
Transition to Remote Learning during the Covid-19 Pandemic: Mapping the transition International Relations undergraduate courses took in northeastern Brazil from attendance in class to remote learning during the Pandemic

Do Presencial ao Remoto: mapeamento da transição dos cursos de Relações Internacionais do Nordeste para o isolamento social na Pandemia de Sars-Cov 2

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Abstract: The SARS-Cov 2 Pandemic has changed the world scene, including education. Faced with isolation measures, as Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) were forced to adopt Emergency Remote Education (ERE). This sudden transition impacted the routine of teachers and students in several ways and posed serious challenges to these institutions. In this scenario, the objective of this research is to map how the adaptation process carried out by the International Relations bachelor degrees in northeastern Brazil takes place in two moments of the pandemic: April 2020 and in the next year, between May and June 2021. For both, semi-structured ones were assigned with representatives of institutions in the region that offer a bachelor's degree in International Relations. We started with the question: how did the IES adapt its classes to the remote environment? The results point out paths for several reflections on the challenges of transition, remote education and the pandemic, in addition to differences between public and private institutions, both in speed and in the initiatives carried out.

Keywords: Pandemics; COVID-19; Emergency Remote Teaching; International Relations.

Resumo: A pandemia de SARS-Cov 2 modificou o cenário mundial, inclusive o da educação. Diante das medidas de isolamento, as Instituições de Ensino Superior (IES)

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foram obrigadas a adotar o Ensino Remoto Emergencial (ERE). Essa transição brusca impactou de diversas maneiras a rotina de professores e estudantes e impôs sérios desafios a essas instituições. Nesse cenário, o objetivo da presente pesquisa é mapear de que maneira ocorreu o processo de adaptação realizado pelos cursos de Relações Internacionais localizados no nordeste brasileiro em dois momentos da pandemia: abril de 2020 e no ano seguinte, entre maio e junho de 2021. Para tanto, foram realizadas entrevistas semiestruturadas com representantes das instituições da região que oferecem o bacharelado em Relações Internacionais. Partiu-se da questão: como a IES adaptou suas aulas para o ambiente remoto? Os resultados apontam caminhos para diversas reflexões, acerca dos desafios da transição, do ensino remoto e da pandemia, além de diferenças entre instituições públicas e privadas, tanto na celeridade quanto nas iniciativas realizadas.

Palavras-chave: Pandemia; COVID-19; Ensino Remoto Emergencial; Relações Internacionais.

1. Introduction

The SARS-Cov-2 pandemic modified the international scenario in March 2020 after the outbreak spreading from Asia to the whole world. The measures to control the pandemic, initially planned for a period of ninety days, ranged from personal recommendations such as the use of protective masks, adoption of gel alcohol for basic hygiene care, to more drastic guidelines, such as social isolation and closing of borders. This affected directly the world's educational system, from elementary to higher education, leading worldwide Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to adapt to this new reality.

The case of Brazil did not differ. In March 2020, the SARS-Cov-2 arrived in the country, bringing the need to social isolation and, in addition, the adjournment of classroom lessons, both in elementary and higher education (PIERRO, 2020). According to UNESCO (2021) estimates, the adjournment affected almost 53 million students, being 8 million at the higher education level. Unprecedented in its proportions, this event affected the field of education to such an extent that discussions on accelerating the growth of distance learning, expanding existing differences between public and private education in the country and mental health care, both of students and educators, became a mandatory agenda in the area (GUSSO et al, 2020; PIERRO, 2020).

Although recent, the relevance of the topic stimulated this research, which has as its main objective mapping the adaptation process carried out by the International Relations (IR) courses of public and private HEIs in Northeast Brazil. The article is

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structured into three parts: first, the pandemic and its challenges in the field of education are contextualized. Then, the results of the mapping are presented; carried out at two different moments of the pandemic (in its beginning, 2020 and in the following year, 2021) to, finally, raise some reflections and questions about emergency remote teaching in IR courses.

This study is characterized as exploratory, as it aims to raise questions and reflections on a recent topic, still little worked on. As a method, qualitative data was used, obtained through semi-structured interviews with representatives of HEIs that offer IR bachelor's degree courses in Northeast Brazil (ROCHA, 2021). From the answers offered by the coordinators, some considerations were raised about the experience of implementing the emergency remote teaching (ERT) in higher education in Northeast Brazil.

