

# CIBERTEXTUALIDADES 04

Ensino à Distância: Desafios Pedagógicos Distance Education: Pedagogical Challenges

**Publicação do CECLICO - Centro de Estudos Culturais, da Linguagem e do Comportamento**

Universidade Fernando Pessoa



# ficha técnica

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## TÍTULO

**Revista Cibertextualidades 04 (anual) - 2011**

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## EDIÇÃO

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**Praça 9 de Abril, 349 | 4249-004 Porto**

**edicoes@ufp.pt | www.ufp.pt**

## DESIGN E IMPRESSÃO

**Oficina Gráfica da UFP**

## ACABAMENTOS

**Gráficos Reunidos**

## DEPÓSITO LEGAL

**241 161/06**

## ISSN

**1646-4435**

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<http://cibertextualidades.ufp.pt>

org. Pedro Reis e Fátima Silva

PORTO UNIVERSIDADE FERNANDO PESSOA 2011

## **Case study of UFP-UV (2010): “Pedagogic-didactic usefulness and effectiveness of distance learning platforms”**

### **Project: “Manage, know, intervene” (co-financed by the Technical Assistance Operational Programme (POAT), FSE branch, of the QREN)**

Instituto do Emprego e Formação Profissional, IP (IEFP, IP), Centro Nacional de Qualificação de Formadores (CNQF), do Departamento de Formação Profissional  
(Translated by Fátima Silva)

#### **1. Introdução**

At UFP it is widely recognised that the virtual learning environment extends beyond the classroom space, provides greater momentum in higher education and improves the pedagogic relationship not only in DE courses but also in blended or even face-to-face courses.

All the material and didactic resources, videos, teaching material, exercises, links related to each discipline, news and further additional information are placed on the platform. Thus, the platform centralises all the information, allowing gains in terms of time and facilitation of the interaction with new sources of formal knowledge, with the instructor, and even collaboration among colleagues.

Each instructor is responsible for using the tools they deem necessary for the purpose of planning, communication with learners, delivery of resources and pedagogic interaction.

#### **2. Profile of platform usage**

We tried to research whether the technological environment provided to those involved in the educational process – learners and faculty – is easy to use and functional; whether it provides the support required to develop didactic resources; whether it allows the necessary learning interactions; whether it supports diverse activities for different learning styles; whether it supports tutorial and didactic activities regarding communication and collaboration facilities; whether it supports assessment, pedagogic management and follow-up of the learner's process.

##### **2.1. Organization and production of learning objects**

The development and organization of didactic material and activities on the Sakai platform are positively evaluated by the participants. The platform features a structure by area, which is efficient and

enables built-in authoring; updating and maintenance of learning objects; sharing and reuse of content. In addition, it has a Web interface to up/download resources (packets of html pages, images, flash, multimedia) and supports SCORM content produced with the content authoring tool – **eXeLearning**, which is the most used by instructors.

The current version of the Course Management System installed on UFP-UV – **Sakai 2.6** – shows limitations in the templates; however, this aspect is not of great value, since it is considered of little importance to the pedagogic project and the design of material. The configuration is fixed and defined by the platform administrator although the instructor is free to edit the names in the Menu. The upcoming 3.0 version will allow every instructor to customise their area, thus creating more personalised learning environments.

## 2.2. Tutoring

The course management system used at UFP promotes participatory communication that emphasises discussion and collaborative work, primarily through the use of the Forums. One of the aspects considered relevant is the need to centralise communication on the platform, to keep track of the discussions and avoid the dispersion of information.

A systemic approach is advocated, centred on the use of educational technologies that UFP-UV provides and that learners and instructors know are available.

Educational technologies allow the monitoring of learners. The Chat and Elluminate *Live!* are tools which permit real-time flexible tutoring and that is similar to the monitoring of face-to-face learners. There are fixed office hours although with flexibility to receive questions from learners outside these hours. On-demand sessions by learners also occur.

