; SILVA FILHO et al., 2007; ANDRADE and ZERBINI, 2019; OLIVEIRA, OESTERREICH, and ALMEIDA, 2018; NASCIMENTO and ESPER, 2009).

As observed in Figure 5, difficulty in balancing work and study was not cited by respondents as a reason for dropout. However, it is important to highlight that, according to Xenos, Pierrakeas, and Pintelas (2002), managing time to dedicate to studies, the feeling that the knowledge acquired in the course is not sufficient for the university level, lack of tutor assistance, and health or family problems are factors that are directly related to dropout.

Thus, it is possible to highlight that financial difficulty was one of the main reasons cited for dropout, with the following percentages: 59% for the Administration course, 50% for the Business Management course, 72% for the Public Administration course, 64% for the Marketing course, 52% for the Process Management course, and 64% for the Human Resources course. Health problems were also cited by some students as motivators for dropout. These data reveal the reality faced by a large portion of the Brazilian population, which still faces difficulties in completing higher education, including a lack of financial resources to pay for tuition and to cover the expenses associated with the course. Personal factors affecting the student and their family members were also pointed out as explanatory factors for dropout.

In this context, it is crucial that the institution adopts mechanisms to provide incentives and support to ensure that students complete their degree and do not drop out due to issues that can be addressed. Therefore, granting scholarships, establishing psychosocial support rooms, forming partnerships with public and private organizations, renegotiating debts, and offering discounts are some strategies that can motivate students throughout their journey.

Figure 7 – Analysis of the Modality/Methodology

Subject	Question	Business Administration		Accounting		Logistics		Commercial Management		Quality Management		Financial Management		Public Management		Marketing		Managerial Processes		Human Resources	
Modality/Methodology	Lack/Difficulty of face-to-face interaction with colleagues and professors	14	8%		0%	6	8%	5	10%	2	13%	1	14%	1	3%	5	11%	5	14%		0%
	Difficulty maintaining a study routine/access to the Virtual Learning Environment	36	21%	2	29%	21	28%	14	28%	5	33%	2	29%	6	20%	12	27%	9	24%	2	18%
	Lack of study autonomy	6	4%	1	14%	3	4%	3	6%		0%	2	29%	1	3%	4	9%	1	3%		0%
	I prefer studying in-person	26	15%	2	29%	16	21%	9	18%	2	13%	1	14%	4	13%	4	9%	6	16%	2	18%
	I had no issues regarding modality/methodology	87	51%	2	29%	30	39%	19	38%	6	40%	1	14%	18	60%	20	44%	16	43%	7	64%
<b>Total</b>		<b>169</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Author's own elaboration, 2023.

Figure 7 reveals that most respondents stated they did not have issues with the modality/methodology used by the institution analyzed. However, it is important to highlight that, regarding maintaining a study routine and accessing the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), 21% of students who dropped out of the Administration course, 28% from Business Management, 33% from Quality Management, 20% from Public Administration, 27% from Marketing, and 24% from Process Management, reported issues with this aspect.

These results corroborate the findings of Tamariz and Souza (2015), who identified that traditional teaching methods applied in face-to-face education also serve as contributing factors to dropout in Distance Education (DE). They recommend that content mediated by face-to-face courses should adopt new media and interactive formats for DE, with the intervention of teams of professionals working in the field of instructional design.

Figure 8 – Analysis of the Professional Aspect

Subject	Question	Business Administration		Accounting		Logistics		Commercial Management		Quality Management		Financial Management		Public Management		Marketing		Managerial Processes		Human Resources	
Professional Aspect	Difficulty balancing work hours, online study, and in-person meetings	43	26	3	50%	20	29%	16	35%	7	47%	2	33%	4	14%	6	16%	8	26%	3	30%
	Changed to the same course, but in the face-to-face modality at the same institution	2	1%		0%	3	4%		0%		0%	2	33%		0%		0%		0%		0%
	Canceled/paused enrollment, but I plan to return in the future	95	58%	2	33%	35	50%	26	57%	4	27%	1	17%	22	79%	25	68%	16	52%	6	60%
	Changed to a different educational institution	13	8%	1	17%	9	13%	2	4%	3	20%		0%	1	4%	4	11%	3	10%	1	10%
	Gave up on investing in higher education	12	7%		0%	3	4%	2	4%	1	7%	1	17%	1	4%	2	5%	4	13%		0%
<b>Total</b>		<b>165</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Author's own elaboration, 2023.

Therefore, it can be observed in Figure 8 that the majority of respondents stated that they canceled or paused their course but intend to return in the future. It was also identified that 50% of students from the Accounting course and 47% of students from the Quality Management course reported difficulty balancing work hours with studies and in-person meetings. According to Cunha et al. (2015), many Accounting and Business Administration students need to work for their own livelihood; thus, maintaining satisfactory performance in both college and work while managing conflicting schedules can be very demanding. This increases the risk of repeating modules, losing motivation, and eventually leading to dropout. This finding is supported by Almeida, Meneses, and Zerbini (2013), who warned that excessive work was one of the main factors contributing to the non-completion of courses in the EaD modality. Many students had to engage in additional activities to supplement their income, and as a result, they were unable to balance studies, work, and family commitments.