The interviews were carried out in two different moments of the epidemic: the first was carried out in April 2020, right after social isolation, a moment in which the institutions experienced something new, unprecedented in the Brazilian experience and whose duration, at that moment, was expected to not exceed three months (WHO, 2020). Eight higher education institutions located in Northeast Brazil were contacted. The second moment was through May and June 2021, when the pandemic was already at a more 'mature' stage, in which both professors and students had adapted to the implemented dynamics, although already worn out. The expectation of permanence in emergency remote teaching was until December 2021. In the second moment, the same institutions of the first stage were contacted again, to verify which of the implemented measures had been maintained and how these institutions evaluated the impact that such measures had on the courses. In addition to those analysed at first, the number of institutions approached was expanded, adding five new ones to the initial list³.

2. The Pandemic, social isolation, and the emergency remote teaching

Initiated as an atypical pneumonia in Wuhan, China, in November 2019, for reasons not yet clarified, the new coronavirus fell into the category of pandemic on March 11, 2020, determined by the World Health Organization (WHO). This new condition modified the disease guidance protocols, which, at that time, did not only affect the Asian continent. The WHO advised local governments to implement necessary measures to

³ The list with the HEIs interviewed and the questions used can be found in the attachments.

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minimize the effects of the pandemic. Among the recommended measures were social isolation, mass testing of the population and an increase in hospital beds, professionals, facilities and health equipment. In addition to research on the origin of the disease, treatment possibilities and the creation of a vaccine. The disease was still an unknown for scientists, with no known treatment, and social distancing was the most efficient non-pharmacological measure to prevent the further spread of the virus.

For this reason, the pandemic affected directly the educational activities. In March 2020, the new coronavirus caused the closing of schools in about 85 countries as an attempt to contain its dissemination, a measure that affected more than 700 million children and young people around the world according to UNESCO (UN, 2020). The most extensive use of distance learning resources such as the internet, radio or television was recommended. At that time, the WHO projected a quarantine period of ninety days, a period considered by educational institutions when organizing their calendars.

In Brazil, the closing of higher education institutions took place in the week of March 18, 2020. From then on, public and private institutions organized themselves based on the guidelines established by the National Education Council (NEC), which was devised during the H1N1 pandemic in 2009, seeking to implement/expand access to new technologies, the main support for the "new normal" that would be established in Brazilian higher education in the following months (BRASIL, 2009).

Based on this scenario, still in March was created the Emergency Operating Committee of the Ministry of Education (COE-MEC), followed by several other legal instruments that purveyed guidelines in relation to what educational institutions could or could not do in order to maintain their activities remotely. The COE-MEC authorized the use of digital media to conduct classes (except for internships, laboratory practices, and medical courses and residencies). In addition, it relaxed the number of school days, while at the same time maintained the workload of the modules (Ordinance n. 343/2020, amended by Ordinances n. 345/2020 and 473/2020, and Provisional Measure n. 934/2020) (BRASIL, 2020c, 2020d, 2020e, 2020f). In this context, a new teaching category emerged in Brazil: Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT).

From that period onwards, HEIs witnessed several waves of the pandemic in Brazil. As expected in a country of continental proportions, the 26 states and the Federal District presented different moments of peaks and falls in cases and number of deaths,

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which also led to different restrictions on the movement of people and the return of certain in-person activities in different moments. Thus, what would have been a period of 90 days, ended up extending for more than a year. The abrupt implementation of the ERT, with all its nuances and challenges, for both students and teachers, sparks the debate around the differences between in-person and virtual teaching and the challenges that the pandemic scenario has brought to the life of the entire higher education environment.

2.1. Emergency Remote Teaching as Category

Before starting the discussion on the challenges of Emergency Remote Teaching, it is worth differentiating it from a well-known category: Distance Learning (hereafter DL). DL is an "educational modality mediated by technologies in which teachers and students are physically separated" (GUSSO et al., 2020, p. 5). In order to conduct the teaching-learning process through this means, specific strategies are planned and used, which consist of the preparation of adequate material, training of teachers and pedagogical support for students. To this end, DL has a multi-professional team to provide guidance and support to students and faculty (KAPLAN; HAENLEIN, 2016; GUSSO et al., 2020).

The ERT by its turn does not rely in aspects such as planning and training. Hodges et al (2020) and Gusso et al (2020) highlight that the lack of planning, training, and technical support, as well as considerations regarding aspects of the reality of students and educators in addition to the risk of exclusion to those without proper access to technological resources, make it difficult to guarantee conditions for a quality course. Charczuk (2020) claims that the main difference between DL and ERT lies on the theoretical-conceptual assumption contained in this 'in-person to digital' transition. In the same sense as Hodges et al (2020) and Gusso et al (2020), the author states that in the ERT there was no planning and establishment of specific assumptions for this practice, only the in-person transition. Therefore, it cannot be considered a modality such as distance education, but only a "pedagogical action" (CHARCZUK, 2020, p. 5). The author sustains moreover that exists a false dichotomy between DL and ERT on one side, and on the other, in-person teaching (CHARCZUK, 2020). In this false dichotomy, teaching mediated by digital means is seen as inferior to in-person teaching. However, neither in-person teaching is effective, nor DL or ERT are inherently inferior. In this way,

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the effectiveness of teaching depends on the quality of the interaction between student, teacher and knowledge, as well as on the assumptions on which it is based.

