

# Managers Pedagogical Supervision as A Professional Quality Performance

## Contribution: A Study Based on Distance Education Resource Centers at the Catholic University of Mozambique

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**Abstract:** This research focuses on pedagogical supervision activities that are undertaken in all the resource centres of distance education at the Catholic University of Mozambique. The study was undertaken in view of promoting a deeper understanding of the supervisors' profiles, on the models and instruments used for pedagogical supervision and it was intended to objectively address the reality and major challenges associated with distance education in the same university. Methodologically, it adopted a qualitative-descriptive approach that falls under the category of a case study. For data collection, the study used semi-structured interviews, documentary analysis and a questionnaire. The study was undertaken between 2017 and 2020, with participants from 4 Resource Centres. This group included resource centre managers, course coordinators and non-teaching staff. The interpretation of the data collected was done after content analysis. The findings show that resource centre managers are responsible for the supervision and preparation of training sessions that are given to non-teaching staff and to course coordinators. At the resource centres level, supervision contributes to career advancement for non-teaching staff. One of the challenges associated with the university under study concerns lack of a pedagogical plan for supervision at the resource centre level, as managers still undertake this activity without systematic supervision and guidance. The conclusions evidence the need of trainings professionals in the area of pedagogical supervision. This requires the institutionalization of pedagogical supervision as an autonomous body and not as an aspect to be aggregated to other bodies.

**Key words:** pedagogical supervision, resource centres, distance learning

### 1. Introduction

In the face of various transformations taking place around the world, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) cannot remain oblivious to such undertaking. It is necessary for them to be in track with new conceptions of space and time, where new models of knowledge are produced and imparted on human daily dynamics. In this respect, pedagogical supervision has a very crucial role in articulating educational processes happening in such institutions as well as in articulating the development of other activities that are meant to meet the demand for a qualified teaching and non-teaching staff at different levels in such institutions. With such approaches this will help them to

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better face the challenges of the current educational scenario. Along these lines, Formosinho (2002) states that supervision has three main functions namely the improvement of institutional practices, the development of individual potential for learning and the promotion of institutional capacity for self-renewal.

This study was undertaken from the backdrop of the need to reflect on the performance of pedagogical supervision in educational processes in view of reflecting on the contribution of different approaches of Pedagogical Supervision within the scope of managers' performance in the Resource Centres (RCs) at the Catholic University of Mozambique (UCM). The main questions guiding the study covers the following areas: Pedagogical supervision approaches, pedagogical supervision strategies, factors catalysing changes in the effectiveness of pedagogical supervision, among others.

In this regard, this research discusses the models and instruments of pedagogical supervision used by RC managers at UCM in line with the need to address possible weaknesses and strengths existing therein. It is worth mentioning that the choice for this particular area of study resulted from the need to contribute to the improvement of teaching and learning quality assurance standards at UCM as a response to the questions that are frequently raised in relation to this approach of higher education. The paper also intends to reflect on possible mechanisms that can help to improve the quality of distance education (DE) in all aspects, given that the demand for courses in this type of education tends to increase. The last problem associated with this type of education at UCM is related to the fact that in most cases, most of the terms of reference attributed to DE managers superficially speak of them as pedagogical supervisors and yet, in some respect, they may not be and act as expected of them.

## **2. Methodology**

This research adopted a predominantly qualitative-interpretative methodological approach which helped to explore in greater detail the reality of the study as well as it helped in the interpretation of data and for a better familiarization with the problem. The use of this method enabled the researchers to better understand the reality under study, particularly in line of what Canastra, Hanstra and Vilanculos (2015) say about such kind of research methods.

For data collection, the researchers used a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and document analyses. It is important to consider that questionnaires are data collection instruments consisting of an ordered series of questions, which are meant to be answered in writing (Marconi & Lakatos, 2003). In the present research, the questionnaire was organized into different blocks of questions, corresponding to the different aspects that cover and are ordered in line with the objectives of the study. The intention of using such an approach was to collect all the possible relevant information concerning pedagogical supervision in all UCM's RCs so as to better understand how pedagogical supervision is implemented, practiced, evaluated and supervised. This was also meant to understand the motivations of the employees and the role of the RC managers as pedagogical supervisors.

