VIRTUAL INTERACTIVITY: WEB FORUM CAFÉ IN A NURSING MANAGEMENT COURSE

INTERATIVIDADE VIRTUAL: FÓRUM WEB CAFÉ EM UM CURSO DE GESTÃO EM ENFERMAGEM

INTERACTIVIDAD VIRTUAL: FORO WEBCAFÉ EN UN CURSO DE GESTIÓN EN ENFERMERÍA

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to describe student participation in the forum "internet café" of a distance learning nursing management course. This is an exploratory quantitative study carried out with 268 students in ten cities of three Brazilian regions. Data was collected in 2014 through a survey of students' postings on four discussion topics: "let's share knowledge"; "it happened to me"; "advertisements"; and "courses, seminars and similar." The researchers identified 248 posts from the tutor and 324 from the students. Students' posts were classified using an investigator triangulation. Students from all the centres, in which the course was offered, participated in the forum. "It happened to me" was the discussion topic with the highest participation. Most posts were related to health problems of students' family members. In the remaining topics, there were: messages between the students and the tutor and information about short courses; postings on the applicability of course material; compliments and information about government job opening positions and hospital vacancies. In conclusion, a forum as "internet café", not subjected to evaluation and mediated by a tutor, can be adopted in distance learning education in order to facilitate interaction between students from other centres and to discuss different topics, showing the potential of this versatile and innovative proposal.

Keywords: Education, Distance; Nursing; Education, Nursing, Graduate; Health Management; Interpersonal Relationship

RESUMO

Analisar a participação dos alunos no fórum Webcafé no curso de especialização em Gestão em Enfermagem, modalidade a distância. Estudo exploratório, quantitativo, realizado com 268 discentes, que foi conduzido em 10 cidades de três regiões brasileiras. A coleta dos dados ocorreu em 2014 a partir do levantamento das postagens dos alunos realizadas no fórum Webcafé, nos quatro tópicos de discussão: "vamos compartilhar conhecimento", "aconteceu comigo", "classificados" e "cursos, palestras e similares". Foram identificadas 248 postagens do tutor mediador e 324 dos discentes, sendo que as dos alunos foram classificadas utilizando-se a triangulação de investigador. O fórum contou com a representação de alunos de todos os polos em que o curso foi ofertado. O tópico com mais participação foi o "aconteceu comigo" e teve predomínio de postagens relacionadas a problemas de saúde de familiares de alunos. Houve predomínio das seguintes classificações nos demais tópicos: mensagens entre os alunos e o tutor mediador e informações sobre cursos de curta duração, postagens sobre a aplicabilidade do material do curso e elogios e a divulgação de concursos públicos e vagas hospitalares. Concluiu-se que a criação do fórum Webcafé, um espaço sem caráter avaliativo e mediado por um tutor, pode ser adotado em cursos EaD com o intuito de viabilizar a interação entre alunos dos diferentes polos e contemplar temáticas diversas, demonstrando o potencial versátil e inovador dessa proposta.

Palavras-chave: Educação a Distância; Enfermagem; Educação de Pós-Graduação em Enfermagem; Gestão em Saúde; Relações Interpessoais.

RESUMEN

El objetivo de esta investigación fue analizar la participación de alumnos en el foro Webcafé del curso de especialización de Gestión en Enfermería (A distancia). Se trata de un estudio exploratorio cuantitativo llevado a cabo con 268 estudiantes de diez ciudades de tres regiones brasileñas. Los datos se recogieron en 2014 a través del relevamiento de sus mensajes en el foro Webcafé, en cuatro temas de discusión: "compartamos conocimiento", "me sucedió a mí", "avisos clasificados" y "charlas, cursos, y similares". Se identificaron 248 mensajes del tutor mediador y 324 de los alumnos. Los mensajes de los alumnos se clasificaron usando la triangulación de los investigadores. El foro contó con la participación de estudiantes de todos los centros que impartieron el curso. El tema más discutido fue "Me sucedió a mí" con mayoría de mensajes sobre problemas de salud de familiares. En los demás temas de clasificación predominaron mensajes entre los alumnos y el tutor mediador e información sobre cursos de

corta duración, mensajes sobre la aplicabilidad del material del curso y elogios a la divulgación de concursos públicos y plazas hospitalarias. Como conclusión del presente trabajo se puede decir que la creación del foro Webcafé, un espacio no evaluador mediado por un tutor, puede adoptarse en cursos de educación a distancia. Ello permite la interacción y discusión de distintos temas entre alumnos de varios centros y demuestra el gran potencial de esta propuesta versátil y novedosa.
Palabras clave: Educación a Distancia; Enfermería, Educación de Postgrado en Enfermería, Gestión de la Salud, Relaciones Interpersonales.

