

Emerging challenges of initial education in School Psychology during the pandemic

Izabella Mendes **SANT'ANA**¹  0000-0001-9381-350X

Mara Aparecida Lissarassa **WEBER**²  0000-0002-0758-434X

Adinete Sousa da Costa **MEZZALIRA**³  0000-0001-9869-2030

Abstract

This paper aims to discuss initial education in School Psychology in Brazil in the framework of the pandemic, addressing the challenges in emergency remote teaching. Therefore, considerations were made about the initial training of the school psychologists, their relationship with the performance of emergency remote teaching, in universities and, finally, the difficulties existing in the current reality. The training challenge during the pandemic refers to the change in the way activities are carried out and theoretical and practical teaching subjects that use digital technologies; in addition to difficulties associated with social conditions, health or access to equipment and the internet, which have implications for the training of undergraduates across the country. The importance of a careful look at the training of a professional who has experienced a different training process in relation to academic experiences and the development of professional skills is discussed.

Keywords: Covid-19; Pandemic; Psychologist education; School psychology.

The Coronavirus disease - 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic caused by the new Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) family coronavirus has triggered a health crisis that has not only affected world health, but also economics, education and politics. According to Antunes (2020), in a devastating scenario, the pandemic scaled and aggravated the conditions of poverty, unemployment, education precariousness and work, as well as generated feelings of hopelessness and concern, experiences of mourning and political

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¹ Universidade Federal de São Carlos, Centro de Ciências Humanas e Educação, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação. Rod. João Leme dos Santos, km 110, SP-264. Bairro do Itinga, 18052-780, Sorocaba, SP, Brasil. Correspondence to: I.M. SANT'ANA. E-mail: <izabellams@ufscar.br>.

² Centro Universitário de Brasília, Curso de Psicologia. Brasília, DF, Brasil.

³ Universidade Federal do Amazonas, Faculdade de Educação, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Psicologia. Manaus, AM, Brasil.

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and social tensions. Thus, in many countries, several actions have been implemented to ensure the physical, psychological, social and economic integrity of the population.

This situation brought many challenges to society, changed people's daily lives and intensified social and economic problems around the world. In Brazil, the problems highlighted in confronting the pandemic in the political field, especially in the Federal Government, in relation to short, medium and long-term planning and regulations for periods of social isolation, including those in connection with education, showed the government's inadequacy and inefficiency in dealing with this reality (Carvalho, 2020).

The pandemic affected everyone differently, and institutions and professionals who could contribute to alleviate the suffering arising from this event also had their services limited and/or their routines altered. In this scenario, institutions and psychology professionals were called upon to resume their activities with new operating and organization strategies in accordance with current health standards for the prevention of COVID-19.

Thus, on June 16, 2020, the Ministry of Education, through Ordinance nº 544⁴, established the replacement of in person classes by classes using digital media as long as the COVID-19 pandemic situation persists. According to this ordinance, higher education institutions should define which subjects could be offered in this digital system, which pedagogical tools would be used, as well as how assessments would be carried out during this period (Ministério da Educação, 2020). In general, based on this ordinance, education in Brazil had to be reorganized and offered remotely through digital information and communication technologies, but without taking into account markers such as social class, gender, territory, deficiency, among others.

Given this context, we sought to discuss initial training in School Psychology in Brazil in connection with the pandemic, addressing the challenges involved in Emergency Remote Teaching (E.R.T). To that effect, we made considerations about the initial training of school psychologists, their relationship with the realization of E.R.T. in universities and, finally, the difficulties existing within the current reality.

Academic training of school psychologists: some considerations

Historically, the insertion of psychologists in educational frameworks has led to rethinking about the initial training of these professionals, focused on the different demands that arise in the Brazilian educational scenario. Researchers, professionals, institutions and professional bodies have developed researches and prepared guiding documents for the training and performance of School Psychologists based on the *Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação* (LDB, Law on Brazilian Education Guidelines and Bases), the *Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente* (ECA, Child and Adolescent Statute), in the *Plano Nacional de Educação* (PNE, National Education Plan), in the *Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais* (DCN, National Curriculum Guidelines) and in the *Conselho Nacional de Educação* (CNE, National Education Council).

Despite these legal frameworks and the political, economic and social situation in our country that directly affect the conduct of theoretical disciplines and internships in School Psychology, the skills required by the real world are not always offered in these initial training courses. When dealing with the concept of competence in higher education, Marinho-Araújo and Almeida (2016) and Marinho-Araújo and Rabelo (2015) explain that the Curriculum Guidelines for Higher Education should be based on competence indicators that consider historical, cultural and social aspects in the dialectical process of human development and learning.