The questionnaire helped to collect a wide range of objective and relevant information concerning Pedagogical Supervision in all UCM's resource centres, to understand the pedagogical supervision's implementation model, as well as to understand the evaluation that supervisees make of the whole process. Finally, the questionnaire helped to understand the motivation of the employees in the work they do as well as to understand the role that RC managers play in the whole process.

The questionnaire was divided into different groups of questions. In this respect, there were alternative answers, followed by the use of the Likert scale and, at the end, there were open questions as a way for the

participants to provide their personal views. This was done as a way to provide more flexibility for the participants to answer the questions in a way that would easily provide diversified options and answers. The questionnaires given to the course coordinators and non-teaching staff were processed through Google forms and sent to them through their respective focal points who were four RC managers. Likewise, the responses were sent back to the researchers through the same channel.

Semi-structured interviews have been used as a complement to the questionnaire as a flexible way of obtaining more data (Bravo, 1991). Such interviews became a good technique as it helped to better understand the work done by RC managers. The role of the interviewers was reflexive as it gave room for permanent renegotiation of some implicit research rules throughout this interaction, leading to the production of a polyphonic discourse (Aires L., 2011). The interview approach was chosen because it is considered as one of the most powerful means to understand the subjects involved in a particular research study.

The other instrument used was document analysis. The researchers collected and analysed the information existing in some documents of the university. Such documents included the institutions guidebook (2014), the minutes of different University councils meetings such as the ones that took place in 2016/2017, 2018/2019 and 2019/2020. The researchers also analysed the University Council's deliberation number 4/19/CUUCM, institutional quality assurance guidelines and the Procedures Guidelines Manual (2014).

Broadly speaking, four UCM RCs participated in the research with 84 participants. Each RC had 10 employees and 10 delegates. This means that there were 40 UCM's non-teaching staff. These employees were from Nampula, Pemba, Chimoio and Maputo. The choice of these RCs was due to the large number of students that each of them has as compared to the rest of the country. The RC which had more students was Maputo due to its location in the capital city.

For this purpose, a spreadsheet was created and shared as a way to register all the necessary information required. The same spreadsheet contained the following information: a heading to identify the type of material existing, the date, the objectives and a code. The last element was meant to guarantee privacy protection for the informants and interviewees. After the interviews had been recorded, listened to and transcribed, each interviewee was given a code for his/her identification. The acronyms ET1, Et2, Et3 and Et4 were used to identify the 4 managers interviewed from the 4 selected RC.

The questionnaires for the non-teaching staff and the delegates were handled through Google Form platform. The results were duly confirmed and used. In order to handle responses for open questions, the researchers used the same procedure as well as they used referential descriptive statistics and their corresponding conclusions were described in tables and graphs through the information collected.

This study intends to spark a reflection about the issues raised in it, considering the following aspects:

a) It provides a general overview of the RC managers' profiles as to what is expected of them as pedagogical supervisors of distance learning (DE) courses;

b) It can help DE to create not only strategies and instruments for a better pedagogical supervision at the RC level, but it can also help to develop clear and inclusive pedagogical supervision policies to ensure a quality service offered for the same courses;

c) The results of the study will, on the one hand, provide important indicators for the definition of the profile and competences of supervisors and, on the other hand, it is meant to help in developing more contextualized supervision strategies and models that ensure a better articulated and integrated supervision process at the level of RCs.

## 2.1 Presentation and Discussion Results

Considering that supervision involves several sectors within an organisation, the researchers created 4 categories and their respective subcategories to operationalise the research problem. This helped to reflect about the importance and contribution of pedagogical supervision that is used by RC managers. In the same way, the same approach helped the researchers to understand the challenges faced by RC managers since there are several factors that influence the quality of supervision in the RC, within the university under study.

