

**THE OVERVIEW OF DISTANCE HIGHER EDUCATION IN BRAZIL: AN
EXPLORATORY STUDY
Campina Grande, 05/2009**

Múcio Alexandre da Silva
Universidade Estadual da Paraíba
muciocg@gmail.com

Sídia Fonseca Almeida
Universidade Federal de Campina Grande
sidia.almeida@gmail.com

**Research and Evaluation
University Education
Research Report
Scientific Research**

ABSTRACT

This paper presents the profile of Distance Higher Education in Brazil, at the graduation level, based on its historical development and its main current academic indicators. For this, it was performed an exploratory and descriptive research, for the purpose. For the means, a literature and indirect research was realized. Official sites were found, such as the Ministry of Education (MEC) Portal, Department of Distance Education (SEED) Portal and the Portal of the INEP SINAES, which were taken from the census data of the DE Higher Education level in the country. Some indicators related to academic DE were organized in tables and analyzed using a quantitative approach, based on simple statistical techniques. There was a steep growth of the modality in the country, although not homogeneous, is considered the disparities between different regions with respect to different indicators.

Keywords: Higher Education. Census of Higher Education. Distance Higher Education

1 INTRODUCTION

Brazil is, in terms of history, a nation that has a high educational deficit. Currently, there are millions of Brazilians of high school graduates who could not enter or complete the third grade, according to some obvious reasons, namely: the distance between the college and the place where they live; unavailability of time to study, depending on need to work the whole day; preoccupation in the age above average, insufficient purchasing power to pay the tuition fee of the course, beyond the cost of food, transportation, clothing, books and teaching materials etc. In this context, Distance Education is not just as a potential solution in order to access to higher education, but as a revolution in educational paradigms terms, its peculiarities. Therefore, the DE has been presented as an opportunity to rate the degree courses in which the combination of reliability and consistency in the provision of educational products for education on a large scale will meet with appropriate professional and personal needs of each.

The data from the Census of Higher Education 2006, released by the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP) said the provision of degree courses in the distance mode has grown 571% between 2003 and 2006, or the number increased from 52 to 349. The growing number of students in distance education courses, also surpassed expectations. They went from 49 thousand in 2003 to 207 thousand in 2006, which increase to 315%. The participation of this modality students in the universe of students is now at 4.4% in 2006, and, a year earlier, that represented 2.6%.

Despite its socio-economic-cultural importance, it is possible to say that the DE in Brazil is still a fact known and little explored, and found in most situations, still an experimental character.

Considering the above, the study conducted by Silva (2008), searched to answer the following central question: What is the current landscape of Distance Higher Education in Brazil, at the level of graduation, based on its historical development and its major academic indicators?

2 THEORETICAL REFERENCES

2.1 Historical Development of Distance Education (EAD) in Global and National Context

Several authors, like Vasconcelos (2008), Lobo Neto (2008), Freitas (2007), Bezerra (2007), Belloni (2006), Black (2005) and Souza, Oliveira and Cassol (2005), have a history of DE in Brazil and worldwide, leaving a clear idea that it is not something new in the service of education, being currently a powerful tool, because the use of computing resources in support.

Maia and Mattar (2007) reinforce this idea and present the history of DE divided in stages, taking three generations.

First Generation: marked by correspondence courses. Although there are records of shorthand courses in the distance, offered through advertisements in newspapers, from the decade of 1720, the effective emergence of DE was in the mid-nineteenth century, due to means of transportation and communication development (as trains and mail), through the use of printed materials and sent by mail. From there, there were several initiatives in distance courses, initiating the creation of companies, institutes and schools.

Second Generation: characterized by new media (television, radio, audio and video tapes and telephone) and opened universities, inspired by the British Open University model, founded in 1969, which heavily used such media. Around the world, emerged the distance open large-universities, usually the largest in terms of students number in their respective countries, such as the Centre National d'Enseignement à distance (CNED) in France, Universidade Aberta de Educación a Distancia (Uned), Spain, the Open University of Portugal and FernUniversität in Hagen, Germany.

