

# The Challenges of the Supervised Internship in a Distance Bachelor's Degree Courses

## *Os Desafios do Estágio Supervisionado em um Curso de Licenciatura a Distância*

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### Abstract

The objective of this paper was to investigate how the supervised internship takes place in a degree offered at distance. In order to do so, our view sought to understand how the supervised internships of the degree course in Mathematics at distance of a Federal University in Minas Gerais have been proposed by the institution, how they are organized by the professor responsible for the internship subjects and how they are experienced by the students. This research is qualitative and was based on the analysis of data in official documents of the University, of online interviews with the internship teacher and with the trainees, as well as of reports of internships elaborated by students of the course. We conclude that the principles of technical rationality, based on logic three (theory) plus one (practice), is still dominant. We also believe that one of the main problems that the EaD has experienced is precisely the fact of reproducing the face-to-face model, starting from the “face-to-face” culture, and elaborating adaptations for the use of AVA and its tools, that being one of the difficulties faced by teachers who work in the modality.

**Keywords:** Mathematical education, Distance education, Initial teacher training, Theory and practice, Degree in mathematics.



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## Os Desafios do Estágio Supervisionado em um Curso de Licenciatura a Distância

### Resumo

*Este trabalho teve por objetivo investigar como acontece o estágio supervisionado em uma licenciatura ofertada a distância. Para tanto, o nosso olhar buscou compreender como os estágios supervisionados do curso de licenciatura em Matemática a distância de uma universidade federal mineira têm sido propostos pela instituição, como eles são organizados pelo professor responsável pelas disciplinas de estágio e como eles são vivenciados pelos alunos. Essa pesquisa é de cunho qualitativo e se constituiu na análise de dados de documentos oficiais da universidade, de entrevistas online com a professora orientadora dos estágios e com estagiários e de relatórios de estágios elaborados por alunos do curso. Concluímos que os princípios da racionalidade técnica, pautados na lógica três (teoria) mais um (prática), é ainda dominante. Acreditamos também que um dos principais problemas que a EaD tem vivenciado é justamente o fato de se estar reproduzindo o modelo presencial, partindo da cultura “presencialista”, e elaborando adaptações para o uso de AVA e suas ferramentas, sendo essa uma das dificuldades enfrentadas pelos docentes que atuam na modalidade.*

**Palavras-chave:** Educação matemática, Educação a distância, Formação inicial de professores, Teoria e prática, Licenciatura em matemática.

## 1. Introduction

The stage is the central element of the discussion developed in this article. We understand that in each formative context where it is experienced, it can assume different characteristics. Thus, we seek to direct our look at how the internship happens in the context of teacher training and, more specifically, in the field of Distance Learning (DL).

Researches such as those of Quaranta (2011), Reis (2015) and Álvares (2015) on the stage in the DL point to indications that, in the context of the modality, it has been organized by higher education institutions under the face-to-face teaching model. Our research, in turn, sought to investigate this reality more deeply; for this, we seek to analyze how the supervised distance stage occurs, with emphasis on how it is proposed by the teaching institution, how it is organized by the tutor and how it is practiced by the trainees.

To this end, we invested in understanding how the supervised internship is being developed in the Mathematics Distance Course of the Federal University of Viçosa (UFV). The course started in the first half of 2011; their vacancies were destined to Basic Education teachers who did not have higher education, in order to meet the demands of the National Training Plan for Basic Education Teachers (Parfor)<sup>1</sup>. The vacancies that were not filled by students from this demand were offered to candidates characterized by social demand.

We believe that, through this analysis, we can contribute to the theoretical discussions about the internship, the DL and the degree programs in general, since the structure of distance learning courses

1 More information on Parfor may be obtained at the website of Ministério da Educação e Cultura (MEC): [www.portal.mec.gov.br](http://www.portal.mec.gov.br).

has been a research agenda, such as Gatti (2010; 2013-2014) and Barreto (2015) and has been debated in several aspects in the field of Education. We hope, therefore, that investing in research that presents the different voices of this context can collaborate, for example, for a review of the organization of the courses and the legislation that defines the parameters for the elaboration of courses offered in the EaD.

## 2. Methodological Paths

In order to meet the research proposal of the internship in the context of this course, we chose the qualitative paradigm of research, since we wanted to arrive at the “how it happens”, question for which we will not present definitive answers, but reflections that can collaborate with the discussions about the DL and its specificities.