**Table 1 Different Dimensions and Their Respective Categories**

Categories	Sub- Categories
<b>I. Pedagogical supervision approaches</b>	1.1 Organization of the Pedagogical Supervision (PS) processes in the RCs 1.2 The person in charge of PS at the RC; 1.3. Objectives of the PS at the RCs; 1.4. General support from the top in DE.
<b>II. Pedagogical supervision Strategies</b>	2.1 Strategies; 2.1.1. Instruments that favour PS; 2.1.2. The influence of PS in career promotion; 2.1.3 SP results in RCs evaluation and performance 2.1.4 Frequency of the PS in the RCs
<b>III. Catalysing Factors for Change in the effectiveness of Educational Supervision</b>	3.1 Successful experiences of the PS at the RC level; 3.2. Existing or ongoing policies on PS in DE.
<b>IV. Articulation between pedagogical supervision actors and how this affects the success of PS in DE at RCs'</b>	4.1. Mediation between different actors to achieve results; 4.2. Articulation of different activities with coordinators and delegates for the operationalization of different courses; 4.3. The role of students in the improvement of PS; 4.4. Exchange experience of PS with other RCs.

## 2.2 Pedagogical supervision approaches

This research intended to know how different supervision approaches utilized by the RCs influence the effectiveness of pedagogical supervision in DE at UCM. Based on the testimony of the interviewees, the research findings are described as follows: For non-teaching staff and RC delegates, the results showed that the collaborative approach, associated with a democratic approach to management, is prioritized in the use of their competences for the pedagogical supervision practiced at UCM's RCs. Democratic management subsidises collaborative supervision, identified in this group of informants. In this regard, the research concluded that isolated supervision alone does not work. There should be greater collaboration between the participants. The supervisor should lead and guide his team be it involving tutors, non-teaching staff, among others, in promoting collaborative work, in listening more to the involved parties, in criticising and in respecting individual differences. As argued by Alarcão and Canha (2013), Roldão (2007), Pinheiro (2014) and Santos (2012) there are different perspectives concerning collaborative supervision. These authors highlight that this approach contributes to continuous institutional transformation through interaction and mediation, articulated work, and collective reflection. In this aspect, the manager is considered as the promoter of transformation and mutual help and support.

While it can be argued that a collaborative manager needs a leadership posture and should be a participative leader in order to help his/her RC move forward, collaborative supervision, at UCM RCs takes part within a training context as well as it is understood as a process in which more experienced professionals, more informed and knowledgeable people lead others towards harnessing their human potential and development (Alarcão & Tavares, 2010).

In this respect, the supervisor needs to be an individual who leads and recognises communication skills in his/her peers. He or she also needs to be someone who values mutual help and support in order to perform his/her functions successfully. This will enable him/her to achieve the objectives of the institution, and will impact on his/her performance for the improvement of teaching and learning processes.

In relation to the moments in which supervision is done, the testimonials received confirmed that such practices are characterized by a process of organization and preparation for the beginning of pedagogical supervision. This supervision process happens at different times of the year, by means of organized programming through monitoring, sharing of ongoing activities and information of what is going to happen and or be made known. Informants revealed the times in which supervisions take place. These are previously prepared and directed to the delegates and, in general, to tutors. As defended by Alarcão (2002), Novello and Lourino (2012), the organisation of a supervision processes, in the RCs, should be perceived as a complex and comprehensive activity, as a place and time of learning for everyone, namely for students, staff, tutors, delegates and even for the RC managers.

As far as supervisory organization processes are concerned, whichever the task to be performed and whichever the objectives to be accomplished, the pre-organization process should be done at all the possible institutional levels. This means that in the RCs, supervision processes should be organised, known and informed to everyone that would be involved in the whole process. Finally, there is need for UCM to adopt a pre-observatory interaction process so as for the top managerial leaderships to be acquainted with the work that needs to be done for the improvement of service delivery in the institution.