Third generation: the DE online, based on the video, the microcomputer, the multimedia technology, hypertext and the computer networks use, providing true integration between all the mediums above. With the presence of Internet, comes a new field for education: the virtual environment of learning, based on the digital network. DE history in Brazil is very different from the world experience in some aspects

and moments. At first, the Brazilian DE followed the international movement, with the provision of courses by correspondence. In a second time, media such as radio and television because of its broad potential for communication and information were also explored with considerable success in Brazil, before the introduction of the Internet. However, the experience of open universities is still very low, moving a step slow, and movements as the recent creation of Open University of Brazil (UAB).

2.2 Conceptualization of Distance Education (EAD)

According to this definition in Decree 5622 of 19.12.2005 (repealing Decree 2.494/98), which in turn regulates Article 80 of Law 9394/96 (LDB), the Distance Education is "educational method in which the didactic-pedagogic mediation in the processes of teaching and learning occurs with the use of media and information and communication technologies with students and teachers developing educational activities in different places or times."

According to Maia and Mattar (2007), the DE is a mode of education in which teachers and students are separated, designed by institutions and using communication technologies.

To Neder (2001, apud Preti, 2005), the DE should be understood as a mode of education that enables the sharing and dialogue between subjects in the search for the construction of social meanings, allowing the constitution, therefore, of an area, not necessarily physical, of dialogue between the subjects of educational action.

For Moore and Kearsley (2007), Distance education is planned learning that normally occurs in a place other than teaching, requiring special techniques for creating the course and instruction, communication through various technologies and special organizational and administrative arrangements. It can, therefore, be seen as a relation of dialogue, structure and autonomy that requires technical means to turn possible this communication. Distance education is a subset of all educational programs characterized by: high structure, low dialogue and high transactional distance. It also includes learning.

Peters (1973 apud Belloni, 2006), in turn, the Distance Education is a method of transmitting knowledge, skills and attitudes that is rationalized by the

organizational and labor division principles application, and the intensive use of technical means, especially aiming to reproduce high quality education material, which makes possible to educate more students at the same time wherever they live. It is an industrialized form of teaching and learning.

3 METHODOLOGY

According to the parameters of Vergara (2004), the search can be classified, for purposes, such as exploratory and descriptive; and as to means, such as bibliographic and indirect documentary.

The research was based on literature review and information collection in the file records from secondary sources, such as statistical data from government. Official sites were found, such as the Portal of the Ministry of Education (MEC), Department of Distance Education (SEED), the INEP Portal, which were taken from the census data on the DE in the country and SINAES Portal.

It was analyzed some academic indicators related to DE, such as the IES, courses, positions offered, candidates, Enrollment and graduating numbers by geographic region and general and detailed areas of knowledge.

Information collected through literature review were examined under a qualitative approach. The data extracted from the statistical records were organized in tables and analyzed using a quantitative approach, based on simple statistical techniques, such as numbers, rates, frequency, percentage and average, with the Microsoft Excel aid.

4 PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The research undertaken enabled map the high education ED and it was highlighted a few points that deserve emphasis, both in geographical context, as on the behavior of the method for each specific area of knowledge.

The first point relates to the exorbitant growth of the sport in the country, if considered as indicators the numbers of IES participating, the courses offered and vacancies offered.

However, it should be emphasized that there was no uniformity in growth, if observed the differences between the many regions related to the different

indicators. It can be detached, in this context, the case of the North Region, which entered the modality late and ended the period studied signaling to the continuity of the delay, in almost all indicators. This fact contradicts, including one of the objectives proposed by the UAB Program, which is to reduce regional disparities in higher education in the country.

It is, on the other hand, the progress made by the Northeast Region, which significantly increased its relative share in total supply of vacancies in the country, mainly from 2005. This fact reinforces the recognition of the effects generated by UAB in this region and the country as a whole, allowing a vacancies spatial redistribution through the massive entry of new IES, focusing on the Federal and State, bringing new courses and new places.

The data from the Census of Higher Education show that these differences were more pronounced in some regions than in others, emphasizing the following points:

- When comparing the relationship between the number of places offered and the number of registered students, as well as the relationship between the number of vacancies and the number of effective registrations at the end of the studied period (2006), displayed in Table 1, it can be seen that the supply capacity of courses in DE is still under-used. This is reality in Brazil as a whole, which has a weighting of 26.21% of entrances to the vacancies provision and 25.31% of registrations for all vacancies, as well as in regions, taken individually. Noteworthy is the northern region, which displays the largest percentage of entrances (85.41%) and, paradoxically, the lowest rate of enrollment (5.05%). The Center-West region, in turn, stands out because, after the North, which attracts a higher percentage of entrances by tests and other selection processes (53.39%), and is holding the highest rate of enrollment (43.30%) throughout the country.

