"Doctor's title": social representations about distance learning.

Érica Steffen Ramos [a], Adelina Novaes [b].

[a] Universidade Cidade de São Paulo, steffen_erica@hotmail.com.

[b] Fundação Carlos Chagas, adelina.novaes@unicid.edu.br.

Abstract. The possibility of expanding distance classes to up to 40% of undergraduate law courses in Brazil motivated the present study, which sought to identify the social representations of law professionals and students regarding distance education. The coronavirus pandemic has made the topic more prominent, given the need to think about more sophisticated methodologies for the new social context. The Theory of Social Representations was used as a theoretical-methodological foundation based on studies by Moscovici (2012), Marková (2017), and Novaes (2010, 2015). To this end, an electronic questionnaire was created consisting of a free word association test and objective and discursive questions. In total, 51 participants responded to the questionnaire, of which 41 had already taken at least one distance learning subject. The results demonstrated highlights in the social representations of professionals and law students, whose understanding of distance education was based on two main axes: discipline and practicality, whose elements sought to balance like a scale, a symbol of the law course. The understanding prevailed that distance classes are not suitable for law degrees, given that the teacher is seen as the protagonist, while in distance learning the student must be the protagonist. Less contemporary elements of the imaginary of legal education were preserved, such as formal rigor and elitist character, since they understood distance education as a modality in which the quality is worse, demonstrating that they intend to become legal professionals not only in view of his social motivation, as well as in view of the power and intellectual status conferred on him, guaranteed by the traditional doctor's title and pronoun of treatment.

Keywords. Legal education, Law graduation, Distance education.

1. Introduction

The disorderly expansion of undergraduate law courses in Brazil is a cause of resistance by the Brazilian Bar Association, especially in view of the possibility of an even greater expansion of the offering of undergraduate courses in full distance learning.

This hypothesis has been established in private educational institutions, whose adherence to distance methodologies has already been used up to its limit of 40% of the total course workload, in accordance with Ordinance no. 2.177/2019 from the Ministry of Education [1], which motivated the development of the study.

In turn, the coronavirus pandemic brought greater relevance to the topic, given the need to think about more sophisticated methodologies, with the use of information and communication technologies, whose social context favored the search for understanding the social representations of professionals and students of right on distance education and enable reflection on legal courses in the country, whether face-to-face or distance learning.

2. Context of legal education in Brazil

The historical occupation of law graduates in spaces of power contributed to building the social imaginary [2] and keeping the choice of legal course on the rise, the supply of which is growing increasingly:
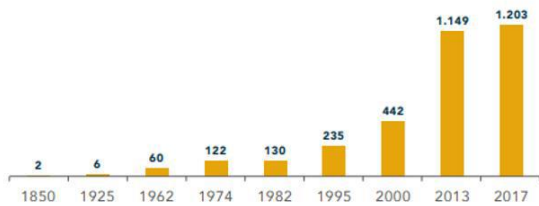
Fig. 1 – Evolution of the number of law courses in Brazil [3].

3. Theoretical-methodological strategy

The Theory of Social Representations was chosen as a theoretical-methodological strategy considering the possibility of explaining how the representational phenomenon operates in social groups, depending on its three dimensions: attitude, information and image. These allow us to consider how the system of values, affectivity and culture of a given group contributes to the constitution of the object of representation [4].

This study included the participation of legal professionals, teachers, students, magistrates, jurists and lawyers as the target audience, considering that legal practice and legal education constitute a true amalgam.

The data collection instrument used was an electronic questionnaire made available by Google Forms and sent through social media, given that the period in which it was published, from April 1, 2022 to April 30, 2022, higher education institutions were closed due to the pandemic.

This questionnaire was divided into two blocks of questions, the first focused on participants' understanding of "distance education" and the second on socioeconomic profile issues.

To this end, in the first part, we used the free word association technique, whose statement was: "Write 03 (three) words that come to mind when you hear Distance Education. Number them from 1 to 3, according to the order of importance", which sought to obtain spontaneous conceptions of the semantic universe of the participants [5]. Essay questions were also used using memes, similar to those used on social networks, with a view to obtaining spontaneous and critical responses.