Essential instructor/tutor competences include the ability to be aware of the learners' doubts, to be able to track their progress, and to guide them towards an ever greater autonomy in the learning process and management of knowledge. The instructor must be able to anticipate situations of anxiety and disorientation; consider new teaching methods and be capable of designing didactic material that arouse and hold the learners' interest. This implies the search for material and strategies that make sense to the instructor, which they would like to see used in their own education, and which motivate them; thus, enabling them to teach their students with greater enthusiasm and interest.

### 2.3. Analysis of Frequency of Use and Usefulness of the Functional Dimensions of the platform in the work areas of the learning context<sup>1</sup>

In order to emphasise the activities which have an impact on the teaching-learning process, the following **functional dimensions** of the platform have been found:

- **Communication** (sending summons, sending documents, news release, clarification of learners’ doubts, ...);
- **Collaboration/Interaction** (conversations/discussions on the forums, chats, wikis, presentations, ...);
- **Availability of information** (resource sharing, glossary construction, databases, ...);
- **Gathering of information** (tests, surveys, quizzes, work delivery).

On the other hand, in the context of learning the following **working areas** have been found:

- A** – Work carried out among instructors;
- B** – Learning activities developed between instructors and learners;
- C** – Work of the management teams;
- D** – Learners’ activities and projects;
- E** – Work carried out among institutions.

The **frequency of use** of the functional dimensions of the platform (*communication, collaboration/interaction; availability of information and delivery of information*) in each of the different work areas (*among instructors, in activities – teaching-learning, learners’, management teams, work among institutions*), is represented in Table 1.

**Table 1** – Analysis of the frequency of use of the functionality of the platforms in pedagogic activities

	Work carried out among instructors	Teaching-learning activities developed between instructors and learners	Work of the management team	Learners’ activities and projects	Work carried out among institutions
RR: Rare R: Regular F: Frequent					
Communication	F	F	F	RR	R
Collaboration / Interaction	R	R	RR	R	R
Availability of information	F	F	F	F	RR
Gathering of information	R	R	RR	RR	RR

The **usefulness** of the functional dimensions of the platform (*communication, collaboration/interaction; availability of information and delivery of information*) in each of the different work areas (*among instructors, in activities –teaching-learning, learners’, managing teams, work among institutions*) was questioned and is represented in Table 2.

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Pedro N., Soares F., Matos J. and Santos M.(2008). Utilização de plataformas de gestão de aprendizagem em contexto escolar: Estudo nacional. Centro Competências FCUL - DGIDC/ ME)

**Table 2** – Analysis of the usefulness of the functional dimensions of the platforms

	Work carried out among instructors	Teaching-learning activities developed between instructors and learners	Work of the management team	Learners' activities and projects	Work carried out among institutions
L: Little MD: Moderate M: Much					
Communication	M	M	M	MD	MD
Collaboration / Interaction	MD	MD	L	L	MD
Availability of information	M	M	M	M	L
Gathering of information	MD	M	L	L	L

Some factors were presented which, in the use of platforms, may be identified as being effective effects in the learning process:

- Availability of material/resources for distance learning;
- Ease of communication with faculty and colleagues;
- Assignments / tests at a distance.

#### 2.4. Monitoring and Assessment

The system of assessment, classification and qualification at UFP is stipulated and expressed in the Pedagogic Norms of the University<sup>2</sup>, which indicates the specific provisions for blended and/or distance education.

<sup>2</sup> [https://docs.google.com/viewer?url=http://www.ufp.pt/images/stories/aurea/regulamento\\_bolonha.pdf](https://docs.google.com/viewer?url=http://www.ufp.pt/images/stories/aurea/regulamento_bolonha.pdf)

The instructor is responsible for developing diversified assessment procedures, in accordance with the Assessment Guide – Distance Learning System (DL) – UFP-UV.

#### 2.5. Monitoring the learning process

Monitoring is accomplished by the tool, developed by the UFP technical team, *SiteStats*<sup>3</sup> which generates reports about the use of tools according to the discipline/ project area.

The UFP-UV platform provides information on the frequency, attendance and time spent on the platform and generates useful reports for the learner's activity in the courses, informal exams and communication tools.

The *contact* work time for a curricular unit in the DL system comprises synchronous communication (seminars via Elluminate) as well as asynchronous communication (activities via Sakai).