INTRODUCTION

Distance Learning Education (EaD) brought new possibilities for education, and primarily for the learning process, because it allows reaching a broader number of students. This method enables course access in different locations, when there is technology available and organization of the time dedicated to learning.

Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) are online spaces arranged for focusing on the didactic and pedagogical spheres, which added to the work professors and tutors have contributed to the interactive format of EaD. This format goes beyond the provision of learning materials, and seeks collaborative and cooperative learning, supported by digital tools that make the learning process more significant. VLEs allow professors to integrate new models for sharing information in an organized way, using goals and aims previously established, one of them being the forum.[1]

A study of a research group on information technology in nursing work processes, the researchers used forum as a social space, aiming at developing human relationships, in addition to disclosing events, birthdays, happy hour, among others. The forum allowed the tutor to share information and establish bonds among the participants, assisting in socialization[2] and minimizing time and space distance in this type of learning education.

Accordingly, the Paulista School of Nursing of the Federal University of Sao Paulo (UNIFESP) has been using Moodle as a collaborative learning environment[3] and considers the forum as one of the major tools for communication and socialization among students and professors/tutors, especially in graduate programs. It began in 1998 with the Distance Learning Specialization Nursing Course in Nephrology and, successively, in Infectious Diseases Nursing and Prenatal Care. The Specialization Distance Learning Course in Nursing Management (CEGEMD) was first offered in 2009.

The second version of the course, Course 2 (CS), had a workload of 416 hours, divided into 10 subjects. It occurred from 08/30/2010 to 08/31/2011, with provision of 550 spots distributed in 10 different classroom settings, located in the Midwest region (one), three in the North region and six on the Southeast region.

Discussion forum was the Moodle communication tool more often used with the students, among all tools offered. Forum is an asynchronous communication tool used to share discussions, although not at the same time[4] as the topics proposed by professors and tutors.

In C2, for each type of content, a forum was created, mediated and evaluated by the tutors that were previously trained in the discussion subject at hand. Student's postings in these forums were graded according to the relevance of the topic in discussion, which could range from 0 to 2 points. These points were added to the score (from zero to eight) of the exam for each subject. Therefore, if the student received two points for the forum postings and eight points in the exam, his/her final grade would be 10 points, for the content taught.[5]

Although there were established guidelines to the use of the forums, the tutors began to identify postings that were not directly related to the proposed content. The majority of the postings were of a private nature, including solicitation for blood donation, stories about resignation, other course suggestions, students' family members' severe illnesses, among others.

Four months after the beginning of the course, the course coordination team and tutors conducted an evaluation of the students' postings. The need of creating a space not related to the subjects' forums was identified, in which the students could express themselves freely.

Thus, the creation of a social forum called *Webcafé* was proposed and incorporated in the "student's space". This forum lasted 7 months and ended according to the completion of the activities for C2. The compelling proposal was to integrate the students, so they could express themselves freely on various subjects. The forum had the mediation of a distance-learning tutor, and it was not accounted as part of the course evaluation, grades or frequency of access to the page.

Given the content described above, this study aims to analyze the participation of students in the *Webcafé* forum of the Specialization Distance Learning Course in Nursing Management.

METHODS

This is an exploratory retrospective study of quantitative approach. It adopts the methodological framework of formative evaluation research, developed in the Specialization Distance Learning Course in Nursing Management of the Paulista School of Nursing, Federal University of Sao Paulo.

