# What I Learned About Online Education: An Analysis of Course Participants' Responses About Their Training in the Pandemic

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**Abstract:** The report presents the IFMT's experience in offering an online course for training in online education for its employees during the pandemic period of the new coronavirus. Based on the reuse of educational resources and the discussion among course participants, the course aimed to train more than 1,300 course participants on an emergency basis, with different levels of knowledge about distance education. As a result, we can describe that, despite certifying less than half of the enrolled course participants, the training brought up the difficulties of teachers in putting themselves in the perspective of the learner and in using the resources of information and communication technologies to learn. Such evidence was decisive for the institution to develop its plan for training for employees.

**Key words:** online education, teacher training, pandemic

## 1. Introduction

Between April and May 2020, the initial phase of the new coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), the Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology of Mato Grosso (IFMT), offered an online course for its teachers, educators, and technicians in educational matters, with a view to training them about the fundamentals of online education (OE). The course was quickly organized and designed, with learning objectives defined based on the needs of an audience that had different levels of knowledge about the object (Filatro, 2018). This report aims to understand the understanding of distance education that course participants had in the training offered in a pandemic period.

## 2. The Organization of a Course for the Pandemic Period

Complying with the social distance, the course participants had 40 hours to go through eight units that ranged from the history of OE, its support technologies, to the student's pro-file and legislation. The IFMT, which has been working in OE since 2007 (Cruz Neto, Bettencourt, 2016), saw in this delicate moment the opportunity to gather part of its employees to discuss the educational modality in the institution.

The course design was based on the use of didactic resources in textbooks and videos, available in educational repositories; online lectures and, more intensely, the discussion forums in the Learning Management System (LMS), promoted a space for discussion and construction among the participants, according to the

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Connectivism (Siemens, 2005). The evaluation, with a mediating characteristic (Hoffmann, 2014), favoured qualitative aspects, gathering the reflections of the course participants on the topics discussed. As a synthesis of the formative path taken, the course participants were asked to construct texts based on their understanding of the subject. It was based on the respondents' feedback that the content analysis searched for conceptual categories (Bardin, 2011, p. 147) and, thus, obtained different views that the course participants had about OE.

### 2.1 What Did Coursists Learn About OE?

The analysis of answers that coursists given to sentence "I've learned that online education is...", was made by its mediators and, in sequence, resulted in three categories representing distinct views of OE:

The first category observed was the one where OE was seen as a tool by the coursists, that is, as an intermediate modality and that can be used by them to promote inclusion and democracy, as seen in the following answers:

"... is a powerful tool for universalizing access to education..."

"... possibility of democratizing education…"

The view of OE as a process was the second category observed. It is part of the perception of the coursists about the continuous and procedural character that the modality has. For them, the OE has a historical composition, complex, based on teaching and learning and, also, it is imminent, that is, from which it is not possible to regress, as follows:

"I learned that distance education is the teaching-learning process, mediated by technologies..."

"A complex process involving several actors..."

"... is much closer than I imagined!"

The third category observed is the one in which the coursists understand OE as an educational modality, as it really is (Brasil, 2017). For them, the modality is on the rise, pro-motes overcoming, but can be dependent on the educational context and technological conditions of students. It was also scored that the OE, although it has obstacles to establish itself, can be considered the "teaching of the future", according to the following answers:

"... it is a path full of possibilities that can reach students all over the country".

"When I ask what I learned about distance education, the first word that comes to mind is a challenge..."

### 2.2 Discussion of the Answers and Categories Found

The mediating proposal of the evaluation brought important elements about how the study and debate of OE provoked the reflection of the coursists, especially at a time when the learning through digital technologies, seemed to be the only alternative to maintain academic activities. However, not everyone has the conception of OE as a teaching modality, despite the fundamentals presented in the course units.

## 3. Conclusions and Implications of Findings

Based on the discussion about the results obtained, the institution will be able to determine the design of training programs that can reverse the procedural and supporting view implied by OE and that, through pedagogical practice in the modality, strengthens its learning and use by teachers and technical staff of the institution.

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