We believe that the approach we choose is marked by the transience of the data produced, the lack of neutrality of the researcher and the possibility of reconfiguring the data in the face of the opportunity to change the understanding and production of the data. In addition, qualitative research is marked by the failure to establish rigid and generalist prior paths for its development (Garnica, 2006).

For the purpose of data production, the work was divided into four parts: analysis of documents and regiments on the UFV's stage; analysis of the reports produced by the students; interview with the internship teacher; and interview with students selected from the reading of 21 reports from them, provided by the teacher.

After processing the data of the reports and official documents, we conducted the interview with the teacher of the internship discipline and later with two students of the course, selected from the reports. We opted for the semi-structured interview; with the objective of making the research feasible in a timely manner, we found it more appropriate to conduct them online, via chat in a social network, since the students were spread through several cities and it would not be viable, with the available resources, to find them in person.

The chat option was based on the convenience pointed out by Borba, Malheiros and Amaral (2011) that the interviews could be later transformed into text files, being originally transcribed. From here we are dedicated to the description of the data.

For the analysis of the data, we invested in a constant dialogue with the theoretical referential, seeking to find characteristics of the stage in the context of the DL. Our final analyzes sought to understand, in particular, the place of the internship in institutional planning, the development of orientation and supervision of the internship, and, finally, the narrative about internships in schools, thus showing how it happens in the context of a course distance learning.

## 3. The Supervised Internship in Graduation

In academic training, the internship has been primarily responsible for bringing the experience of the classroom and school into the life of the future teacher. Lüdke (2013, p. 123), studying the trainee's reality and discussing the role of traineeship in teacher training, states that “the training offered by undergraduate courses does not correspond to what is necessary for the performance of teaching work.” For example, she claims that the internship is at the center of the problems that the training institutions have experienced in articulating theory and practice in the curriculum of their courses. In agreement with this idea, Gatti (2013-2014) maintains that the research on teacher training has evidenced a “formative insufficiency” in the degrees, aimed at the development of the teaching work. And it adds to this the conditions in which the stages are realized. Gatti (2013-2014) states that although it is difficult to analyze the data that comes

from the stage, it is possible to observe by means of these studies that the majority of the stages counts on the observation like main form of insertion. In addition, it explains that students usually seek out the schools where they will train, without the proper supervision and articulation between the higher education institution and those who receive them in that period, corroborating what Pimenta and Lima (2005-2006) emphasize the lack of importance given to who and how the internship period is coordinated.

This lack of commitment to the management of the internship and the role it should play in the formation of the future teacher ends up leaving loopholes to be a “fictive noun” (Lüdke, 2014). This is due to several aspects that imply the lack of effective insertion of the trainee in the school context, as: regent teachers sign attendance books without the student having attended the internship, the teacher regent rarely sees itself as a fundamental piece in this training process; and trainees feel themselves to be mere observers, rather than taking an active part in their training process.

As a counterpart to this type of practice, the internship, if seen as an articulating element between the course and the dimension of the teaching practice, will have the characteristic of mobility and of transit between the spaces of the university and of the school, its conceptions, challenges and ideas, for example (Felício and Oliveira, 2008). For Felício and Oliveira (2008, p. 217), this may favor the “meaningful construction of learning” not only for the trainees but also for the teacher regent and the tutor teacher.

According to Barreto (2015), the weaknesses of the degree courses can be attributed to the recent conditions of its expansion, that is to say, a great growth of the enrollments at a distance and through the institutions of higher education. For her, this is worrying because, because they have a market interest, these institutions do not conduct research and do not engage in teaching activities. Another point is that, with the rapid growth of distance education, there has been improvisation of the pedagogical project, the infrastructure of support and accompaniment of the students and a great evasion, which leaves evidence that it can offer an even more precarious formation than the classroom.

For Gatti (2013-2014), the DL does not favor the conviviality of its students with the academic culture of the direct dialogue with the people involved in the formation process, like student movements, among other experiences characteristic of the classroom modality. that DL has been offered in a more precarious way than face-to-face and that, instead of contributing to improvements in initial education, may make it more fragile.

Borba, Malheiros and Amaral (2011), looking at possibilities and recognizing the word “distance” as an essential term for DL, see the relations established in the modality, mediated by technology, with more optimism, considering it as an opportunity to gather people geographically distant, opening space for a possible exchange between different cultures. The authors emphasize that, regardless of the proposal used, it will be necessary to use technological means to make communication feasible. These spaces are known as virtual learning environments (VLE); depending on the resources they have, can favor qualitatively different teaching and learning experiences - for example, whether they have audio and video capabilities or just chats. For this reason, the curriculum should be thought according to the possibilities of the available media.