For the second part of the participants' socioeconomic profile, closed questions were prepared.

4. Results

In total, 51 participants responded to the questionnaire, of which 41 had already taken at least one distance learning subject, the majority of whom identified themselves as female, ranging in age from 18 to 24 years old.

4.1 Evocations for distance learning

The evocations were processed in the EVOC2000 computer program [6], which allowed the creation of a graph with four quadrants, which allowed us to get closer to the semantic universe of the representational object.

Fig. 2 – EVOC program report for "distance education".

This report considered the order of frequency, the order of evocation and the order of importance attributed by the participants. Among the most important evocations, "discipline" and "practicality" stood out, with identical frequencies, accompanied by ease with lower frequency and high importance as well.

As observed, in the upper left quadrant the evocations are closer to the central elements of the semantic network. Those constants in the upper right quadrant are further from the center. While those located in the lower left quadrant comprise the contrast elements and those in the lower right quadrant comprise the more peripheral elements [7].

Despite the use of this analysis, the study did not seek a structural approach to TRS, but to obtain spontaneous evocations that were close to the participants' semantic network.

4.2 Differences between distance learning and remote teaching

In total, 20 participants indicated that they were unaware of the difference between remote teaching and distance education, while 15 pointed out differences related to the synchronicity of the modalities, 12 pointed out differences in the pedagogical organization and 4 did not clearly point out the differences.

As a result, the understanding that because distance learning was asynchronous did not allow moments of live interaction, which made learning difficult. This characteristic, however, allowed flexibility in studies,

enabling the choice of environment and technology.

It was found that the participants found remote teaching strange, suggesting a destabilization in the social representations they had regarding the didactic-pedagogical organization of classes, since in their understanding remote or in-person classes were identical, as they preserved rigid schedules, identical system assessment and presence system, with the difference that the first were mediated by information technologies.

This finding allowed us to understand that remote teaching was characterized by improvisation, while distance classes were marked by an organizational structure previously oriented towards virtuality, allowing better student use.

4.3 Experience

Positive aspects related to the practicality of studies, well-being, flexible schedules and reduced costs were highlighted. Regarding the negative aspects, the lack of infrastructure in educational institutions, the lack of motivation to study alone, among others, stood out. This question presented a meme as an interpretation resource.

4.4 Interaction

The choice of a meme as an interpretative resource indicated a class with a synchronous moment between teacher and student, which should be interpreted spontaneously by the participant, who should associate it with remote teaching.

The indication that it was remote teaching and not distance education was pointed out by only one participant, whose response pointed out the main characteristic of distance learning, which is that it is asynchronous.

The lack of interaction was indicated as an element of difficulty, associated with a cultural element of Brazilians who are mostly oriented towards physical contact. In this sense, distance education causes strangeness, as it does not allow physical contact, destabilizing social representations anchored in the imagination of the Brazilian being [8]. As they do not know for sure how to interact at a distance, which reflects an ambivalent behavior: some of the participants prefer not to interact, as it is more comfortable and it is not necessary to build new social representations, while another part feels uncomfortable in the beginning, but over time they build new conceptions about the interaction, making what was strange familiar [9].

5. A synthesis

It was considered interesting to systematize the discursive questions into categories, dividing them into initial, intermediate and final categories.

The concepts of distance education were associated with the protagonism of the student, whose characteristics they should present were autonomy, determination and time management capacity, allowing fluidity in studies.

Autonomy was associated with the cultural and intellectual background required of the student to follow distance classes, the lack of which would constitute one of the hypotheses for their evasion of distance courses.

6. Final Considerations

This study made it possible to identify the keynotes of the social representations of law professionals and students who understand distance education from two main axes: discipline and practicality, whose elements seek to be balanced as in a scale, a symbol of the law course.

The discipline was understood as a sine qua non condition for the teaching-learning process, indicating the student as the protagonist. While practicality was understood in terms of dynamism of studies, flexibility of schedules, ease of entry and cost, and choice of study environments.

The adoption of distance methodologies has been gaining more and more space, however, this modality has caused some strangeness among professionals and law students, whose imagination is anchored in more archaic elements such as expository classes, according to the Coimbra model, from which it can be inferred that more innovative elements, such as methodologies that employ ICTs, were not integrated into their curricular components at graduation.

