**The COVID-19 pandemic impacts on the Higher Education Academic Community: An explanatory and descriptive approach**

Abstract

The COVID-19 outbreak has caused many consequences, including a severe worldwide halt in education, as students, teachers and all learning institutions had to quickly adapt to a brand new and constantly changing reality.

The pandemic has influenced the learning community to a point that it even affected the welfare and health conditions. Academic and professional planning suffered the consequences to a level we have yet to understand.

As learning institutions were trying to navigate their way in this new normal, millions of people had to change and adapt their daily lives and routines. Because of the restrictive measures imposed to minimize the risk of contagion that could come with the “crowded” classroom environment, all face-to-face academic and administrative activities were halted.

In mid-2020 the projections made had indicated the preventive measures taken would be temporary. However, as the year of 2020 progressed and the need to extend the official restrictive measures (quarantine) arisen, though it has been somewhat intermittent. This decision had been made with the goal of containing the virus transmission by keeping everyone at home and not out in public places.

In March 2020, the Brazilian Health Ministry issued an ordinance defining strategies to contain the coronavirus outbreak. After the public health emergency was declared, the Education Ministry revised the Provisional Decree, authorizing a flexibilization of school calendars as well as the change from face-to-face classes to distance learning, using information and communication technology.

Therefore, learning institutions all over the country had to deploy strategies to face the sanitary crisis, the main strategy being the change from in-loco activities to remote activities on “digital means”.

This setting and its demands brought forth new expectations for learning as a whole, especially in higher education. The unexpected and drastic change in the education structure and new format of the teaching-learning process on higher education institutions came with many challenges, continuous uncertainty and stress, for both students and teachers.

The overall Brazilian social situation is expected to worsen considering the upsurge of the pandemic in early 2021, the challenges faced by the public health system in Brazil (SUS) and the extremely slow advances regarding vaccination. It is possible to conclude that immediate consequences from the extension of digital learning and isolation measures to avoid contagion will lead to severe consequences to the academic and pedagogical development.

Considering all the factors mentioned and the worldwide emergency situation of the pandemic, the aim of this research is to study the consequences of the Covid-19 outbreak on the higher education community, to collect exploratory data to understand how teachers and students are experiencing this event and to discover the short and long term impacts in the teaching-learning process affected by the strategies deployed by learning institutions.

Therefore, this exploratory and descriptive research has the following objectives:

(1) to examine how higher education teachers and students experience the COVID-19 pandemic given the sanitary restrictions and social distancing (quarantine and social isolations);

(2) to research how the teaching-learning process was adapted to a completely digital setting (100% online) in higher education following the restrictions to decrease and avoid virus dissemination, and how they affect University teachers and students;

(3) to understand the impressions from University students and teachers regarding the strategies deployed by their institutions and the possible consequences facing this new reality that has been imposed by Covid-19.