Gusso et al (2020) adds another complicating element: physical distance imposes some natural limitations, such as the impossibility of developing certain physical/motor and social/interpersonal skills. Furthermore, it should be noted that these inherent limitations, in the case of the ERT, are added to the variables derived from the lack of planning, and the pandemic environment.

In this sense, DL and ERT are also not dichotomous, as there are institutions in which, given the infrastructure conditions, teachers' experience and conditions of access of students and professors to digital media, it was possible to ensure a greater approximation between ERT and DL. Thus, based on available resources and conceptual frameworks of the teaching-learning process, each HEI can make several decisions, which lead to simpler or more complex paths (GUSSO et al, 2020).

The simpler path is based on three premises: a) everyone has access to the resources; b) everyone is in condition to perform remote activities, and c) teaching is about transmitting content. The more complex path “involves a broad characterization of the working and study conditions in each HEI” (GUSSO et al, 2020, p. 7). Therefore, the most complex path considers everyone's access to the internet, the way students deal with the virtual environment (autonomy and other skills) and the training of teachers to plan and execute the ERT, in addition to evaluating students.

Therefore, in choosing how to move to the remote, it becomes essential for managers, in the view of Gusso et al (2020), to reflect on the conception of higher education and the teaching-learning process. In this sense, in a teaching-learning concept as capacity development, the HEI seeks to train professionals capable of analysing social needs and generating solutions and not just reproducing knowledge. In view of this reflection, decisions regarding the ERT should be taken by teams of education specialists, representatives from academic and infrastructure areas, and the Ministry of Education's Own Assessment Commission (CPA).

2.2.Challenges to Emergency Remote Teaching

Such debates generated the beginning of a specialised literature on the subject. According to Neves, Assis and Sabino (2021), from the Scielo platform, between March 2020 and March 2021, 16 articles on the ERT were published in Brazil. Among these, 14

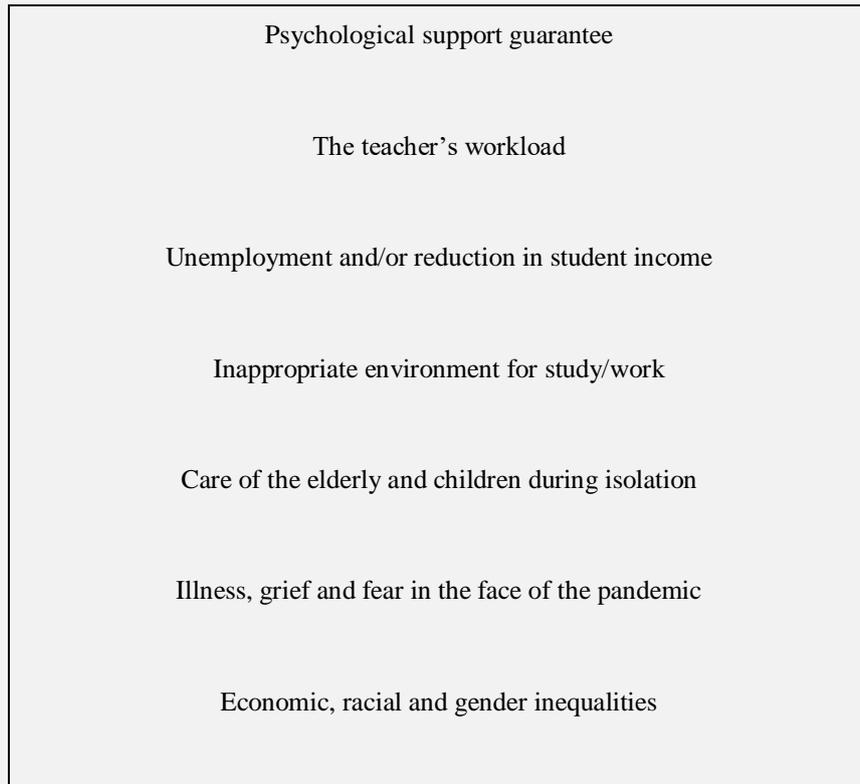
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focus on this modality in higher education, of which nine are in the medical sciences field. The low number of publications, even on a recent subject, indicates potential for research on the topic. Based on the review conducted in this research and the authors' experiences, there is great concern about the numerous challenges of the ERT in the SARS CoV-2 pandemic and its consequences. For didactic purposes, these challenges were divided into three categories: 1) didactic-pedagogical challenges; 2) challenges related to digital technologies and 3) socio-emotional and social challenges.