The understanding of graduation as a space where the teacher is the protagonist does not coincide with distance education, whose modality places the student as the protagonist, suggesting that they can play a leading role in postgraduate studies.

This study also made it possible to identify which elements closest to social representations of legal education remain preserved: the elitist character and formal rigor. In this sense, they understand distance learning mainly as a lower quality education, which they reject, as they intend to become professionals not only in relation to social contribution, but also due to the intellectual status that the profession confers, strengthened by the title of doctor.

There is a convergence of interests from private educational institutions and a high demand for legal courses, suggesting that distance learning is a new way of maintaining an old educational policy associated with the phenomenon of legal bachelor's degrees [10].

While when comparing the offer of legal courses from educational institutions of excellence, with private institutions that privilege economic advantage, there is an abyss, as the former offer distance learning with sophisticated resources, while the latter privilege the transmission of content purely. In this regard, distance learning is understood as one of the expressions of liberalism,

allowing a formally democratic, but materially unequal, education.

This EaD format does not seem to coincide with what will allow the student to become a protagonist during their undergraduate studies, or even bring them closer to a more critical view of reality, with the ability to transform it [11].

It made it possible to obtain information to reflect on legal education in the future, as well as to rethink professional practices, which form a true amalgam, since professors of law chairs are still, for the most part, the exponents in their areas of activity, outside of academies. It is hoped that this can be modified, including pedagogical subjects in law courses, since today's student will be tomorrow's teacher.

7. References

[1] BRASIL. Portaria nº 2.117, de 6 de dezembro de 2019. Brasília, DF: Diário Oficial da União, 06 dez. 2019. Available in: https://www.in.gov.br/en/web/dou/-/portaria-n-2.117-de-6-de-dezembro-de-2019-232670913. Acess in: 12 jul. 2023.

[2] Adorno S. *Os aprendizes do poder: o bacharelismo liberal na política brasileira*. Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo; 2019; 318 p.

[3] ORDEM DOS ADVOGADOS DO BRASIL. Exame de Ordem em Números. 2020. Elaborada por FGV. Available in: https://examedeordem.oab.org.br/pdf/exame-de-ordem-em-numeros-IV.pdf. Acess in: 2 set. 2022.

[4] Marková I. *Mente dialógica: senso comum e ética.* Fundação Carlos Chagas e PUCPRess, Curitiba, 2017.

[5] Sá C. *A construção do objeto de pesquisa em representações sociais*. Editora da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 1998, 110 p.

[6] EVOC2000. Version 5. [software]. Aix en Provence. 2002. Available in: https://evocation-2005.software.informer.com/download/. Acess in: 8 dez. 2022.

[7] LIMA A. **O bom aluno das representações sociais de professoras da rede municipal de ensino do Recife.** 2009. 384 f. Dissertação (Mestrado) - Curso de Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação, Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, Recife, 2009. Available in: https://repositorio.ufpe.br/handle/123456789/4282. Acess in: 31 dez. 2022.

[8] NOVAES A; SOUZA, C. Protagonismo? - identidade e representações sociais de estudantes de pedagogia sobre o Brasil. In: ARRUDA, Angela; SOUZA, Clarilza Prado de (org.). *Imaginário e representação social de universitários sobre o Brasil e a escola brasileira: um estudo construído com múltiplas possibilidades.* Annablume, São Paulo, 2013. p. 27-52.

[9] MOSCOVICI S. *A Psicanálise, Sua Imagem e Seu Público.* Vozes, Petrópolis, 2012.

[10] NOVAES A. *Por uma análise psicossocial do curso de direito.* 2010. 248 f. Tese (Doutorado) - Curso de Doutorado em Educação: Psicologia da Educação, Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo, São Paulo, 2010. Available in: https://tede2.pucsp.br/handle/handle/15946. Acess in: 24 mar. 2021.

[11] FREIRE P. *Pedagogia da Autonomia: Saberes Necessários à Prática Educativa*. 58. ed. Paz e Terra, São Paulo, 2019.