The population consisted of 427 students, and the sample included 268 students that earned their specialization degree, attended the *Webcafé* forum and agreed to participate in the study. The students came from 10 settings: Breves-PA - eight

(3%), Parauapebas-PA - 13 (5%) and Palmas-TO - nine (3%), from the North region; Juara-MT - four (1%) from the Midwest; Itapetininga-SP - 34 (13%), Jandira-SP - 54 (20%), Sao Carlos-SP - 35 (13%), Sao Jose dos Campos-SP - 30 (11%), Diadema-SP - 44 (16%) and Serrana-SP - 37 (14%) from the Southeast region of the country. Data collection occurred in February of 2014, using information stored on the Moodle platform.

The *Webcafé* forum included four discussion topics (DT), which were monitored by a mediator tutor (MT). The first discussion topic was entitled "let's share knowledge", and aimed at sharing files, links, articles, videos and other documents mainly related to the theme management or other theme related with nursing management.

"It happened to me", another *Webcafé* topic, had as its goal to share positive events, problems, difficulties and anxieties, faced by the students daily, in order to seek understanding/support/encouragement from peers. The topic "advertisements" concerned job openings, government jobs openings and voluntary work. The fourth topic, "courses, seminars and similar" aimed at sharing information on free or paid events in the field of nursing practice.

The 572 posts written in the four DFs were retrieved from the VLE and inserted into an Excel® spreadsheet. The posts were read, analyzed and divided in two clusters according to the issuer: one with threads from the students, N=324 (56.6%), and the other with the posts from the MT, N=248 (43.4%).

The first cluster was reread, analyzed and its posts grouped according to the central theme in the content presented. After that, they were printed and sent to two other researchers, experts in Nursing Management, so the groupings could be validated.

The experts made suggestions, and a new analysis of the content was performed until consensus was reached by the authors, ending the data classification. This process is characterized as investigator triangulation, which involves the collaboration of two or more researchers to interpret data from open-ended questions.[6]

The MT postings focused on directing the discussion topics and were not included in the second analysis. Data was analyzed using percentages and statistical analysis and will be presented in tables.

The research project was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of UNIFESP (19667/2012) and followed all ethical principles according to the Resolution CNS 466/12.

RESULTS

The four DTs were organized according to the mediators' perceptions of following areas: coordination, tutors, distance and presence. There was careful announcement of the space to all students registered for the course, since the aim was interaction among students from all settings.

As for the posts, according to the issuer, in the DT "let's share knowledge", 67.7% (N=84) of the posts were made by students, and 32.3% (N=40) by the MT. In the DT "it happened to me", the values found were 73.5% (N=83) posts from students and 26.5% (N=30) by the MT; in "advertisements", 47.6% (N=39) and 52.4% (N=43), respectively; and for "courses, seminar and similar" 46.6% (N=118) were from students, and 53.4 % (N=135) from the MT.

Regarding students participation, the DTs "let's share knowledge" and "courses, seminar and similar" were represented by all settings. However, the remaining DTs did not have the participation of the settings Parauapebas ("it happened to me" and "advertisement") and Juara ("advertisement"), as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 - Distribution of number of students participating in the Webcafé forum by discussion topics and settings - Sao Paulo, 2014

Students Origin'	Discussion Topics							
	Let's share knowledge		It happened to me		Advertisements		Courses, seminar, similar	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Breves – PA	2	7.4	6	12.0	2	8.7	4	8.3
Diadema – SP	5	18.5	9	18.0	6	26.1	8	16.7
Itapetininga – SP	1	3.7	8	16.0	3	13.0	7	14.6
Jandira – SP	4	14.8	10	20.0	3	13.0	8	16.7
Juara – MT	1	3.7	1	2.0	0	0.0	1	2.1
Palmas – TO	2	7.4	1	2.0	1	4.3	4	8.3
Parauapebas – PA	1	3.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	6.3
São Carlos – SP	5	18.5	5	10.0	3	13.0	6	12.5
São José dos Campos – SP	2	7.4	5	10.0	3	13.0	3	6.3
Serrana – SP	4	14.8	5	10.0	2	8.7	4	8.3
Total	27	100.0	50	100.0	23	100.0	48	100.0

The posts made by the students in the four DTs, grouped and categorized, will be presented below, in their respective topics.