Finally, in relation to the accountability of the supervision process, it has been observed that RC managers have all the responsibility over the management process for all the activities developed in the RCs, be they in terms of teaching and learning or any other. This means that they are responsible for handling and leading all the work developed by non-teaching staff, tutors and students, as well as they represent the Distance Learning Director at the RC level. Therefore, it is the RC managers' responsibility to oversee all the work developed therein. This includes all the teaching and learning processes that are undertaken therein. This is why Fossatti and Sarmiento (2009) state that managers are supervisors *par excellence*. This means that management involves planning, organization and working with people and resources attributed to them to ensure the achievement of institutional objectives.

A responsible person takes responsibility of his/her actions as well as he is accountable and naturally embraces his/her obligations. In this respect, a manager considers himself as the most responsible person for supervision processes. Moreover, he/she does not blame others for mistakes that occur but accepts them as part of his failures or part of his/her successes. Therefore, such a person must have a working plan and organisation, which facilitates any supervision process when it is well devised. Therefore, RC managers, as pedagogical supervisors, should use a schedule of activities, containing all the tasks listed and adopt supervision as one of the priorities for the achievement of teaching and learning objectives.

For the accomplishment of the above-mentioned objectives, the research concluded that there are no documented evidences that support the implementation of this process. However, at the level of different UCM RCs, their managers have been tasked to accomplish certain objectives. This process aims to improve quality, abide to certain established standards and procedures, as well as it promotes internal cohesion. All these situations help to ensure a healthy functioning of the RC activities. As defended by Formosinho (2002), Alarcao and Tavares (2007), Lima (2007) and Chaves (2011), educational supervision is intended to contribute to the personal and

social transformation of an academic community, underpinning the activities that lead to the development of day-to-day activities, as well as to the improvement of quality standards which are necessary for an educational institution to stand among the best in a country.

The objectives of pedagogical supervision enhance learning and can be relevant in the following aspects at the level of the RCs:

- The adoption of leadership styles that are efficient and effective, promoting the balance between non-teaching staff and tutors in their given tasks and in;
- The identification of development needs, both personal and professional in view of enhancing the necessary conditions that promote continuous learning.

For these objectives to be fulfilled, there is need for institutional support for those who develop such tasks. Findings from the research prove that informants received support at the central level in the provision of guidelines such as annual activity plans for the accomplish of DE objectives in Mozambique. As far as supervisory committees and pedagogical supervision are concerned, Alarcão (2009) looks at the pedagogical supervisor as a reflexive actor who has the capacity to move from being an observer to become someone who understands how things are done. In this regard, the supervisor moves from being part of the supervisory body to become someone who understands and stimulates the potential contribution of each of its staff members for the development of collective objectives in an institution.

As it has been observed above, DE practices at UCM ensure the accomplishment of annual activities recommended by yearly activity plans. However, pedagogical supervision activities are not included in such plans. In this regard, it is important for supervisory bodies to pay more attention to UCM's RCs, particularly in relation to what pedagogical supervision and activity plans are concerned.

### **2.3 Pedagogical Supervision Strategies**

In relation to the second dimension, which has to do with pedagogical supervision strategies, Alarcão and Costa (2008) defend that strategy is the intervention plan through which the necessary resources are chosen, organised and managed so as to achieve a given objective. In this respect, each strategic plan for a specific supervision requires a choice, organisation and proper planning management. On this subject, the guiding documents and outlined strategies clarify this aspect as it has been noticed that some of the above-mentioned strategies are used randomly and without much institutional rigour.

- a) Regarding the instruments that privilege pedagogical supervision, it has been noted that all the RCs have a methodology used at different times. In fact, RC managers hold meetings, have departmental reports, visits and meetings. They also have performance evaluation sheets, periodical evaluations, personal evaluation and group evaluation, as well as they have weekly meetings at different times. This is done by using the RC working plans of action for pedagogical supervision.
- b) In relation to the influence of pedagogical supervision on career promotion, the results obtained from the research findings show that supervision does not play any role in promotional change for tutors. This only influences training plans for improving the performance of teaching and learning processes. This happens because tutors have got part-time contracts with the institution. Therefore, supervision can influence the continuity of their service provision for the following years.