⁴ This Ordinance revokes Ministry of Education Ordinances nº 343, dated March 17, 2020, nº 345, dated March 19, 2020, and nº 473, dated May 12, 2020

In this connection, competence cannot be reduced to training or technical dimensions, but needs to incorporate the intersubjective dimensions that occur in the educational processes and that affect the process of human development. Thus, the development of skills should not be merely associated with the demands of the labor market through universal and/or sequential problem-solving instructions, but should be linked to a perspective of sensitivity and understanding of the subject and the problem-situation under a dialectical bias. This will allow the subject: (a) to visualize the situation peculiarities; (b) to mobilize the necessary resources to transfer knowledge in a flexible way into action and (c) to develop the commitment to always reframe his/her performance in view of the problems faced (Marinho-Araújo & Rabelo, 2015).

As explained by Marinho-Araújo and Almeida (2003), the competence to act in a problem-situation is characterized by the mobilization of available resources – behaviors and knowledge – by the subject, which must articulate to the critical points of the situation and aim at taking decision, as well as the necessary and useful referrals for what is being demanded.

This challenge of developing professional skills is set in the initial training of the School Psychologist both in the context of theoretical subjects and in supervised internships in the area. Regarding the acquisition of knowledge in theoretical subjects, Marinho-Araújo and Rabelo (2015) explain that knowledge and competence are interdependent; however, they have specificities that differentiate them. Knowledge is essential to build competence; however, the way the subject appropriates the theory is not enough to measure his competence to act in a problem-situation.

Hence, Marinho-Araújo (2005) states that developing competences goes beyond the acquisition of knowledge, as it will require the subject to intentionally and planned manner to mobilize internal and external resources to face the daily challenges that present themselves in the personal and/or professional field. It is important to highlight that the researcher does not minimize the importance of theoretical knowledge acquired on college graduation. On the contrary, she advocates the selection of critical and contextualized theories for the construction of a personal and personalized trajectory of professional skills that will serve to consolidate the identity of the school psychologist committed with social and educational issues and positioned in an ethical-political manner.

Regarding the importance of supervised internship for the formation of the future school psychologist, Guzzo et al. (2009) and Silva Neto et al. (2014) emphasize that it is through insertion in the educational field that interns will have the opportunity to recognize their personal and technical limitations when faced with the complexities of the demands coming from the school community. Therefore, Ferreira et al. (2019) explain that the adequate development of the skills of trainees who intend to work in schools cannot be restricted to the use of methodologies and knowledge that encompass only the articulation of theory and practice. It is also essential to consider the development of such trainees' psychological resources to deal with political, social, cultural and emotional demands.

Initial School Psychology training from the adoption of Emergency Remote Teaching (E.R.T.) in universities

According to CNE the “[...] undergraduate course in Psychology must be offered in the in person modality, in view of the complex nature of the psychologist’s professional skills” (Ministério da Educação 2019, Art. 3). However, with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, we came across the possibility of offering the modality of E.R.T. for those students.

On April 28, 2020, CNE presented Opinion CNE/CP n°. 5/2020 with guidelines for Basic Education and Higher Education during the pandemic period, especially with regard to the performance of non-face-to-face

educational activities. In the document, a list of technologies or means that can be used in the educational field was reported, and the role of family members as mediators of their children's school tasks was indicated. Thus, on June 16, 2020, the *Ministério da Educação* (MEC, Ministry of Education) issued Ordinance nº 544, which established the replacement of in person classes by classes using digital media for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Based on that opinion, E.R.T. was presented as a pedagogical strategy to maintain the functioning of the teaching period in the education systems. This adherence to E.R.T., however, brought different consequences to the teaching and learning process, besides intensifying the precariousness of teaching work and not ensuring the democratic functioning of education. Researchers have pointed out some limitations, such as: (a) difficulties for students, especially the poorest from the outskirts of cities and rural areas, in having access to quality equipment and internet (Pott, 2020); (b) need to train educators – also carried out on an emergency basis – to work with resources and technologies in the teaching process; and (c) lack of students' training regarding access to the internet to study, considering the autonomy and skills needed in the use of these technologies (Gusso et al., 2020; Pott, 2020). In the case of university students, Maia and Dias (2020) state that, in addition to problems in accessing digital technological resources, difficulties such as anxiety, depression and stress conditions that cause deleterious effects on the mental health of teachers and students are evidenced.