Referring to the topic "let's share knowledge", with 84 posts, the most prominent comments, 38% (N=32), were accounting for the applicability of the material and giving compliments for the course. The compliments encompassed the shared material, e.g. "this is a interesting paper", "and this material is going to be helpful for my work", "thank you for sharing this material", among others about the creation of the forum, e.g. "I loved the news", "this is a very good space" and "excellent idea". Taking into account the academic material, 35.7% (N=30) of the posts were suggestions of different materials that have a link to the topic discussed. Less frequently, there were posts that addressed subjects not related to the thematic of the forum totaled 15.5% (N=13), search of information 4.8% (N=4) and questions regarding the nursing legislation 6% (N=5).

Regarding the topic "it happened to me", as shown in Table 2, there were 83 posts from the students. Most frequently, representing 20.5% (N=17) and 21.7% (N=18), were posts related to health problems in the family of one of the students and feedbacks by colleagues. The student presented the problem and it was answered by 12 of other classmates.

Table 2 - Distribution of students' posts in the forum Webcafé – topic "it happened to me" – Sao Paulo, 2014

Items approached in DT "it happened to me"	N	%
Scientific research disclosure	2	2.4
COREN SP Elections	5	6.0
Suggestions of material	7	8.4
Unemployment	8	9.6
Subjects not related to the thematic of the forum	13	15.7
Activities from a different category	13	15.7
Family health related problems	17	20.5
Feedback from own students	18	21.7
Total	83	100

Findings related to the topic "advertisements" summed up 39 posts from the students. Predominantly, 35.9% (N=14) of the comments were about conversations between classmates and their respective tutors, talking about doubts, suggestions or showing appreciations for a certain orientation given by the tutor. The second most common post was advertising open positions for government jobs, with 25.6% (N=10), followed by open positions in hospitals and institutions with 17.9% (N=7) and other themes of less expression, as can be seen in Table 3.

In the DT "courses, seminars and similar", likewise "advertisements", the majority of comments, 60.2% (N=71), consisted of exchanging of posts among the students and between them and the MT. Among those posts, emerged solicitations of spe-

cific courses. Secondly, the short duration/update of courses were the most mentioned, summing 22% (N=26) of the comments with highlights for the online courses. The approach to *stricto sensu* courses was not significant, being represented in only two comments (1.7%). The advertising of other events were posted, however, they didn't have visibility in the topic, as is seen in Table 4.

Table 3 - Distribution of students' posts in the forum Webcafé – topic "advertisements" – Sao Paulo, 2014

Items approached in DT "advertisements"	N	%
Asking for help for determined job position	1	2.6
Education jobs openings	1	2.6
Primary Care job openings	2	5.1
Diversified job openings (job searching website)	4	10.3
Hospital job openings	7	17.9
Government job openings	10	25.6
Conversation among students or answers to tutors	14	35.9
Total	39	100.0

Table 4 - Distribution of students' posts in the forum Webcafé – topic "courses, seminars and similar" – Sao Paulo, 2014

Items approached in DT "courses, seminars and similar"	N	%
Advertising content in scientific journals	1	0.8
Advertising Discussions	1	0.8
Advertising Bachelor Degrees	1	0.8
Advertising information regarding Masters and PhDs	2	1.7
Advertising Specialization Courses	5	4.2
Advertising Events	11	9.3
Advertising short duration/update courses	26	22.0
Interactions among students and between student-MT	71	60.2
Total	118	100.0

DISCUSSION

The contribution of MTs for the interaction process proposed by the forum *Webcafé*, focused in leading the DTs. The leading was conducted by intermediation among the students, motivating participation and answering doubts that came up. This resulted in more interpersonal relationships among the students and was a stimulus for their frequent participation in all DTs.

It was emphasized by authors that the tutor has one of the main roles responsible for instigating student's interactions. He or she provides an environment for learning in which exchanging experiences, in a collaborative perspective is allowed, and by this, there is a creation of knowledge networks among the ones involved.[7,8]

In *Webcafé* forum, the MT had autonomy to make contributions to what the students had posted, e.g. suggesting videos, literature, movies, events and others. In addition, the MT was expected to send messages to students advertising the content shared by their colleagues, emphasizing the spreading of information among all. This enabled more interpersonal interactions among the students and the available space.