- It is valid to emphasize that at the end of the study period, were offered in Brazil, 818.580 vacancies, of which only 214.573 were actually attracted to the modality, turning into entrances, and, of these, only 207.206 were to the registration effectiveness. This fact suggests a reflection on the ED method capacity of attracting people, because, in all regions and the country as a whole, there was a significant difference between the number of places offered and the number of entrants attracted by means of tests and other selection

processes. It was even more pronounced difference when making comparison between the number of places offered and the number of registrations made (Table 1).

TABLE 1 - THE DISTANCE HIGHER EDUCATION - GRADUATION LEVEL ENTRANTS AND REGISTRATION NUMBER ON THE VACANCIES OFFERED BY GEOGRAPHICAL REGION (IN UNITS AND PERCENTAGE). BRAZIL – 2006

REGION/BRASIL	VACANCIES	ENTRANCES		ENROLLMENT	
		AMOUNT	ENTRANCES/VACANCIES	AMOUNT	ENROLLMENTS/VANCANCIES
NORTH	17.476	14.926	85,41%	883	5,05%
NORTHWEST	82.425	27.473	33,33%	32.639	39,60%
CENTER-WEST	19.227	10.266	53,39%	8.326	43,30%
SOUTHEAST	95.108	37.602	39,54%	31.172	32,78%
SOUTH	604.344	124.306	20,54%	134.186	22,20%
BRAZIL	818.580	214.573	26,21%	207.206	25,31%

Source: MEC/INEP/DAES (2008)

Another aspect also investigated in this study was the vacancies offered rate of recovery by arrangement during the period by knowledge area. Accordingly, the data are displayed in Table 2, which clearly show some evidence, namely:

- Of a total of 818,580 seats offered in 2006, Brazil managed to attract only 214,573, which represents 26.21% of the total bid. Even smaller proportion was recorded for enrollments performed (25.31%).

If examined this relationship by area of knowledge, is concluded that the area of Education has attracted a greater proportion of income (26.88%), compared to the Social Sciences area, Business and Law (25.65%). Concerning the relationship between the number of vacancies and the number of registrations made, it can be also verified that the Education area showed greater ability to establish people in modality and enrolled, at the end of the period, a proportion of 28.78%, this indicator is higher than the recorded for the Social Sciences, Business and Law area (20.24%).

This fact reveals some gaps in the operationalization of the DE method in terms of indicators distribution between the different areas of knowledge, which implies the need for future studies that will clarify these points in order to support public policies aimed at the Distance Higher Education.

TABLE 2 - THE DISTANCE HIGHER EDUCATION – GRADUATION
LEVEL
ENTRANCES AND ENROLLMENT NUMBERS RELATED TO THE
VACANCIES OFFERED BY AREA OF KNOWLEDGE
(IN UNITS AND PERCENTAGE) BRAZIL - 2006

AREA OF KNOWLEDGE/BRAZIL	VACANCIES	ENTRANCES		ENROLLMENT	
		AMOUNT	ENTRANCES/VACANCIES	AMOUNT	ENROLLMENT/VACANCIES
SOCIAL SCIENCES, BUSINESS AND LAW	270.597	69.409	25,65%	54.756	20,24%
EDUCATION	523.395	140.693	26,88%	150.711	28,79%
OTHERS	24.588	4.471	18,18%	1.739	7,07%
TOTAL IN BRAZIL	818.580	214.573	26,21%	207.206	25,31%

Source: MEC/INEP/DAES (2008)

NOTE: (1) Others includes courses from the following areas: Humanities and Arts, Health and Social Welfare, Services, Science, Mathematics, Computing and Agriculture and Veterinary

5 CONCLUSION

The results say, in terms of geographical distribution, that, although some regions have shown extraordinary progress towards the DE consolidation, prevailed, during the period in focus, a strong regional concentration of the modality, which migrated from the Southeast Region in 2001, for the South Region in 2006.