Another factor that seems to significantly contribute to dropout in distance learning courses is the lack of time, which, when combined with other elements, causes students to reconsider their professional priorities. This often leads to course abandonment, even at later stages (SENHORINHA et al., 2021; RAMMINGER, 2006; ALMEIDA, 2003; COMARELLA, 2009).

As observed, dropout is a multifaceted phenomenon and is not a one-time event, meaning it occurs in processes that show signs even before the student enters the course, with dropout being its peak (HEIJMANS; FINI; LÜSCHER, 2013; DORE; LÜSCHER, 2011). Thus, the variables related to dropout stem from both internal and external causes. To combat this phenomenon, strategies during the pre-university period are focused on addressing external causes, while strategies during the university period are aimed at addressing internal causes (TINTO, 1975/93; DIAS; THEÓPHILO; LOPES, 2010). Internal causes may be related to infrastructure, faculty, socio-educational support, etc. External causes are mainly related to poor decision-making regarding course choice, deficiencies in basic education, socioeconomic factors, distance between home and university, personal issues, etc. (TINTO, 1975/93; BUENO, 1993; SILVA FILHO et al., 2007; DIAS; THEÓPHILO; LOPES, 2010; CUNHA, NASCIMENTO; DURSO, 2016).

Problems with infrastructure, the qualification of technical staff and faculty, dissatisfaction with tutors and advisors, issues with the platform, difficulties accessing the virtual learning environment, lack of in-person meetings, course content not meeting students' expectations, and the lack of academic and administrative support also emerge as contributing factors to dropout. In this context, it is necessary to have a team with expertise in the processes of distance education courses. This team should support the professor, from the production of materials to the use of the virtual environment and the preparation of assessment activities. To achieve this, active management of in-person activities and the use of resources that facilitate group work is essential to prevent students from feeling isolated and demotivated (PACHECO, NAKAYMA, and RISSI, 2015).

Figure 9 – Model Summary

Dimension	Cronbach's Alpha	Variância contabilizada para		
		Total (Eigenvalue)	Inertia	% of Variance
1	,966	8,200	,745	74,544
2	,948	7,246	,659	65,870
Total		15,445	1,404	
Mean	,958 <sup>a</sup>	7,723	,702	70,207

a. The mean of Cronbach's Alpha is based on the average eigenvalue.

Source: Author's own elaboration, 2023.

In this context, the figure above illustrates the calculation of Cronbach's Alpha. For this estimation, a Likert scale was used for the responses (1 – Strongly Disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 – Agree, and 4 – Strongly Agree). This coefficient indicates the reliability of the responses in a questionnaire, and the closer the value is to 1, the more reliable the results are. Therefore, the result for Dimension 1 was 0.966, and for Dimension 2, it was 0.948, indicating that the results obtained in the research on student dropout are reliable.

## 6. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The results found in this investigation revealed that the courses with the highest number of dropouts were Business Administration, Logistics, Commercial Management, Marketing, and Management Processes. The main reasons for dropout were: difficulty accessing the content, lack of knowledge about the structure of the modality, financial issues, and various personal, professional, and academic challenges that ultimately hindered the continuation of the course. Surprisingly, many reported that they intend to resume the course at some point in the future.

Moreover, the research also revealed the dynamic role the educational sector has played in the Brazilian economy. While several sectors, such as industry and construction, reduced hiring or were in the process of laying off employees during the COVID-19 pandemic, educational institutions experienced a period of growth, with increased enrollment and the introduction of new courses. This trend was also observed in the higher education institution analyzed.

Therefore, the results can contribute to better management of distance education, particularly in light of the significant challenges this modality still presents, especially due to the limitations and opportunities brought about by the effects of the pandemic and the high dropout rates it continues to face. Thus, the findings presented should not be considered conclusive, as further targeted investigations are necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the roles and actual contributions of the various stakeholders involved in and shaping distance education.



Thus, it is expected that this study will contribute to the higher education institution analyzed, particularly its coordinators, managers, faculty, and tutors, by providing insights into the reasons behind student dropout and helping them formulate strategies to address and/or minimize this issue, either through student monitoring or by offering the necessary support to prevent dropout, especially in the early years. Furthermore, the actions adopted by higher education institutions that have yielded positive results in reducing dropout rates can serve as examples for other institutions to implement similar procedures to minimize this type of event.

The study has the limitation of being developed with a focus on a single higher education institution and only on management courses, which hinders broader generalizations. Therefore, it is suggested that the various stakeholders involved in this process reconsider their practices and approach the provision of distance education courses as a necessary resource for the social development of the country, rather than merely as a tool for capitalist exchange.

As a recommendation for future research, it is suggested that more comprehensive studies be conducted, including in other private and public higher education institutions, and that this information be used for comparative analysis with the aim of improving distance education. This would involve attempting to break the various social stigmas that still exist and hinder the advancement of this sector.

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