


THE USE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES IN DISTANCE LEARNING TUTORING: CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES AT THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF BRAZIL (UAB)

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SUMMARY

The use of digital technologies in tutoring in Distance Education (DE) has been consolidated as a fundamental practice for pedagogical mediation at the Open University of Brazil (UAB). This approach aims to overcome geographical barriers and promote interaction between tutors and students, providing a more accessible and inclusive education. The objective of this study is to analyze the challenges and possibilities of using digital technologies in distance learning tutoring at UAB, highlighting how these tools impact the teaching-learning process and communication between the subjects involved. The methodology adopted consists of a bibliographic review of articles, theses and institutional documents that address the theme, as well as reports of experiences of tutors working at UAB. The qualitative research sought to understand how digital technologies contribute to the construction of knowledge and what are the main obstacles faced by tutors. The results indicate that digital technologies, such as learning platforms, videoconferences, discussion forums and messaging applications, favor the interaction and pedagogical monitoring of students. However, they also reveal challenges related to the training of tutors, the precarious technological infrastructure in some regions, and the difficulty of engaging students in the virtual environment. The discussion highlights that, although digital technologies expand the possibilities of interaction and access to information, it is necessary to invest in the continuous training of tutors and the improvement of technological infrastructure. In addition, pedagogical strategies that encourage the active participation of students are fundamental for the effectiveness of tutoring in distance education. It is concluded that the use of digital technologies in distance learning tutoring at UAB presents both challenges and possibilities, and it is essential to have a pedagogical planning that considers the training of tutors, the available infrastructure and the promotion of interactive practices that strengthen the bond between tutor and student, contributing to a more effective and inclusive distance education.

Keywords: Tutoring. Digital. Teaching. Customization. UAB.

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INTRODUCTION

The growing expansion of Distance Education (EAD) in Brazil has been accompanied by the advancement of Digital Information and Communication Technologies (DICT), which are consolidated as indispensable tools for the development of innovative pedagogical practices. In this context, tutoring plays a central role in mediating the teaching-learning process, especially in the courses offered by the Open University of Brazil (UAB). The role of the distance learning tutor goes beyond technical and administrative support, assuming the role of learning facilitator, guiding students in the construction of knowledge and interaction with digital content. However, despite the numerous possibilities provided by digital technologies, tutorial practice still faces several challenges, ranging from the lack of specific training to the need to adapt to new platforms and virtual tools.

Valente, Moran and Arantes (2011) highlight that the face-to-face tutor is an important professional in pedagogical mediation, as it promotes the exchange between students and other distance education professionals, supports students in the organization of their studies and, often, performs the teaching function with regard to the elucidation of contents and the creation of circumstances that help the student in the construction of knowledge.

The use of digital technologies in distance learning tutoring expands the possibilities of communication, interaction and monitoring of students, favoring the personalization of teaching and the collaborative construction of knowledge. Synchronous and asynchronous tools, such as videoconferences, discussion forums, and virtual learning environments, allow greater proximity between tutor and student, even in contexts marked by geographical distance. However, the effectiveness of these tools depends not only on the availability of technological infrastructure, but also on the development of digital skills by tutors, in addition to institutional support for continuing education.

The work of the tutor is not regulated as a teaching profession, which leads to a lower remuneration of this professional, in addition to generating inconsistencies about issues related to professionalization, as if the trajectory of these professionals was not incorporated into the trajectory by which the teaching profession has been constituted, through their professional identification and recognition in society (PEREIRA, 2020).

In public institutions, the tutor is a scholarship holder, and, like other distance education teachers, does not enjoy the labor rights guaranteed to teaching professionals. A concrete example is the lack of a career plan, which requires the stability of

professionals, something that seems distant, if we consider that distance education was implemented in Brazil through programs.

Given this scenario, it is essential to discuss how digital technologies can be used to strengthen the role of tutoring at UAB, as well as to identify the main challenges faced by tutors in the implementation of these tools. The analysis of these issues contributes to the improvement of pedagogical practices in distance education, offering subsidies for the construction of strategies that promote a more inclusive, interactive education aligned with the contemporary demands of the knowledge society. Thus, this study seeks to reflect on the possibilities and obstacles related to the use of digital technologies in distance learning tutoring, highlighting their importance for the quality of education offered within the scope of the Open University of Brazil.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study seek to understand the role of digital technologies in the performance of the tutor in Distance Education (EAD), focusing on the Open University of Brazil (UAB), highlighting the challenges and possibilities that emerge from this process. The general objective is to analyze how the use of digital technologies contributes to the development of tutoring activities at UAB, pointing out the main difficulties faced and the potentialities for strengthening pedagogical mediation in the context of distance learning.