The MT responsibilities also included the analysis of the relevance and source of the posted material. If the posted material had problems, MT would have to send a private message to the student and, if necessary, she/he could delete the post. This actions from the tutor corroborate with the literature, in which authors had addressed that in a forum with characteristics of a social environment, the tutor can allow sharing of information that may establish and narrow the interpersonal relationship among the participants[2]. Also, the tutor can contribute to the quality of the process of teaching learning that is a determinant factor of EaD.

Taking into account posts not related to the DT used, MT would replicate to the posts in their respective DT. Also, the student was informed quickly about the change so she/he could have the orientation of where to look for feedback about her/his posts. This MT responsibility had as an objective to enhance the factors that enhance student participation, by valuing the feedback established. This aspect is congruent with the literature because, the rhythms and consistence of interactions and feedbacks from the tutor with the student, summed with the encouragement with positive and altruistic comments, are basic to create a commitment to the educational process.[9]

The high number of posts within the different DTs of *Webcafé*, among the students and the tutor, call for attention, once the posts were "voluntary" and had no grade or weight for the student's final grade in the course. It is possible that the high participation contributed to the reduction of the transactional distance of the course. The transactional distance means the psychological and communicational gap frequently reported by authors who write about EaD courses. They are a sum of the physical and temporal distances and can culminate in failures of interpersonal interactions between the participants and, consequently, can compromise the teaching-learning process of the student.[10]

The study found that the DTs of *Webcafé* were used as interactive technologies within LVE, since it allowed the mutual exchange among participants, maintaining them active until the end of the course. The interactivity already belongs in the routine of the students, through social networks and/or use of communication tools offered on-line. This is attributed to the growing insertion of computational technologies among the health services, whether by patients' electronic health records, information systems, security networks, databases and others.

This can be considered as not different from the strategies designed for education.[11]

Besides, the participation of students of all settings, inserted in different contexts of professional practice and distinct geographical and socio-cultural realities was noted. In this perspective, this shows that the interactivity proposed by the activity was accomplished.[10]

The Southeast region of the country, which includes the settings with the highest participation in the DTs, especially Diadema, Jandira and Sao Carlos, has the highest concentration of teaching and research centers of the country, such as universities and colleges, which includes the Nursing area. This suggests that the culture in education contributes to the profile of these students in their participation.[12]

However, the Northern region, which includes, among others, the Parauapebas setting, twice was not represented among DTs. This setting does not have easy access to education, as evidenced by the education indicators, with high levels of illiteracy and low educational opportunities in the region.[12,13] It is observed that even EaD mode courses in the Nursing area have low expressiveness in this region, as an example, the small offer of undergraduate courses in nursing, contradictorily to important assumptions of EaD.[13] These elements create an opportunity to reflect about the challenge, and maybe the unfamiliarity with the EaD, which may have contributed to the low participation on the *Webcafé.*

These results reinforce a similar study, which also evaluates specialization in nursing students from different regions of Brazil, and is correlated to the variations of results according to regional differences, showing significant reflections to be made.[14]

The highest number in participation, in five out of six settings of Southeast region of Brazil, was "it happened to me" DT, which concludes that this high participation might have occurred given the great variety of services these nurses operate in distinct fields, even in more recent fields, for instance, head coordination in centers of teaching and research, clinical research, air transport of patients, consultation in health service accreditation, among others. It is also due to the fact that the Southeast region concentrates the highest density of nurses in Brazil, allowing different experiences to be shared among the colleagues.[15]

The study highlights that the greatest number of students in the Palmas setting showed interest for the DT "courses, seminars and similar", which might have happened due to the small offering of local qualification courses. This study demonstrates inequalities throughout the country regarding professional training and distribution of human resources in health care fields. The smallest number of nursing graduate courses is offered in the Northern region, with only one course, while the Southeast region has 19.[16]

Regarding the students' posts on DT, it can be verified that they add value to the course. Posts related to "let's share knowledge" have contributed to the richness of the didactic material provided, since they summarize varied information regarding plagiarism, as well as thesis and dissertations on the topics of discussion; television reports; journal articles; videos; scientific papers; and books on the subject of management.