Regarding the stage, which is a dilemma of teacher training, as presented previously, authors such as Quaranta (2011), Reis (2015) and Álvares (2015), in different researches indicate a lag in the organization of the EaD that has mainly neglected the distribution of roles and the use of resources without recognizing specific characteristics of the modality. The reproduction of face-to-face teaching is one of the most contradictory points addressed by the authors and points to a necessary elaboration of characteristic foundations for the modality whose “distance” is the basic element of its conception. Thus, we analyze that it is necessary to reflect on this “customization” of face-to-face teaching, which has been generating the precarious formation to rethink the EaD of the “presenceist” culture for the possible “distancialist” culture.

In the National Curricular Directives aimed at the standardization of courses in the distance modality, the internship is mentioned once in Art. 1º, § 1º of Decree number 5.622, of 2005. In this article it is affirmed that the internships “will be realized at the headquarters of the institution or at the accredited DL courses, accepting agreements for supervised internships, in accordance with current legislation” (Brazil, 2016). This aspect shows that it is not admitted, at least on paper, that this stage of formation can be marked by the specificities of the DL.

Considering that, in the face-to-face modality, the stage is a node, in the distance mode, still lacking in research and policy, it tends to gain characteristics that add even more difficulties to the process experienced by the trainee, such as those pointed out by Barreto (2015): students with difficulty to reconcile internship, graduation and work; teachers with no training to work in the DL and / or little committed to the demands of the internship discipline; guardians being the only support-supervisor-supervisor of the student; little exploitation of the available media, etc.

Looking from this angle, even if all the legislation and the entire organization of the stage in the distance modality are copied from the face-to-face modality, it will still be different, particular, made up of specificities. The future teacher is exposed to models of classes and teachers throughout school and academic training, for example. But, the student of the distance modality has the opportunity to experience a space of mediations that are not conventional, although they have many similarities with the classroom.

#### 4. Supervised Internship Challenges in the Context of a Licensed Distance Mathematics Course

In our analysis, several themes emerged, of which we highlight: the place that the stage occupies in institutional planning; as was the development of guidance and supervision; and the trainees' narrative about experiences in schools.

In general, we observe that the institution, the regent teacher and the mentor teacher understand little their own role in the internship and, as far as their organization is concerned, they adapt to face-to-face teaching without considering the specificities of the DL, corroborating research on stage in the distance mode already presented. This posture points to a disregard for the stage itself and not just the way it happens being supervised and oriented at a distance.

From our data, we also observe that there are no definitions for the distance supervised internships in the official UFV undergraduate documents, but rather documents prepared for the course in question, evidencing a separation between the face-to-face and the distance-learning modality. In its Article 3, the regulations determine that “the curricular contents of the course ... are systematized in a curricular matrix that indicates the horizontal and vertical integration of the disciplines and activities” (UFV, 2015, p.2), indicating that it should not be organized as the culmination of courses.

The stages are elaborated as pedagogical disciplines, but they do not relate to the disciplines that comprise this group, nor to the other disciplines of the course, although the documents indicate that they must be integrated horizontally and vertically in the curriculum. According to the document, the internships also comprise the academic orientation group, which includes the subjects of monographs, projects, completion of course work and complementary activities. Although they are in the same group, we understand that each of these disciplines requires different paths and strategies of orientation, since the processes and results that are produced by them generally are different. Still, there is no distinction between them in the regiment, nor for the role of the advisor of each of them, which prevents us from clearly understanding what is expected of this orientation process. In addition, in the curriculum grid of

the course under study, we find the offer of three supervised internships presented to the student in the last three semesters, going against what we discussed previously and the guidelines that the institutional regiment itself proposes.

Historically, undergraduate courses organize the disciplines in the 3 + 1 format, based on the technical rationality model (Diniz-Pereira, 1999). In this model the theory is presented in the first three years and then explored in a year of practice. In the case of degrees, this year of completion is usually composed of pedagogical disciplines; among them is the stage and many of the orientation disciplines mentioned above, seen as finishing pieces of the formation process, as we discussed earlier. According to Dias-da-Silva et al. (2008, p.20),

to train teachers presupposes the creation and implementation of a specific project and shared by all university teachers, who must overcome the bachelor's degree & bachelor's degree: both "teachers of pedagogics" and "content teachers" (!) form teachers...