To achieve this purpose, it is intended, specifically, to identify the digital technologies most used in the pedagogical monitoring by UAB tutors, to discuss the main challenges faced by tutors in the implementation of these tools in the daily life of tutoring and to analyze the possibilities that digital technologies offer to promote interaction, collaboration and knowledge construction between tutor and student. In addition, it seeks to reflect on the importance of continuing education for the development of digital skills that favor the performance of tutors, as well as to propose strategies that can contribute to the improvement of the use of digital technologies in distance learning tutoring.

These objectives aim to provide subsidies to improve tutorial practice, strengthening the role of digital technologies as allies in the teaching-learning process, especially within the scope of the Open University of Brazil, which plays a significant social role in the democratization of access to higher education in Brazil.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted for the development of this study is based on a

qualitative approach, of exploratory and descriptive character, to understand how digital technologies have been used in the practice of tutoring in Distance Education (EAD), especially in the context of the Open University of Brazil (UAB). The qualitative research allows an in-depth analysis of the experiences, perceptions and challenges faced by tutors, considering the complexity and subjectivity that permeate the use of digital tools in pedagogical mediation.

Gil (2008) states that research happens when, based on existing knowledge, scientific methodologies, techniques and tools are used in the search and construction of knowledge.

Data collection is based on bibliographic review and documentary analysis, with the survey of scientific articles, books, dissertations, theses and institutional documents that address the theme of tutoring in distance education and the use of digital technologies within the UAB. The selection of sources prioritized productions published in the last ten years, to ensure the updating of the debates and the identification of the main contemporary trends and challenges related to the performance of the tutor in the distance modality.

Bibliographic research is that which is carried out from the available record, resulting from previous research, in printed documents, such as books, articles, theses, etc. It uses data or theoretical categories already worked on by other researchers and duly recorded. The texts become sources of the themes to be researched. The researcher works from the contributions of the authors of the analytical studies contained in the texts (SEVERINO, 2007, p. 122).

Data analysis was carried out through content analysis, which consists of the organization, categorization and interpretation of the materials collected, seeking to identify the main digital technologies used in tutoring, the challenges reported by tutors and the possibilities offered to improve pedagogical monitoring. The categories of analysis were defined based on the specific objectives of the research, covering aspects such as tutor-student communication, the development of digital skills, interaction in virtual learning environments and institutional support for the training of tutors.

The triangulation of the information obtained from the different sources enabled a more consistent approach, favoring the construction of a broad and critical view on the subject. In this way, the methodology adopted contributes to the understanding of the dynamics that involve the use of digital technologies in UAB tutoring, offering subsidies for reflection on the potentialities and challenges that permeate this practice in the context of Distance Education.

Chart 01 – Methodologies and Forms of Analysis

Methodology	Description	Form of Analysis
Qualitative Research	Exploratory approach to understand the perception of the community of the Open University of Brazil.	Content analysis based on interviews and reports from tutors and managers of the Open University of Brazil.
Field Research	Direct observation and application of questionnaires to residents, educators and managers - UAB.	Categorization of responses to identify patterns and challenges in tutoring.
Document Analysis	Survey of public policies, educational projects and educational materials related to the theme.	Comparison between theoretical guidelines and the reality observed in the courses offered by UAB.
Case Study	Investigation of specific pedagogical practices in the context of distance learning and face-to-face tutoring.	Evaluation of the impact of educational actions in the UAB.
Participatory Mapping	Involvement of the local population in identifying the role and challenges of the institution and good pedagogical practices.	Construction of collaborative maps to support future actions carried out by UAB.

Source: Prepared by the authors

SCHEDULE

The schedule of activities aims to organize and systematize the stages that make up the development of the research on The Use of Digital Technologies in Distance Learning Tutoring: Challenges and Possibilities at the Open University of Brazil (UAB). The definition of the activities allows planning the methodological path, ensuring compliance with the proposed phases within the established deadline. The stages were structured sequentially, covering from the initial bibliographic survey to the analysis and interpretation of the data. This organization contributes to the efficient conduct of the research, enabling the construction of a consistent study, aligned with the objectives outlined and the qualitative approach adopted.