Table 01: Challenges to Emergency Remote Teaching

<p style="text-align: center;">Didactic-pedagogical</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Maintaining the quality of teaching without planning</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Appropriate training and strategies</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Academic performance of students</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Relationship between teachers and students</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Challenges in dealing with digital technologies</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Technological</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Lack of access to digital technologies</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Limited or poor-quality access to computers and the internet</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Challenges in dealing with digital technologies</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Excessive use of technologies</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Socio-emotional and social</p>

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Source: the authors.

Among the didactic-pedagogical ones are the maintenance of the quality of teaching without planning, training of teachers and students and the use of appropriate strategies; students' academic performance; relationship between teachers and students and the challenges in dealing with available digital technologies.

In the second category, technological challenges, are the lack of access to necessary digital technologies; limited or low-quality access to computers and the internet; challenges in dealing with available technologies (the result of low digital literacy) and the excessive use of technologies (which can lead to other problems). It is noteworthy that these obstacles are repeated in category 1, as they are closely related to the didactic-pedagogical issue.

Finally, the socio-emotional and social category includes the guarantee of psychological support to the academic community; teachers' work overload (in adaptation to the ERT); unemployment and/or reduction in student income; inappropriate environment for study/work (either without infrastructure or home with few rooms); care of the elderly and children during isolation; illness, grief and fear in the face of the pandemic, in addition to economic, racial and gender inequalities that potentiate the

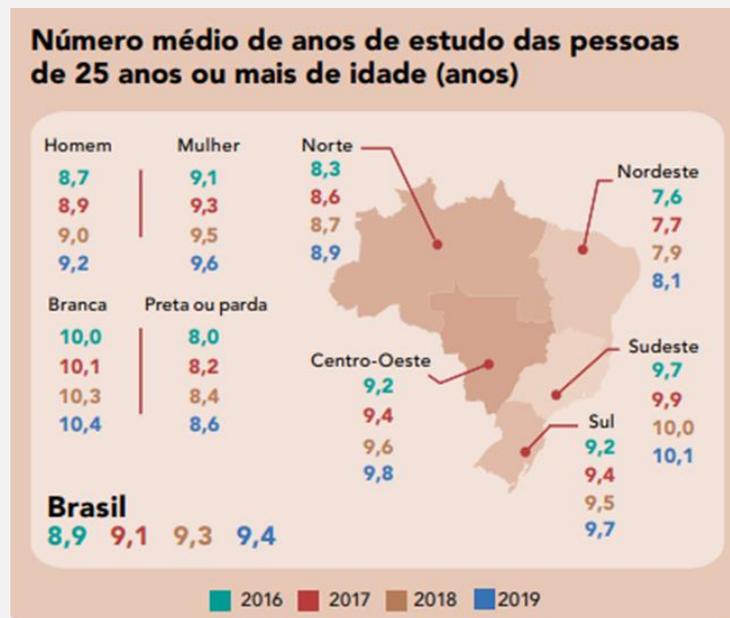
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negative consequences of other challenges (GUSSO et al, 2020; MENEZES et al., 2020; SILUS; FONSECA; JESUS, 2020).

The systematization of the challenges contained in Emergency Remote Teaching, made in Table 1, allows us to understand the range of difficulties faced by the educational institutions, as well as teachers and students, with the arrival of the SARS Cov-2 pandemic in Brazil. This shows that there is an extensive research agenda to be explored by experts in the coming years.

When considering the context mapped in this article – Northeast Brazil – reflecting upon the impact of the ERT is extremely important. This is because the states of the region already faced lower rates of access to technologies and higher education, when compared to the states of the South and Southeast, in addition to lower average years of study than all other regions (figure 1, below). Furthermore, even with the great expansion of access to higher education in the region at the beginning of the 21st century, the enrolment rate in higher education in the Northeast region is still low (DOS SANTOS; DA SILVA, 2015; IBGE, 2020).

Image 01: Average number of years of schooling for people aged 25 and over



Source: PNAD Contínua 2019 - IBGE (2020).

Despite the challenges, it is noteworthy that emergency remote teaching was the factor that enabled the continuity of classes (CHARCZUK, 2020; GUSSO et al, 2020; NEVES; ASSIS; SABINO, 2021). In this sense, it is also necessary to reflect upon the

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benefits of this pedagogical action, and how the period can contribute to the improvement of teaching practices.

Based on this dichotomy and the impact that ERT may have in the coming years on Brazilian education, the following is an exploratory study carried out in International Relations courses in Northeast Brazil.