Facing this fact, we think that it is difficult to promote this articulation with other disciplines in the undergraduate curricula and, among the diversity of reasons that may prevent these changes, one of them, for example, would be the fact that it requires an investment in the elaboration of new proposals for the organization of traineeships. This would require a constant dialogue between trainee coordinators and the other teachers of the training courses, breaking the idea that undergraduates become teachers only from the encounter with concepts and experiences presented in the pedagogical disciplines. After all, all teachers of a degree course are directly linked to the training of the future teacher.

We agree with Dias-da-Silva et al. (2008, p.20) that build new work projects,

in these dark times of the weakening of the public university, implies, besides the difficulty in constructing possible consensuses within the Education area itself, also the necessity of facing the institutional and administrative obstacles of the university routine.

Moreover, this deconstruction of models, besides laborious ones, would require changes of conception, such as: "What is stage?"; "What is it for?"; and "What is the role of the actors involved?". Schools, for example, would need to be presented to the internship and included in the process, not only as receptionists of the students or as giving space to them, but as active participants and co-responsible for the training of the teacher, as we have already discussed. For Santos (2005), however, promoting this partnership with school professionals is not simple, and is, in fact, a delicate and conflicting situation, since, at the stages, the relationship between teachers and trainees has not been seen by them as a space of knowledge production in a complementary and interdependent way among the subjects involved.

In contrast, the author states that

this relationship is still marked by numerous embarrassing situations in which the trainee is seen as the one who is about to "judge" a professional pedagogical practice from others. Especially because the school, especially the public school, is so vulnerable, fragile, insecure that any external approach can trigger "misunderstood" situations (Santos, 2005, p.4).

In the pedagogical project (PP) of the course investigated the specifications for the stage evidences indications that this relation of approach with the schools must happen. However, it is supported by the performance of a single subject, the mentoring teacher of the stage. Such subject, in the undergraduate degree analyzed, was a tutor moved to the role of teacher guiding the internship subjects. According to the PP, in short, his work included not only ensuring that the compromise was respected and that all parties were aware of their duties, guiding, monitoring, supervising and evaluating students, establishing a partnership with the teacher or supervisor in the formal spaces of the field. At the same time, you should select, contact and visit the internship sites before and during the internship. However, the document does not guarantee conditions, in the case of a distance course, for the tutor to perform these functions, such as transportation and stay, for example. According to the teacher,

I would like to have gone to the schools, met with the teachers who received these students, but I only managed to do this in the last stage and only in two poles, because I did not have transportation (Teacher).

In the analyzed course, the stage is summarized as a protocol performed at the end of the theoretical classes, the lack of commitment to the orientation process indicates possibly negligence of the institution with the way in which the stages would be oriented and with the workload of the professional that they assigned function. The tutoring being exploited to "plug holes" in the organization is a recurring feature in DL; in the case in question, a very important "plug hole" in the training of the licenciando, which is the stage, and does not favor the process, since the tutor was not trained and paid to perform the functions of teacher, including that of mentor.

In addition to the deviation of function, the distance supervision is a singularity of the course in question and needs to be reworked so that the guiding teacher can fulfill the functions assigned to him. The orientation has always been through e-mail and chat. This aspect marks little exploration of the available digital technologies, essential for the modality. The students ended up experiencing the internship process through a fragile dialogue with the orientation, and, consequently, without any communication between what the UFV proposes for its students and the subjects that were directly related to the process of formation of them. This distance between the parties is not necessarily geographical, but corroborates what the literature we discuss points out at various points: there is no link of partnership between the institutions involved. There is an improvised bridge made by the trainees, which serves as an exclusive link between what is proposed, organized and guided and what is experienced in the distance supervised stage that we investigate.

The trainees' experience was based on an action guided by the observation-participation-regency triad:

The disciplines are divided into a theoretical and a practical part. As it was three stages, I divided it like this: the theoretical part was done at a distance with texts and videos seeking to relate to the practice (Guiding teacher).

The orientation material was made available in the VLE of the institution - PVANET -, showing the organization of the three internship subjects and the determined workload assigned to each moment of insertion of the student in the school. In addition, according to her, "Guidelines were made via slides and e-mail."

As a result of the internship, reports are produced by students at the end of each internship period; this is the main item of appreciation of his formative experience by the tutor. These reports could ensure better use of learning if they were not seen as an evaluation tool only (Lüdke, 2013). In this regard, the

author argues that the most important contribution of this type of evaluation is to provide elements for the improvement of the training process, which could happen if the report were analyzed before completing this process.

In addition, we believe, there is a “waste” of information that is filled in reports about the school and its subjects, for example, and which are not discussed further with the trainees.