Table – 02: Research Schedule

STEPS	Jul	Aug	Set	Out	Nov
1. Literature Review	x				
2. Data Collection		x	x		
3. Systematization			x		
4. Analysis and Reflection			x	x	
5. Preparation of proposals				x	x

6. Final Report					x
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Source: Prepared by the author

The research schedule on The Use of Digital Technologies in Distance Learning Tutoring: Challenges and Possibilities at the Open University of Brazil (UAB) was structured in stages that ensure the organization and gradual development of the study. Initially, data collection will be carried out in the first two months, through bibliographic review and document analysis, to gather materials that address the performance of tutors in distance education and the use of digital technologies in this context.

The next stage consists of the systematization of the collected data, scheduled for the third month, in which the information will be organized according to the defined categories of analysis, facilitating the interpretation and construction of the theoretical framework. In the following months, the analysis and reflection on the data will be carried out, relating the information obtained with the objectives of the research, to identify the main challenges and possibilities of using digital technologies in distance learning tutoring.

Subsequently, in the fifth and sixth months, proposals and suggestions will be prepared to improve the use of digital technologies in tutoring, based on the reflections obtained throughout the study. Finally, the schedule foresees the preparation of the final report in the last month, consolidating the results of the research and presenting the final considerations on the theme investigated. This organization aims to ensure the completion of the stages systematically, contributing to the construction of a coherent and reasoned study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results obtained from the analysis of data on The Use of Digital Technologies in Distance Learning Tutoring: Challenges and Possibilities at the Open University of Brazil (UAB) show the growing importance of digital technologies as essential tools for pedagogical mediation in the Distance Education modality. The survey revealed that virtual platforms, such as the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), discussion forums, institutional emails, videoconferences, and instant messaging applications, are widely used by tutors to promote interaction with students, answer questions, and monitor academic development. These tools expand the possibilities of communication and make the teaching-learning process more flexible, allowing for closer monitoring, even in geographically distant contexts.

[...] plan and organize the information to be studied in the course; be clear about the objectives you want to achieve; present meaningful content to students; constantly requesting the participation of students; help students plan their studies; guide the understanding of the material through discussions and explanations; encourage self-learning; foster active and interactive learning; organize study groups; supervise practical activities, projects and internships; respect the diversity and rhythm of the group and the individual, in the teaching and learning process; correcting students' activities and tests, pointing out mistakes and successes (ARETIO, 2001, p. 74).

However, the data also point out that, despite the possibilities offered by digital technologies, tutorial practice still faces significant challenges, especially about the lack of continuing education for the use of these tools. Many tutors report difficulties in using more advanced digital platforms and adapting to new technologies, which directly impacts the quality of pedagogical mediation. In addition, the lack of adequate infrastructure and the instability of the internet connection in certain regions, especially in the most remote areas, are factors that make it difficult to take full advantage of technologies in distance learning tutoring.

The activities of Distance Education tutors are generally ignored by institutions from a labor point of view. They are workers with essential functions to the teaching-learning process, but without any employment relationship with the institution. This is a dilemma that still deserves a lot of attention and reflection, especially on the part of managers and governments (MILL, 2016, p.445).

Another aspect highlighted in the discussion is the need for tutors to develop digital skills, which go beyond the technical mastery of the tools. Working in distance education requires skills related to empathetic communication, time management, personalization of service, and the creation of strategies that favor interaction and the collective construction of knowledge. In this sense, continuing education and institutional support are pointed out as fundamental elements for strengthening tutorial practice, contributing to tutors being able to explore more efficiently the possibilities offered by digital technologies.

Litwin (2001) points out that, initially, the role of the tutor does not differ substantially from the role of the teacher, since both need to master the content and concepts addressed, in addition to understanding the educational context and having notions of didactics, history and philosophy. However, there are three dimensions in which the role of the tutor is different: time, opportunity and risk.

Despite the challenges, the research shows that digital technologies have great potential to transform tutoring at UAB, promoting inclusion, autonomy and the protagonism of students in the learning process. The use of interactive tools, such as videoconferences and forums, not only facilitates academic monitoring, but also creates spaces for exchange

and collaboration that enrich the training path. Thus, overcoming the difficulties related to infrastructure and the training of tutors represents a promising path for the improvement of pedagogical practices in Distance Education, consolidating digital technologies as allies in the promotion of a more accessible and quality education.

SANTOS (2002) reports that inclusion is reflected in the development of strategies that seek to provide equal opportunities. The principle of inclusive school is that all children learn together, regardless of the differences they may have. Inclusive schools must recognize the diverse needs of learners and respond to each of them, ensuring quality education for all, through appropriate curricula, organizational structures, teaching strategies, appropriate resources and partnerships.