Taking as parameter the distribution and development of indicators by area of knowledge, it was registered the massive concentration of vacancies in the education area, especially from 2001 to 2003, when the total of courses focused in this area, notably in Training Teacher (of Basic Education and Special Subjects). Since 2004, should be emphasized the redistribution of vacancies offered, depending on the emergence of courses in another area, that of Social Sciences, Business and Law area, in which there was a strong predominance of Management and Administration courses, whose impetus started in 2005, with the UAB Program appearance, which had as one of the goals offer degree courses in different knowledge areas.

Although the pulse registered by the Management and Administration courses, the studied period ended with a concentration in the supply of vacancies in the Education area. This causes not surprise, if reviewed the UAB program objectives, which has emphasized the priority to be given to degree

courses and continuous training of Basic Education teachers and Training of leaders, managers and employees in Basic Education.

There was, finally, verified significant differences between the number of vacancies offered and the number of entrances as well as between the number of vacancies offered and the number of enrollments made, both in Brazil as a whole, and in each of its regions, analyzed individually.

This discrepancy reveals a disparity between the potential supply of vacancies and the ability to attract some students for their selection processes, and large gap between supply of places and the ability to set the students in the system, through activation of registrations. This involves the non-use of institutional efforts that have been made towards of the modality consolidation.

Items posted here suggest, finally, a discussion about the need for revision of some educational policies aimed at DE in Brazil, based on a systemic view, which can be discussed so as to reduce, in fact, regional inequalities.

It is expected, therefore, that this study, which did not pretend to exhaust the subject, is only a starting point for future research, which will provide an effective academic and social contribution.

6 REFERENCES

BELLONI, M. L. **Educação à Distância**. 4. ed. Campinas: Autores Associados, 2006.

BEZERRA, E. P. **Os Pilares da EaD**. In: Trilhas do Aprendiz. BRENNAND, E. G. G.; ROSSI, J. S. V. 1 Recife: Linceu, 2007.

BRASIL. **[Decreto 5.622/052](#), de 20 de dezembro de 2005**. Brasília, DF. Available at: www.mec.gov.br/seed . Access: January 10th, 2008.

FREITAS, L. C. C. Tudo sobre EaD. São Paulo: Editora Minuano, 2006. Available at: <http://mundodoconhecimento.globolog.com.br> . Access: January 10th, 2008.

LOBO NETO, F. J. S. **Do Ensino por Correspondência à Atual Educação à Distância**. In: Curso de Educação à Distância. Available at: www.pedagogiaemfoco.pro.br/curso3a.htm . Access: January 15th, 2008.

MAIA, C.; MATTAR, J. **ABC da EaD: a educação à distância hoje**. São Paulo: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2007.

MINISTÉRIO DA EDUCAÇÃO – MEC. INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE ESTUDOS E PESQUISAS EDUCACIONAIS ANÍSIO TEIXEIRA – INEP. Censo da Educação Superior 2001 a 2007. Available at: <http://www.inep.gov.br/superior/censosuperior/sinopse/> Acess: January 15th, 2008.

MOORE, M. G.; KEARSLEY, G. **Educação a Distância: uma visão integrada**. São Paulo: Thomson Learning, 2007.

PRETI, O. (Org.). **Educação à Distância: sobre discursos e práticas**. Brasília: Líber Livro Editora, 2005.

SILVA, Múcio Alexandre da. **PANORAMA DA EDUCAÇÃO SUPERIOR A DISTÂNCIA NO BRASIL: um estudo exploratório**. 93 f. Monografia (Curso de Especialização em Novas Tecnologias na Educação) Universidade Estadual da Paraíba, Paraíba, 2008.

SOUZA, C. A.; OLIVEIRA, J. C.; CASSOL, M. P. **Tutoria como Instrumento para a Educação à Distância**. Relatório de Pesquisa. Universidade do Vale do Itajaí, 2005. Available at: <http://www.abed.org.br/congresso2005/por/pdf/174tca3.pdf>. Acess: December 12th, 2007.

VASCONCELOS, S. P. G. **Educação à Distância: histórico e perspectivas**. Available at: www.filosofia.org.br/viiifelin/19.htm . Acess: January 8th, 2008.

VERGARA, S. C. **Projetos e Relatórios de Pesquisa em Administração**. 5. ed. São Paulo: Atlas, 2004.