In general, the authors discuss the importance of planning emergency remote teaching, aiming to overcome improvisations and the mere transposition of on-site teaching to the remote framework. They also indicate the need for institutions to rethink their own concept of teaching, seeking to define a work project that is more coherent with the concept of quality education that is aimed at in higher education.

This situation got even worse in educational institutions that did not have available the Distance Learning modality, as was the case with Psychology courses. In Brazil, undergraduate Psychology teaching was never offered at a distance and the instant transfer from classroom to E.R.T. without pedagogical, structural and organizational planning imposed more challenges for this training. Before approaching the difficulties arising from this new situation in the initial training of psychologists, it is necessary to explain that there are important differences between what is configured as Distance Education (DE) and the proposal of E.R.T.

The understanding of DE is very broad (Hermida & Bonfim, 2006). In the literature, several concepts of DE are found, which cover: (a) the non-presential relationship between teacher and student and the use of books; (b) study materials in correspondence courses; and (c) conventional and/or modern technologies for educational action with individuals and groups based on methods or procedures that include studies, assessments, guidance and distance tutoring (Landim, 1997; Mugnol, 2009).

According to Valente (2014), with the emergence of Digital Information and Communication Technologies (DICT), there were changes in the field of distance education associated with theoretical concepts, pedagogical approaches, educational practices and student learning assessment processes. For the identification of DE courses, the author also warns on the existence of a plurality of terms and denominations used in the international literature such as web-based education, online education, virtual classroom, distributed learning.

As pointed out by Costa et al. (2015), the term Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) has been commonly used in reference to electronic and technological devices, also including older technologies such as newspapers and television. Researchers have used, however, the term DICT to refer especially to digital technologies.

With the 2020 pandemic the term E.R.T. has been misused and often used as equivalent to DE. This tends to camouflage the impacts that E.R.T. can cause in the teaching and learning process, considering that DE is a permanent educational modality that uses information means and technologies in the didactic-pedagogical mediation, with specific policies for access, monitoring and evaluation. In addition, it foresees

professionals trained for the pedagogical use of virtual tools. All of this was not possible to materialize immediately in the E.R.T. proposal because the so-called remote learning is exceptional, temporary and of an emergency use, and its purpose is to replace face-to-face teaching with activities that use digital educational resources during the period of social distancing.

Although remote training has expanded due to the pandemic, the studies of Alves (2020) and Canabrava et al. (2020) point out that it is configured as temporary adaptation of activities and methodologies used in the face-to-face context and that it does not always achieve its objectives. They also point out to the improvisation and urgency of many actions and plans carried out, in addition to the fact that teachers were compelled to review and adapt their practices to develop activities based on digital technologies, without adequate support or proper training about such tools.

Santos (2020) clarifies that, although there may be curricular experiences favorable to learning in remote education, the practices have repeated massive pedagogical models and underutilized the potential of technologies and cyberculture in the educational area, making teaching tiring and stressful for students and teachers alike. However, as highlighted by Hodges et al. (2020), the objective of E.R.T. in the current scenario is not to recreate a robust educational system, but to provide temporary access to education and instructional supports during the crisis situation.

Concerned about the use of E.R.T. for the initial training of psychologists, class organizations, associations, universities, regional and federal professional councils, professionals and students sought solutions that could enable the continuation of both initial training and the practice of psychologists in educational and work spaces without harming the physical and emotional integrity of the category and society. Thus, in 2020, the *Associação Brasileira de Ensino de Psicologia* (ABEP, Brazilian Association of Psychology Education) and the *Conselho Federal de Psicologia* (CFP, Federal Council of Psychology) proposed holding national seminars on remote practices and internships. These seminars generated the elaboration of a guideline called “Remote Practices and Internships in Psychology in Connection with the COVID-19 Pandemic: Recommendations” (Conselho Federal de Psicologia, 2020).

According to Soligo et al. (2020), different Psychology entities participated in this national seminar and enhanced, on the one hand, the category’s commitment to the principles of human rights, respect for differences and confronting inequalities, and, on the other hand, the support of public policies that promote well-being, training with ethical and technical quality and presence learning understood as fundamental for the construction of the identity of the professional to be trained.