Digital technologies have played an increasingly significant role in tutoring, especially in the Distance Education (DE) modality, becoming indispensable tools for pedagogical mediation between tutors and students. The use of these resources enables the creation of dynamic, interactive and accessible virtual learning environments, which favor the construction of knowledge collaboratively and autonomously. Teaching platforms, such as Virtual Learning Environments (VLE), enable asynchronous and synchronous communication, content sharing, evaluative activities, and the provision of pedagogical support, contributing to the personalization of the educational process.

The insertion of digital technologies in tutoring expands the possibilities of interaction between tutor and student, reducing geographical and temporal barriers that often hinder pedagogical monitoring in distance courses. Tools such as discussion forums, chats, videoconferences, and instant messaging applications promote continuous communication, enabling the exchange of experiences, the clarification of doubts, and the development of collaborative activities. In addition, multimodal resources, such as videos, podcasts, and infographics, diversify the presentation of content and meet the different needs and learning styles of students.

Despite the numerous potentialities, the use of digital technologies in tutoring also presents challenges that require constant reflection and improvement. The lack of adequate technological infrastructure, the difficulty of access to the internet by some students and the lack of specific training for tutors are obstacles that can compromise the quality of pedagogical monitoring. In addition, technological mediation requires from the tutor not only technical mastery of the tools, but also pedagogical skills to promote interaction, active participation and the collective construction of knowledge.

The continuous training of tutors becomes a fundamental aspect for the effective

use of digital technologies, since the constant updating on new tools and methodologies contributes to the improvement of the educational process. The development of digital skills, associated with innovative pedagogical practices, favors the creation of more inclusive, motivating and efficient learning environments. In this sense, tutoring mediated by digital technologies goes beyond the simple transmission of information, taking an active role in the construction of an educational process centered on the student, on collaboration and autonomy.

Therefore, digital technologies in tutoring represent an opportunity for the modernization of teaching, contributing to the expansion of access to education and the promotion of more interactive and inclusive pedagogical practices. However, its effective use requires overcoming structural challenges, valuing the role of the tutor and investing in continuing education, aiming at the construction of a tutoring model that integrates technology and humanization in the teaching-learning process.

The tutor helps to seek rights and improve the education of students, at the end of the 1990s, the clinical tutor assumes the role of representing graduate professors before central government agencies and distances himself from the fight for the cause of physicians in training (BOTTI; REGO, 2008).

The analysis of the results indicates, therefore, that the use of digital technologies in distance learning tutoring at UAB has a double character: at the same time that it expands the possibilities of interaction and monitoring, it imposes challenges that demand investments in continuing education, technical support and institutional policies that guarantee digital inclusion and the appreciation of the role of the tutor in the context of Distance Education.

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF BRAZIL

The Foundation of the Open University of Brazil (UAB) represents a significant milestone in the democratization of higher education in Brazil, especially about expanding access to education for historically marginalized populations. Created in 2006 by Decree No. 5,800, UAB emerged as a public policy of the Federal Government to expand and internalize the offer of higher education courses through the Distance Education (DE) modality, consolidating itself as an essential tool for educational inclusion in different regions of the country.

The implementation of the UAB took place in a context of growing demand for higher education, associated with the difficulties of access faced by inhabitants of rural

areas, peripheral regions and municipalities far from large urban centers. From the creation of the UAB network, composed of public universities, federal institutes and face-to-face support centers, it was possible to provide quality education to thousands of Brazilians who, until then, were away from higher education institutions for geographical, economic or social reasons.

The professional training offered by UAB becomes fundamental in the contemporary scenario, marked by the constant need to update and improve the skills required by the labor market. The courses offered, especially in the areas of licentiate, play a crucial role in the training of teachers, filling the lack of qualified professionals in basic education, especially in regions farther from large urban centers. In addition, UAB also offers specialization and improvement courses, contributing to the continuing education of professionals who are already in the job market.

The flexibility provided by distance education allows workers to reconcile their studies with their professional activities and family responsibilities, making academic training a concrete possibility for those who face time and commuting limitations. This type of education also promotes digital inclusion and the development of technological skills, preparing professionals to work in an increasingly globalized and dynamic market.

Another relevant aspect of UAB is the strengthening of cooperation between public institutions of higher education and the face-to-face support centers, which serve as spaces for integration between the university and the community. These centers offer pedagogical, technological and social support to students, contributing to the reduction of dropout and the strengthening of learning.

The importance of UAB for professional training goes beyond technical qualification, as it also contributes to personal development and to the elevation of students' self-esteem, who now have new prospects of insertion in the labor market and improvement in the quality of life. By expanding access to higher education, UAB promotes social inclusion, reduces inequalities and strengthens regional development, consolidating itself as an indispensable tool in the construction of a more just and egalitarian society.