Posts regarding the DT "it happened to me" include two main issues: personal issues and professional issues related to the practice. It is expected that the DT has focused on these two subjects for they are the main components of the routine of every profession, that is, the search for balance between work and private life.

Regarding professional practice, all posts focused on professional improvement, discussions on whether or not some activities should be under another professional responsibility, unemployment among nurses, as well as information on the elections of the Sao Paulo Regional Nursing Council (COREN-SP).

In this perspective, regarding professional practice, the main focus is related to the job market, as proven in literature[17], as nurses usually face difficulties trying to find job positions, whether it be because of a saturated job market in the last decade or divergences between job requirements and the student's professional training.[13] The struggle in keeping a job is very common; oftentimes nurses also take part in other positions unrelated to their practice according to labor laws.

It is important to consider that gaps in higher education in nursing can have negative impacts in the insertion of the student in the job market, requiring from them constant professional improvement to stay up to date with ethical aspects of the practice.[18]

Interest in political issues, however small, was present among the DTs, and was encouraged in discussion sessions. In this sense, the results of these discussions match the ones found by researchers[19] on the subject, which report that nurses are indeed detached from political participatory process, both in the sense of being affiliated to councils as well as taking part in movements for better work conditions. However, it is needed that these professionals unit to change this scene and seek a solid political participation for the improvement of the profession.

Nevertheless, it was pointed out that the predominance of posts in the "it happened to me" DT, especially the ones addressing personal issues, showing that participants were willing to share their personal experiences, challenges, and struggles of the everyday work life. It is known that these professionals face feelings of sadness on a daily basis, hurt and angst coming from their patients. However, it is observed that professionals themselves need to be taken care of.

A similar situation occurred in a study performed with nurses working with organ transplants, of which results suggest counseling as part of their job activity, to assure they are fit to practice with excellence and safety.[20]

The interest in government jobs in the Nursing area is not rare. The appeal of having a steady career, in general terms, allied to high salaries, was approached in a recent study, especially for nurses who had recently graduated. They feel frustrated when not approved in the selection process, even when the majority of the nurses still find job positions through traditional recruitment methods.[21]

Even though the predominance of discussions in the DT "advertisement" were related to job positions in hospitals, there is a growing number of management jobs in primary care. Such a trend is due to the great demand by users of public health system (SUS) allied to incentives in public policies toward promotion of health and disease prevention, which culminates in the increase of the workforce, especially nurses, to act in this, offering benefits such as appropriate salaries and fixed work hours.[22]

The urge for highly qualified and trained professionals in the very competitive job market is potentially the main reason why the predominance of posts in the DT "courses, seminars and similar", all related to short time courses, which demand less time and are least expensive to pay for. The findings are relevant and are in resonance with progress in science and technology as well as with the ever-present need of updates for health care professionals.[23]

The challenge in quality improvement in nursing holds even more complex aspects, once the profession is directed related to roles traditionally played by women, hence directly related to family oriented issues, and when summed up with high workloads and low salaries, lead to multitasking of daily activities. In this context, *lato sensu* specialization courses are seen as desired options.[24] Thus, this subject resulted in several posts.

The offer of *stricto sensu* courses showed weak results, contrary to findings of a different study, which shows increasing number of nurses willing to pursue master's and doctorate degrees, aiming at higher salaries and the production of knowledge applied to practice, as well as the prospect of such titles representing important tools for insertion into the job market.[21]

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated the contributions of forums such as *Webcafé* as a promising digital tool towards the development of a social space without evaluation character, but mediated by an tutor, which allows interactions among students, as identified based on different themes and participation of all settings in which the course was offered. This enabled exchange of experiences and information among participants inserted in different professional and region realities.

It also highlighted the need for studies, which investigate and provide subsidies for MT responsibilities in forums such as

Webcafé, as this professional must contemplate particularities of such an activity.

Regarding the role a MT plays in a topic of discussion, it can be considered a limitation in the study, for it has occurred based on past experience, as a mediator in conventional forums and orientations from course coordination, being executed according to demand without following pre-established rules.

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