On the contrary, supervision activities done to non-teaching staff influence their evaluation processes, performance and trainings because this is meant to improve the quality of their work in the institution. The

supervision done to the delegates only influences the training of teachers in DE as well as this is meant to improve teaching and learning activities in the institution.

- a) Research findings show that supervision results also contribute to the improvement and internal promotion of the non-teaching staff and for the training of tutors. The results obtained from tutors' supervision are a control device for improving the quality of trainings. The trainings help to respond to the problems detected in the context of the supervision of the work developed by tutors. This is why RC managers, as pedagogical supervisors, must achieve the expected results through the work developed by non-teachings staff and tutors. These people help the RCs to achieve their goals and results. The supervision results are meant to help in defining strategies for improvement and continuous training. This also helps non-teaching staff to improve their evaluation and performance. Hence, the results of the PS are meant to correct the mistakes made and support the development of RCs action plans.
- b) In relation to the timing of pedagogical supervisions, research findings ascertain that tutors and delegates are supervised in the tutorial sessions while non-teaching staff are supervised sporadically. Even if there are no institutional guidelines, RC managers carry out different supervision activities to guarantee a good functioning of their respective RCs. These managers plan the frequency of the pedagogical supervision. However, this planning should be known to all the people involved in such activities so as to help them improve everyone's performance.

### **3. Change Catalysing Factors in the effectiveness of Educational Supervision**

In terms of catalysts for change that affect the effective implementation of the strategic approach to supervision in CRs, feedback provision is the strategy used in educational supervision so as to evaluate staff performance. Demonstration, observation, reflective reporting, continuing education, distance supervision, support, supervision sessions and self-supervision are also used as methods that can help to achieve the same results.

To understand catalyst factors that affect the implementation of effective change in the supervision processes of all DE RCs at UCM, the researchers noted that this objective has the following indicators: successful experiences of pedagogical supervision at the RC level and the existence of ongoing policies for pedagogical supervision in DE.

- a) Regarding the experiences of successful pedagogical supervision observed at the RC level, the research findings prove that communication is the means used to measure RCs success in attaining the results obtained. The same approach is used to understand the effectiveness of the trainings provided to non-teaching staff and attendance at all levels, in the RCs.
- b) In contemporary societies, communication is one of the key factors that may help to accomplish institutional development and success. This helps to improve the work developed by the RCs because, through communication, they receive all the developed pedagogical activities done as tutorials, fieldwork and about the behaviour of both tutors and students. Through the same means, RC managers receive financial information such as payment of fees, fines and details concerning tutors' payments.
- c) As far as policies of pedagogical supervision are concerned, at UCM's RCs, the research findings prove that these do not exist. Therefore, each RC manager, coordinator and any other personnel working at managerial positions in the institution develops his/her own approach to supervise all the activities

arising in the RC. Alarcão and Canha (2013) address inspection and supervision as concepts that are related to an emphasis on control. For these authors these concepts may be linked to preventive and punitive measures. This was the trend perceived from the responses provided by RC managers. Therefore, it can be stated that although there is no supervision policy at the institutional level, it is important to note the existence of management standards which comply with the activities that are expected to be developed by the RC managers in accordance with the annual plan of activities.

Moreover, it is important for the institution to seriously consider issues related to pedagogical supervision as an activity that is important for learning, improvement, exchange of ideas and for the development of the same institution. Non-teaching staff and tutors should also understand that abiding to the institutional supervision policy will help them to learn and improve their practices, leading them to accomplish the desired objectives rather than simply looking at it as an inspectorial process.

#### **4. Articulation Between Pedagogical Supervision Actors and How It Affects the Success of PS in DE Courses**

With regard to the articulation between pedagogical supervision actors, it is important to note that this activity is carried out as a tool that will affect the success of their activities. For the different actors involved, mediation, articulation, students' satisfaction and experiences constitute a set of indicators that are meant to help in achieving the success of pedagogical supervision in the RCs. Without these indicators, supervision processes would not be possible to be developed.