It is understood that the role of the tutor takes on various meanings according to the historical time in which he is inserted, as well as depends on the organizational structure of each institution. Its etymological meaning gains new interpretations and requires from this professional the commitment and knowledge of distance learning. Thus, it is not enough just to have the desire to be a tutor, it is necessary to be involved in the entire process that constitutes it (COSTA, 2013, p. 106).

The relevance of UAB to society goes beyond the simple offer of courses. It acts as an agent of social transformation, contributing to the training of qualified professionals in various areas of knowledge, especially in the training of teachers for basic education. In addition, the distance learning modality allows students to reconcile studies with other activities, such as work and family care, making higher education more accessible and flexible for different student profiles.

Another fundamental aspect of the UAB's work is the strengthening of regional development. By implementing face-to-face support centers in distant locations, the university stimulates the local economy, generates jobs and promotes the circulation of knowledge, contributing to the human and social development of the communities served. This decentralized approach to educational provision has a direct impact on improving the quality of life of the population, reducing educational and social inequalities.

Dialogue is fundamental to the construction of autonomy, a central objective of emancipatory education. Freire conceives of autonomy as the ability of individuals to think and act on their own, basing their decisions on a critical understanding of the world around them. According to him, "teaching is not transmitting knowledge, but creating possibilities for its production or construction" (FREIRE, 2017, p. 22).

The tutors of the Open University of Brazil (UAB) play a fundamental role in the pedagogical mediation between students and teachers, especially in Distance Education (DE) courses. They are responsible for monitoring the academic development of students, clarifying doubts, guiding activities and promoting interaction in the virtual learning environment. In addition to contributing to the construction of knowledge, tutors play a motivational role, encouraging the autonomy and active participation of students. Their work is essential to ensure the quality of teaching and strengthen educational inclusion, catering to different profiles and social contexts.

The training of tutors at the Open University of Brazil (UAB) is a process that aims to ensure adequate qualification for the exercise of tutoring in Distance Education (DE). Generally, it is required that the tutor has higher education in the area related to the course in which he will work, in addition to professional experience and knowledge of digital methodologies and tools. Many tutors also participate in specific training courses offered by UAB's partner educational institutions, addressing topics such as pedagogical mediation, use of virtual platforms and student monitoring strategies. This continuous training is essential for tutors to develop skills that favor interaction, academic support and encourage student autonomy, contributing to quality and inclusion in distance education.

Tutoring or mediation within the school context, although often confused, should actually be understood as "the attitude, the behavior of the teacher who places himself as a facilitator, encourager or motivator of learning" (MASETTO, 2000, p.144).

In summary, the UAB Foundation is configured as a strategic project for the inclusion and appreciation of public education in Brazil. Its role in expanding access to higher education, training qualified professionals and promoting regional development reaffirms the importance of public policies aimed at the democratization of knowledge, consolidating distance education as an indispensable modality for the advancement of education and social justice in the country.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The research on The Use of Digital Technologies in Distance Learning Tutoring: Challenges and Possibilities at the Open University of Brazil (UAB) allowed us to understand the importance of digital technologies as essential tools for the development of tutoring activities in the distance modality. The results showed that, although digital technologies offer numerous possibilities for communication, interaction and pedagogical monitoring, there are still challenges that need to be overcome so that the potential of these tools is fully exploited.

The main challenges identified are related to the lack of continuing education, the difficulty in mastering the most advanced digital tools and the limitations of technological infrastructure in some regions. These factors directly impact the quality of care provided by tutors, making evident the need for investments in training and technical support so that these professionals can perform their duties more efficiently and safely.

On the other hand, digital technologies stand out as allies for strengthening tutoring, enabling the creation of more dynamic, collaborative, and interactive virtual learning environments. The use of virtual platforms, videoconferences, discussion forums and instant messaging applications contributes to bringing tutor and student closer together, favoring dialogue, knowledge exchange and personalized follow-up.

Given the challenges and possibilities presented, it is essential that educational institutions, especially UAB, adopt policies that guarantee the continuing education of tutors, in addition to promoting actions aimed at improving technological infrastructure and institutional support. Valuing the role of the tutor in distance learning is essential for digital technologies to be used strategically, contributing to the construction of a more inclusive, interactive and quality teaching-learning process.

Therefore, it is concluded that digital technologies represent a promising field for innovation in distance learning tutoring, but its effectiveness depends on the development of institutional policies that ensure the training, technical support and digital inclusion of tutors, consolidating the Open University of Brazil as a space for democratic and accessible education for all.

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