3. Methodology

By aiming to raise reflections and questions about a recent topic that still has little literature, the present study is characterized as exploratory. For that, as a method, the authors used qualitative data obtained through semi-structured interviews with representatives of HEIs in Northeast Brazil that offer bachelor's degree courses in International Relations (ROCHA, 2021).

The mapping process was guided by the question: how did the HEIs in the Northeast that have a bachelor's degree in IR adapt to the ERT? Starting from this question, some factors were considered such as: a) response time of the institution to the problem; b) virtual resources made available to students; c) preparation of teachers for the new virtual teaching instruments; d) consultation with students about the means adopted (whether only remote access, hybrid regime or maintenance of the in-person model), and e) provision of internet to teachers and students. Another factor considered was the nature of the participating institutions: whether public or private. This characteristic seems to be crucial to understand some of the measures taken, and some of the patterns found vis a vis the solutions offered by the institutions to face the pandemic.

The interviews were conducted at two different moments: 1) April 2020, including eight higher education institutions in the region at the time, raising the factors listed above; and 2) May and June 2021, where the same institutions were sought to verify which of those measures had been maintained, whether at any time during the relaxation of the measures there was a return to classroom classes, and how the pandemic had impacted the course (enrolments and suspensions in 2021). The latter, as it is a sensitive topic for private higher education institutions, was treated with the necessary kindness. In this second moment, it took the opportunity to contact some institutions not covered in the first stage, which increased the number of consulted courses. The list with the HEIs interviewed and the questions used are in the attachments section.

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In the analysis, a tabulation of the data was performed for better comparison, in order to observe the similarities and differences between the transitions of each HEI. From this, we sought to observe these differences and similarities in parallel with the context of each institution, in its space (where it is located) and nature (public or private).

4. Results

In July 2021, the BA in International Relations was offered in eleven higher education institutions in Northeast Brazil. In addition, the region also counts on two BA's in Political Science (UNICAP and UFPE⁴), area considered to be the “mother” of IR. In general, they were the result of recent encouragement to create these courses in the country (MYIAMOTO, 2003; FELIU, KATO, REINER, 2013). Directed specifically towards the field of IR, public universities in Sergipe, Paraíba⁵ and Bahia also offered this course.

The University of International Integration of Afro-Brazilian Lusophony (Unilab), located in the State of Ceará, offers the course at the Malês Campus, outside its headquarters, in São Francisco do Conde, State of Bahia. Created in 2010, as a cooperation initiative with CPLP countries to promote solidary cooperation between their peoples, it has students from both Latin America and Africa, which makes it unique in the Brazilian context. This singularity also leaves it quite fragile in a political scenario of significant cuts in funds for higher education that has occurred since the victory of Jair Bolsonaro for the presidency of Brazil, in 2018⁶.

According to Revista Fórum (2021), in an article published in April 2021, Education was the sector that suffered the most cuts during the Bolsonaro government. Between 2019 and 2020 alone, the ministry's budget was reduced by almost twenty billion Brazilian reais.

In the private sector, the State of Pernambuco stood out, as it has the largest offer of IR courses in the Northeast. With the exception of Ascens-Unita, located in the city of

⁴ In the case of UFPE, the degree in Political Science offers IR as a possibility of concentration. In practical terms, a mandatory minimum workload is dedicated to specific subjects in the area.

⁵ Interestingly, Paraíba has two IR courses, both in public universities, in the same city, João Pessoa, at a distance of 15 km from each other, which perhaps explains the lack of courses in the private sector in the state.

⁶ It is important to mention that, before the pandemic in 2019, Jair Bolsonaro criticized Unilab for offering entrance exams to transgender and intersex people. The institution suspended the initiative, after questioned by the MEC. Available in: <https://www.cartacapital.com.br/educacao/pelo-twitter-bolsonaro-anuncia-suspensao-de-vestibular-para-pessoas-trans>. Access in July 5th 2021.

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Caruaru, the other faculties are located in Recife, the State's capital. Alagoas, Maranhão and Piauí did not have International Relations courses at the time of the research.

Table 02: Institutions that participated in the interviews, by state and nature

Nature	State	Institutions	April 2020	May-June 2021
Private	BA	UNIFACS	--	S
	BA	Unijorge	--	S
	CE	Fac. Stella Maris	--	S
	RN	UnP	S	S
	PE	Faculdade Damas	S	S
	PE	UNICAP (CP)	S	--*
	PE	Asces-Unita	S	--*
	PE	Estácio do Recife	--	S
Public	BA	UNILAB	--	S
	PE	UFPE (CP/RI)	S	S
	PB	UEPB	S	S
	PB	UFPB	S	S

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	SE	UFS	S	--
Without IR	AL	--	--	--
	MA	--	--	--
	PI	--	--	--
		13	08	10

Source: elaborated by the authors.