This document basically covers guidelines directed to the psychologist’s practices and to remote internships, considering that the theoretical subjects could be adapted for Emergency Remote Teaching. Regarding the psychologist’s practices, there is a need to provide guidance and not only be able to transpose remote teaching to practical internship activities.

Thus, when we review the Conselho Federal de Psicologia, (2020) document on the recommendations regarding the psychologist’s work processes in educational settings, we can highlight some actions that can be developed remotely, such as: (a) families and students guidance, aiming at facing the impacts of that period; (b) development of strategies that can contribute to the teaching and learning process, in particular, activities aimed at students with disabilities; (c) monitoring the work process of educators, aiming to identify the risks to emotional health; (d) school planning in a multidisciplinary team to structure the return to face-to-face activities; and (e) listening to and caring for the suffering caused by the pandemic. However, due to the complex nature of educational and school processes, there is no recommendation that internships be carried out only by remote means.

As established by the Ministry of Education Ordinance nº 544/2020, practical professional internship activities must comply with the National Curriculum Guidelines approved by the National Education Council.

The replacement of professional practices must be described in specific work plans, institutionally approved and linked to the pedagogical projects of the courses. In addition, this ordinance also makes it clear that, in the event of suspension, academic activities must be fully replaced.

Challenges of initial training in School Psychology in the framework of the pandemic

In the provisional and framework context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the conduction of theoretical disciplines and internships has been the object of interest of different researchers and professionals concerned with the impact of E.R.T. in the initial training of psychologists, especially in the area of school psychology. In this regard, we found some contributions that exposed the challenges and limitations of remote teaching from three interconnected points: (a) the psychologist's teaching work in universities, mediated by DICT; (b) the insertion of the E.R.T. in the teaching and learning process of psychology students; and (c) the complexity of the demands presented by the school and arising from the current pandemic scenario.

Regarding the "professional work of psychologists in universities", mediated by DICT, researchers such as Ribeiro et al. (2021) claim that the imposition of the E.R.T. deepened the precariousness of these professionals' activity, especially in private higher education institutions that depend on the payment of tuition fees to remain open. In this connection of financial pressure, university professors had accelerated contact with DICT by quickly adapting to the virtual environment and ensuring a short term return to classes to meet society's demands and the demands of the educational market.

Fear of unemployment prompted teachers to adhere to a new routine of working hours and contracts flexibilization which reduced their rest and leisure time while interfering with their family and private space. Teachers needed to rethink pedagogical activities in a short period of time and within a pandemic scenario in which many suffered from hopelessness, fear and the experience of grief (Ribeiro et al., 2021).

The training given to teachers in these educational spaces was aimed only at technical dimensions, without providing a dialectical analysis of the current situation. This affected the development of these teachers and caused processes of psychological distress. As explained by Marinho-Araújo and Rabelo (2015), when we decide to develop the professional skills needed to deal with problem situations that arise in the course of professional and personal life, it is extremely important to add the intersubjective dimensions to this situation.

The pandemic demanded from teachers that they mobilize both technical and intersubjective resources and material resources. Teachers had to bear the costs of the purchase of new technological equipment, the acquisition of internet and adequate furniture to carry out the work. The psychology internship supervisors also had to look for a space at home that would not overly affect their online internship guidelines and ensure the professional ethical confidentiality of the information arising from these guidelines. We can infer that this professional in the area of school psychology is also at psychosocial risk, and has to deal with the demands of the university, students, school and life itself.

Regarding the "insertion of the E.R.T. in the teaching and learning process", just like the professors, psychology students were also forced to learn and to use the technical resources required in the remote teaching modality and had to mobilize their intersubjective resources without the proper monitoring of higher educational institutions. This situation also caused feelings of anxiety, stress, uncertainty and insecurity.

In this new modality of remote learning, the lack of digital devices and of the internet gave rise to feelings of unfairness in some students who felt excluded and with their autonomy eliminated from their professional training process. This is because the planning and implementation of pedagogical projects in the universities were directed almost exclusively to the attempt to transfer their in person activities to the

online setting and to ensure the construction of competencies, skills and attitudes expressed in the National Curriculum Guidelines (Conselho Nacional de Educação, 2004) for Psychology courses. Since the proposal was to deliver content via online to meet emergency and specific situations, the pedagogical activities that covered the social, political, cultural and economic aspects caused by the pandemic and which impacted human development and learning were set aside.