In fact, without communication, there is no success. Therefore, communication is the master key for pedagogical supervision. This should happen taking into consideration that it is through communication that some RCs managed to address pedagogical challenges that existed therein. In this respect, mediation between different actors is indispensable in pedagogical supervision and in institutional leadership, in the RCs.

- a) The results of the research findings revealed that there has been no communication between the delegates of the RC courses managers and course coordinators at the central level in DE at UCM. Communication is done through documents' sharing, and there is a triangulation process between delegate managers and coordinating managers of the courses. The coordinator provides information about the progress of his/her course and the delegate provides this information to the RC manager who interacts with both of them if need be;
- b) In terms of students' participation in the improvement of pedagogical supervision, research findings reveal the existence of data concerning students' contribution to this process. This is done through communication, presentation of complains, presentation of reports about tutorial sessions, presentation of reports about the social situation of each student, particularly for those who intend to drop out due to loneliness and financial concerns. Students are also important because they provide valuable information for the RCs reflection and action. As referenced by Carneiro (2014), Rocha (2014), Alarcão et al. (2010, 2014), it is important to conduct a careful assessment about the difficulties and challenges presented by students in relation to their learning processes.
- c) As far as inter-institutional exchange experience is concerned, the research findings show that every year, these take place in general meetings, consultation council meetings. For Brito (2010), these kind of experiences and perspectives of DE should be seen as a positive strategy in contributing to the



training and education of the country's human resources in Mozambique.

## 5. Conclusions

Pedagogical supervision is understood as a necessary and unifying action in higher education institutions, assuming itself as the generator of collaborative practices which are fundamental to the development of professional teaching identities. The central focus of this study concerned pedagogical supervision in all DE resource centres at UCM and its aim was to reflect on the contribution of different approaches within the scope of managers' actions for the development of employees and tutors working capacities.

Based on the positions defended by different research participants, it was possible to understand how pedagogical supervision has been undertaken in different UCM RCs. This also helped to understand the role that their respective managers play in the operationalisation of this activity. From such findings, it has been highlighted that this activity is shared on time at the level of the RCs so that its participants, be they non-teaching staff, tutors and delegates, can be informed on time and that they can have a better preparation so as for them to achieve the best expected performance and results.

Another aspect that is worth highlighting is that UCM should implement policies and strategies that could support a cohesive supervision process in the RCs. This process should not be done spontaneously as it has happened in different RCs, much as the interviewees highlighted. For a better pedagogical supervision to take place, UCM should create different monitoring teams at the macro level. In this regard, this activity should be integrated into an existing sector, responsible for ensuring quality supervision in the RC nationwide;

The other suggestion is that there should be continuous training sessions at the managerial level of the RCs. Such sessions should serve as a platform for discussion groups to converse with the top supervisory colleagues so that they can exchange experiences, analyse the practices being implemented and look for joint and collaborative solutions to the problems being faced in the institution. In the same vein, UCM should implement training sessions for managers, tutors and for the non-teaching staff working at the RCs so as to improve their performance be it in the relationship they develop with students as well as in teaching and learning processes.

In some respect, it is also important to note that most of the non-teaching staff have not been trained in the areas they work in the institution. Therefore, apart from them needing some more training that should be added on top of what they already receive in such areas, there is need for UCM to develop a better follow-up approach to the activities that they develop in the institution.

From the findings presented, the research helped to understand the functioning of UCM's RCs, their composition, their provision of tutorials and it suggested the need for more supervision to improve the quality of its teaching, functioning and problem-solving approaches.

The study helped to awaken the university to the need of supervision policies and guidelines that may help to unify and standardize the functioning of the RCs. The same research awakened the university to the need of more pedagogical supervision so that its RCs can be looked at as part of the university where various activities take place in view of knowledge production and innovation so as to improve the quality of the services provided by the university to the larger community.

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