* Both Asces and UNICAP were not sought in the second round of interviews, but it is intended to include new data in the future.

There were two moments of the interviews. In the first, right after Ordinance no. 343/2020, of the MEC, recommending social isolation measures, in April 2020, eight educational institutions were consulted, which promptly participated in the interview, through virtual means or, in some cases, by answering the questionnaires via WhatsApp. In the second moment, in addition to those who participated in the first conversation, participation was also expanded to those who were absent. Among the institutions contacted, the Federal University of Sergipe did not respond to the contact made. In any case, almost all the HEIs with an IR course in the Northeast were covered.

In the second round of interviews, contact was returned in order to understand how the pandemic affected the institutions and the resources adopted. Although in the private sector the number of enrolments (and mainly, its decrease) is a sensitive data, as mentioned above - and, for this reason, not disclosed - the doubt was to understand if there was any new strategy for the problems identified during the period.

The data collected will be presented as follows: first, a general mapping of the strategies adopted in the pandemic will be carried out, to then show the aggregated data on the impacts of the pandemic on institutions, referring to the responses offered in May and June 2021.

Table 03: Structuring of the institutions for the SARS-CoV 2 pandemic of IR courses located in the Northeast (April 2020)

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	Response Time*	Resources Adopted	Professors Preparation	Students Preparation	Offer of Internet
Asces-Unita/PE	01	Google/ Moodle	S	N	N
Unijorge/BA	00	Canvas	S	S	S
Damas/PE	01	Google/ Microsoft Office	S	S	N
Estácio de Recife	03	Microsoft Office	S	S	N
Fac. Stella Maris/CE	02	Google	S	S	N
UEPB	12	Google	S	S	N
UFPB	12	Google/ Moodle	S	S	S
UFPE (CP/RI)	12	Google	S	S	S
UFS	16	Google/ Microsoft Office	S	S	S
UNICAP/PE (CP)	01	Google	S	S	S

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UNIFACS/BA	00	BlackBoard/ Microsoft Office	S	S	S
UNILAB/CE	31	Google	S	N	N
UnP/RN	00	BlackBoard/ Microsoft Office	S	S	S

* time in weeks. Source: own elaboration based on interview data.

The first feature that stands out in the table above is the response time to social distancing instituted with the pandemic. Private higher education institutions responded quickly, and this time can be counted in weeks. As they belong to the same maintainer, UNIFACS and UnP⁷ had the same response time of 48 hours, and shared this speed with Unijorge, which already had the entire system organized in 72 hours. These institutions responded to the questionnaire explaining that they adapted the existing structure in use for distance education to ERT, which is why they did it so quickly.

Regarding the criterion of offering internet to students, among the private institutions only Unicap, Unijorge, UNIFACS and UnP offered some incentive to compensate for the excessive use of internet that students would have. Nevertheless, this happened differently in each of the institutions. Unijorge provided SIM cards to its students through a plan with the telephone company that provided the service and was paid by the institution. For students who returned to their homes, the institution used a network of distance education centres to send SIM cards to cities where there was demand. At UnP and UNIFACS, students and employees had discounts on internet packages and purchase of equipment, through partnerships with companies in the

⁷ Both belong to the same network of private universities (Ânima Educação), which is why their answers are similar.

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appropriate sectors. At UnP, there was an initial mapping of students without internet or computer, in order not to have any damage to their assessments due to these factors.

The same speed of response did not occur in public educational institutions. Although most of them also offer distance education, this modality works separately in the institution, generally constituting its own Dean's Office. The faculty that make up the Distance Learning staff is small compared to the total faculty of the institution, since DL usually has many more tutors than professors. The transition to the virtual environment was therefore slower and more gradual, with many of the public institutions offering teacher training courses and tutorials for students on the new tools to be used. Only UEPB and UNILAB did not offer specific internet grants to needy students, aiming to compensate them for the lack of resources, at this time, essential for the implementation of emergency remote teaching.

In the case of UNILAB, according to the report collected, a significant portion of its students depend on financial support from the university, which is aggravated by the fact that many are far from their country of origin. Added to a scenario of scarcity of federal resources, all these problems seem to accentuate the difficulties in implementing virtual teaching environments quickly. In this way, it is questioned whether in fact it was a delay or simply the absence of necessary conditions to implement the basic virtual environment for the continuity of classes.

The other requirements were met. The big winner in the use of technology was Google, without a doubt, although competition with Microsoft Office was fierce. However, at least in the Northeast, Google was the winner, used by nine of the thirteen HEIs (considering the two rounds of interviews). Both professors and students were able to prepare themselves for the use of the new tools available, receiving training, even if of short duration, with the exception of Ascens and UNILAB, which did not prepare their students in advance.