In several cases, the trainees report that they felt insecure in the process of insertion in the school: some in the first days of observation, due to the strangeness of the class; others in the regency, before the indiscipline of the students and the work of sketching and executing a lesson plan.

We understand that this instability is natural for the movement that the stage adds to the initial formation, but we believe that these issues need to be discussed, elaborating and reflecting with the students on the conception that their formation will not contemplate all the advents that the school can present to him in the course of his profession. Thus, they need to understand the stage as a process that opens the way - not that it concludes stages. Rela (2006) sees this moment of formation as a moment of synthesis. But we do not agree with this perspective, for we could interpret the stage as a kind of summary of something ready-in this case, the initial formation. However, we believe, and we are debating from the outset, that the stage is a joint space of production of all parties involved in the process, not of application. We do not consider it a blank page in which the starting point is innovative; it is, of course, a moving reality. However, it is not a ready-made book either, since the trainee, upon entering school, changes the rhythm and paths that are being lived. Thus, the end of the process is a diverse path in possibilities.

The internship, in any type of teaching, needs to be part of a training that will be in constant development, seeking to reflect on the experiences of teaching and even overcome issues such as difficulties - such as student indiscipline - when possible, and insecurity of newcomers or not so much in the teaching profession. Thus, we start from the conception that “the concept of ‘development’ has a connotation of evolution and continuity that, in our view, overcomes the traditional juxtaposition between initial formation and continuous training of teachers” (Marcelo, 2009, p.9).

In general, the trainees evaluated the internship as an important experience for their training and contributed to their teaching, both in the speech of those who had already taught or already taught as in the speech of students whose first contact with the teaching exercise was through of the stage.

Some students reinforce the need for teachers to develop diverse activities, according to them, from the model of traditional classes whose use of “chalk and chalk” and the lecture are frequent, in search of more dynamic classes that explore play and group activities , for example. This speech is usually accompanied by the participation of students in the activities of regency and is always evaluated as something rewarding and motivating to develop other similar activities. As an example of this, a student reports the expectation that the regent will continue the work she has developed at the stage, evaluating that the use of manipulative material makes the classroom dynamic and creative, considering as a disadvantage, however, that this type of class will demand of the teacher more time to plan, leaving the routine of the use of the picture and the book.

The trainees’ relationship with the counselor was restricted, for the most part, to supervising the compliance with norms that ensure that the student went to school and did the internship, as if the “do”, in the sense of the experiences provided by that moment of the was ready and waiting for the trainee. This, in turn, needs only to experience the reality of the school and learn how it is done. From this perspective, the stages are in fact supervised and completed as determined by the regiments. However, guidance by the guiding and regent teachers is practically ineffective.

Facing this, we conclude that the stage, understood as the practice, needs continuous reflection; not only in the academic context of formation but also in the context of the school. The regent teacher who does not see himself as coauthor of the internship, the mere observer trainee and the supervising teacher acting as supervisor and final evaluator does not confer to that training moment what it really ought to be. This is not their responsibility, we understand. However, it is a consequence of a conception of a stage that has been constructed, enlarged, redefined and, mainly, historically questioned and still lacking in reflection.

## 5. Final Considerations

The stage consists of one of the nodes of teacher education, as the literature points out, and in the scope of the DL it becomes an even greater challenge. In the speech of the authors that we studied in the analysis of the data of our research, we identified the stage as marked by the conception of which, initially, the student appropriates the theory and, at the end of the course, experiences, as an intern, the practice, in which he will have the opportunity to learn "how it is done", accompanying an experienced professional. For us, however, the stage does not achieve formation, since the experience lived in it is not capable of providing all the dimensions of the field of professional activity.

Observation – participation – regency has been the basic tripod of the organization of the stages, including what we analyze. But we believe that the linear way in which these phases have been explored has not promoted space for dialogue and reflection on the experiences of trainees in training. For us, it would be interesting to work this tripod in a less distanced and more cyclical way, giving the opportunity for the student to observe, participate and elaborate an intervention and later evaluate, share, promote moments of reflection and construction of group knowledge, be guided and another instead go back and experience these steps. Thus, doubts, problems, significant experiences could be heard, giving the trainee speech in this important process of his formation and not only at the end of the process.

We also believe that it is necessary to overcome the comparison and adaptations or customizations of the DL in relation to the face-to-face model and to invest in investigations that point to the DL as a different modality, different in possibilities, but currently being exploited in inadequate conditions for training that is expected to promote through it. Therefore, the problem is not in the modality, in the use of digital technologies or even in geographical distance, but in the form and conditions under which it is managed and structured and in the public policies for which it has been used.

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