This urgency to ensure the full progress of the psychologists' initial training process, via remote teaching, was intensified for the last years of the courses due to the compulsory curricular internships, characterized by on-site work practices. Thus, internships became the core of debates on the effectiveness of remote learning in relation to the skills needed to work in the field. With that, the internship supervisors had to rethink their teaching activities beyond the transposition of the face-to-face method to the online method.

Researchers such as Guzzo et al. (2021), among others, are concerned with building potential internship practices in this pandemic framework and seek to ensure not only the continuity of education and the health of students, but also the school community rights to psychological support within this framework. For this reason, they shared their successful experiences in internship supervisions.

For these scholars, the internships carried out in this modality of remote learning, despite limitations and challenges, were able to bring proposals that were shared between theoretical studies and practical application in the field via online. The theoretical studies discussed in the supervision used research data that could help the demands that have emerged from the recurring themes and arising from the contact mediated by technologies with the school community. In the practical aspect, alongside a psychology professional, the interns held online general meetings and meetings with students, teachers and family members and sought to adapt the actions through technological and spatial specificities and the subjective needs of each group. To facilitate communication, digital tools such as SMS, WhatsApp, emails, links and school websites or social networks were used.

We can observe similarities in the descriptions of these theoretical studies and online insertion in the field practices, especially with regard to the importance of reconfiguring preexisting teaching actions and conducting internship activities, as well as the construction of strategies that would meet the psychoeducational demands arising at this time. We note, however, that there are few studies on training in School Psychology within this framework, which points to the need for future investigations to allow understanding the impacts of the use of technologies and of the aforementioned changes for the training of psychologists in relation to the skill development.

In general terms, the remote format required a series of adjustments in the development of the academic supervision process and in the actions with the school community. This approximation with the school, even if remote, allowed identifying the new schools' demands and verifying the worsening of other demands that already existed. It can also be considered that the use of technologies favored the realization of virtual meetings with researchers, professionals in the field and students, both in theoretical disciplines aiming to contribute to studies and debates on topics relevant to the formation of undergraduates, as well as in practical disciplines seeking to encourage exchanges of experiences about the challenges found in the current scenario.

It is noteworthy that carrying out practical actions remotely, developed in the internship supervision spaces, is not intended to replace the face-to-face activities that are extremely important for the process of developing professional skills.

Based on the research by Camargo and Carneiro (2020), Ferreira and Castro (2020), Guzzo et al. (2020), Santos (2021), Souza (2021), and Vier et al. (2020), it became possible to dimension the following "problem-situations of the school psychologist that were aggravated during the pandemic in the school setting", namely: domestic and sexual violence, experiences of mourning and loss, social exclusion, difficulties

in the teaching-learning process, intensification of the challenges posed to school inclusion, psychological suffering of teachers, students and family members, inequality in labor sharing based on gender, conflicts in the family and school relationship, and weakening of the teacher-student bond, caused by the deprivation of social interaction.

Furthermore, the view that the school psychologist must meet the urgent demands of the school, in immediate and remedial actions, was enhanced for the school and society. With the occurrence of the pandemic, there was an aggravation of these demands and of the challenges and limitations imposed, not only for psychology professionals, but also for psychology students who intend to operate in educational settings.

Final Considerations

In view of the changes caused by the pandemic and experienced in the educational settings, training in School Psychology demands new knowledge and actions for psychology professionals and trainees. This is a situation of concern, because, despite the efforts of educators and students to commit to developing those students' professional skills through the E.R.T. or in a hybrid way, the difficulties evidenced by social conditions, health conditions or even students' access to electronic devices and the internet have implications for the training of Psychology undergraduates across the country.

In the specific case of these graduating students in the final years of the course and, specifically, with internships in the educational setting, the importance of a careful look at the development of a professional who, due to social conditions (social distancing, E.R.T., reduction of workload of practical activities and absence of face-to-face internships that allow contact with daily life and interaction with the school community), has experienced a different training process in relation to initial academic experiences and the development of professional skills.

In general terms, the challenges in School Psychology training refer to the change in the way activities and theoretical and practical disciplines are performed, since both are no longer face-to-face and have turned to distance learning through the use of digital technologies. The crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic brought many adversities to society. In the field of Education, it motivated us to continue the struggle for the quality of training in School Psychology and for continuing education, as well as for the preservation of life and health of undergraduates and the population, in particular, people who are part of the educational framework and processes.

Contributors

I. M. SANT'ANA, M. A. LISSARASSA and A. S. C. MEZZALIRA were responsible for the conception and design, text writing, review and approval of the final version of the article.

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