These questions composed the interviews conducted during the first moment of the pandemic, in April 2020. In May and June 2021, given the possibility of including in the discussion institutions that have not participated previously, it was also considered the appropriate time to go back to the previous institutions and raise elements to consider how the issue of the pandemic had impacted them. The concern here was to understand how students and teachers felt the challenges of the pandemic a year later.

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For the public sector, the first step was to search for data regarding the enrolment of students in the years of 2020 and 2021, on the website of the Anísio Teixeira National Institute for Educational Studies and Research (INEP)⁸, in order to compare such data and verify more or less demand for higher education institutions. Unfortunately, this site has not been updated since 2019, which made it impossible to update the data. Regarding the private sector, the data are sensitive and the conversations were made in a general way, without exactly counting on absolute numbers nor percentages.

Table 04: Impact of the SARS-CoV 2 pandemic in IR courses located in the Northeast (May-June 2021)

	Student Dropout	New Classes	Return to in-person Classes	Challenges of the Period
Asces-Unita/PE	--	--	--	--
Unijorge/BA	S	Smaller	N	More familiarity; level of student participation and interaction is lower than in person; students do not turn on their cameras, but participate a little by chat. Everyone prefers to return to face-to-face as soon as possible.
Damas/PE	S	Smaller	N	--

⁸ INEP is an autarchy of the Federal government, “responsible for assessments and exams, for statistics and indicators, and for knowledge management and educational studies” (INEP, in: <http://portal.inep.gov.br/web/guest/sobre-o-inep>).

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Estácio/PE	N	Bigger	N	Good adhesion of students to the proposed activities; greater emotional exhaustion and isolation of students when contagion increases. Exhaustion, lack of physical contact and depletion of the teacher's creativity.
Fac. Stella Maris/CE	S	Drastically Decreased	N	More familiar with this class format, with the resources used and with being in front of the screen to follow the class.
UEPB	N	Increased	N	Everyone became more familiar, which allowed the learning of new virtual teaching tools, but distanced students and teachers. Closed camera of students with little use of chat. Worn out teachers and students. A long-awaited return to in-person classes.

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UFPB	N	Entry similar to the previous year	N	Students are tired, as they kept the same number of subjects in the virtual as in the face-to-face.
UFPE (CP/RI)	N	N	N	The main challenge is how to make the class interesting, on the part of the teacher. On the part of the student, the challenge is to treat the class seriously, since the cameras are off even when asked to turn them on.
UFS	--	--	--	--
UNICAP/PE	--	--	--	--
UNIFACS/BA	S	Smaller	N	More familiarity, exhaustion of the model, tiredness of teachers and students, possibility of attending classes after emptying rooms.
UNILAB/CE	S	No entry yet	N	More familiarity, language difficulties, digital divide

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UnP/RN	S	Entry similar to the previous year	N	Students and teachers are more familiar with technologies, but there is fatigue from remote teaching. Student attendance decreased, as did participation. It is necessary to innovate to have greater participation. Even so, there is an emotional wear and tear on the part of students and teachers.
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Source: own elaboration from the data of the interviews.

The dropout of students already enrolled was significantly perceived within the IR courses of both public and private institutions throughout the SARS-CoV 2 pandemic. Although it is not possible, at this moment, to illustrate with data for the reasons already mentioned above, both in the case of those already enrolled and in the case of new admissions, the numbers dropped.

At UFPE, although there was no access to the data, the perception informed by the coordinator was that there was no decrease in the number of classes. However, the case of UEPB is worth mentioning: the course coordinator reported that the number of students enrolled over the last two semesters has increased by approximately 20% each semester. As for dropout rates, they had the same positive effect during the pandemic: they decreased. The immediate explanatory factors, from the perspective of coordination, are economic difficulties to stay here or difficulty adapting to the city. In the IR course at UEPB, most students are from outside João Pessoa, and even from other States of the Northeast. Thus, during the pandemic, social distancing at this institution had a curious effect: an increase in the number of enrolled students and newcomers when compared to

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previous years. The same phenomenon occurred with the UFPB, albeit in a smaller proportion. As reported by that coordination, the increase in enrolled and incoming students was about 15% higher in 2021, compared to the two previous years.

No institution, whether public or private, had returned to in-person meetings by the time of the second round of interviews. This was mainly because IR is a course that does not require laboratory practice. Those have returned to in-person classes when it was the case, in several public or private institutions over the last few months.

The challenges faced are of the most diverse orders. Wear was pointed out as something recurrent, both in professors and students⁹. Although both are more adapted, it was frequent in the interviews to mention the fatigue of the ERT model, and a very high expectation, also here on both sides, for the return to in-person classes. Closed cameras, non-participation of students, emptying of classes are some of the issues frequently mentioned by professors as discouraging in the virtual relationship between them and their students.