Usage statistics per user shows details of the type of action performed and the tool used. The system does not provide the time spent on the task.

<sup>3</sup> Site Stats is a tool for Sakai 2.1 or higher that provides site statistics by user, event or resource. The tool provides an overview page with summary information about site visits and activity, an events page listing site events, a resources page listing site resource activity, a preferences page and a site list view for administrators.

Individual learner's progress pace is supplied by the platform, which provides grades on individual performance through tests by discipline "area".

Grade records and reports of the learner's progress are available only by discipline "area"; thus, it is not possible to obtain a global monitoring of a learner for a course.

## 2.6. Management, administration and support

The Sakai platform, according to the UFP-UV project coordinators and technicians, has proven a good pedagogic management, administration and support instrument: management of courses and resources; content management; frequency of access; duration of access; learner's progress; classifications/grades; certificates; feedback; statistics; surveys; quizzes (creation and management); grade report editing; schedules.

### Management and administration

Users (instructors, learners and course coordinator) can be added to the discipline areas. They may already exist in the system, be referenced by the UFP LDAP system or be added/created by specifying an external e-mail address.

### Activities linked to users' management

- User management: authentication; password management; integrated enrolment registration;

- Create a user, import user(s), assign different user profiles;
- Create and edit user profiles;
- Batch operations for user and course importing/editing via Web services available for this purpose;
- Import data via XML, CSV via Web services available for this purpose;

### Management of events through the Schedule (by area and aggregated in the workspace).

- Availability of relevant didactic resources to ensure the learner's progress
- Resources management, available as "Tools" in each discipline/project area (administered by area): Events; Learning objects; Tests; Polls; Chats; Forums
- Group work (a range of functionalities for specific group work; virtual classroom *Illuminate Live! on-demand*)
- The creation of a "Project area" to support a specific working group is usual. The forums is the starting point for discussion and interaction, and the main tool used
- The learner's "Workspace" allows the creation of portfolios where they can exhibit their work
- Distribution/delivery of e-learning courses, using the tool that integrates with the UFP Information System (SI)
- The platform generates useful reports for the learner's activity in the courses, informal exams and communication tools.

### Support and technical support

Help documentation is available on the UFP-UV platform<sup>4</sup>. In addition, there is a UFP-UV Support telephone line, email Support and contextual support.

### 3. Evaluation of the teaching experience on UFP-UV

#### Impact of the use of platforms

A study on Internal Communication at UFP, undertaken by ProjEstQ office, in its report which presented results – 1<sup>st</sup> phase (April 2008) – refers UFP-UV as one of the most used services at the University.

Thus, when questioned on the use of the platform and taking a sample of 40% of instructors and 55% of learners at UFP, 63.4% of respondents indicated using the platform against 36.6% who reported not using it.

In relation to the respondents who do not use the platform, this report further states that the reasons given indicate that one-third is roughly distributed by lack of practice, training and lack of knowledge on using the platform. It is worthy stressing that only 2.6% indicated not knowing about the platform.

The following table represents the latest data, regarding the use of UFP-UV in the academic year of 2008/2009.

Data for the previous year	2008/09
No. of users (learners / instructors)	5413 learners, 537 active instructors
No. of participation in training sessions	± 150 instructors / ± 15 non-instructor collaborators
No. of instructors / tutors involved	3
No. of different courses / disciplines	112 courses / 1411 disciplines (946 discipline areas – may aggregate classes of different disciplines)
Average duration of implemented courses	6 semestres (180 ECTS)

The level of learning experience is evaluated as very satisfactory, and the drop-out rate is very low, as is the level of anxiety.

The eLearning experience at Fernando Pessoa University is evaluated as very positive, constituting, for the institution, a means to diversify the courses it offers and promote new ways to teach/learn.

The UFPV-UV is the entry portal of all those who are part of the University for their learning, teaching or training. Seen as a solution that integrates technology platforms, didactic resources and educational activities, it promotes better time management for instructors and learners, it is a meeting point for discussion and debate, it centralises information shared between users and it stimulates the accomplishing of the tasks at a distance within the curricular activities, by learners of the University throughout the world.

4 <https://elearning.ufp.pt/portal/help/main>