Among the results obtained in the first round interviews, it was observed that the private HEIs responded more quickly to the crisis, with an agile transition to the ERT. In public universities, the response was slower, causing a few weeks of delay in the academic calendar. As not all effective professors participated in distance education, training was offered for this new modality.

In terms of the technology used, one of the factors that contributed to the faster adaptation in the private institutions was the virtual resources already available to professors and students of the on-site courses, before the need for ERT. In public institutions, these resources were previously used only for distance education professors, tutors and students, a small portion of their total courses. Regarding the availability of resources, such as computers and the internet, there is a diversity of types of support provided.

More than a year later, the HEIs continued, in the midst of the pandemic, still in ERT. The expectation of something that would last a few weeks turned into more than a year outside the physical environment of the classroom, which seemed to transform the problems and challenges for professors, students and for the managers themselves.

⁹Course representatives in the interviews pointed out this perception of student wear. There were no interviews or research on the issue with the students.

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Everyone already knew the tools and there is no need for an emergency change anymore. However, the extent of isolation brought an even greater concern for everyone's mental health due to gaps in knowledge, brought about by a period of great change, isolation and grief. These difficulties, which involve complex elements such as reconciling the crisis of a pandemic with student training over such a long period, can increase evasion or lead to postponement of enrolment in higher education. In private HEIs, this reduction in the number of students also brings financial risk.

5. Reflections on remote teaching in IR courses

Based on the interviews, on materials already published on the adaptation of HEIs to remote teaching and on the authors' own experience, we sought to raise some considerations that may contribute to the debate on the challenges faced during this adaptation, as well as the perspectives future of remote teaching and the return to classroom classes.

In an article published on the website of the Brazilian Association of Education Institutions Maintainers (ABMES), for example, some of the challenges listed are default (brought on by the economic crisis); dropout; learning difficulties; and how institutions will prepare for the in-person return (SILVA; RIVERA, 2020). The round table entitled "Accessibility and Inequalities in Teaching, Research and Extension in International Relations in Brazil in Times of Crisis" brought by professors Cristina Pacheco and Marta Fernández, already applied to the teaching of IR, also included social issues. Some were the situation of professors and students who have children, especially women, who historically have a greater workload in the domestic environment.

Although unexpected, the pandemic brought as an immediate response from higher education institutions in Brazil the implementation of what is conventionally called ERT. Unlike distance education, which involves not only planning, but also education and training of those involved in a specific platform, the ERT was simply put into practice, as its name implies, on an emergency basis. This happened more quickly in private institutions than in public ones, which is explained by their very nature. Subjected to market scrutiny, the delay costs the private sector more. Although the long response of some public institutions is not justified, it is worth mentioning that, in some cases, the delay generated an overload in the subsequent semesters, as in the UEPB which, in 2021, offered the equivalent of three semesters of course in just one year.

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The didactic-pedagogical challenges were verified in its extension. The relationship between professors and students was perhaps the most affected of all the challenges listed, given the reduction in their interaction. Although technological tools allow it to happen, student participation is scarce, either through audio or through video. Moreover, they are directly related to technological challenges. Reports are that students claim that their connections do not support video calls, and some of them claim they do not have quality internet service available in their hometowns or do not have a camera and microphone. Nevertheless, the challenges are not just technological. The fact that students are not physically present in front of the teacher seems to facilitate their dispersion and, in addition, there is the shyness of being in front of a camera, often in a home setting. Finally, the recording of classes, used as a resource to provide students with access in the event of connection failures or problems arising from the context of the pandemic, represents a risk of accommodation, since not interacting with the professor “live” in these cases, did not represent a loss of all the content of the class.

In this sense, the challenges of professor-student interaction can also be related to the difference in the preparation and strategies of DL and ERT. According to what has been presented, the remote/digital environment requires different engagement techniques from students, from HEIs and professors. Thus, not only the pandemic context, but also the lack of a structured preparation for ERT, can contribute to the interaction (key factor in the quality of teaching) being impaired, as the interview reports showed.

Finally, socio-emotional challenges are perhaps the most difficult to monitor, but are likely to make sense in the end. Upon returning to their cities of origin, students find themselves involved in domestic dynamics that include the guardianship of their siblings or minor family members, unable to dedicate themselves at that moment exclusively to the class that takes place online. The gap in their social structure will be felt for years to come.

After a period of strong expansion of higher education in Brazil, the crisis brought about by the pandemic poses great challenges to HEIs, both public and private, and their students: how to deal with the learning gaps left by the transition period?; How to implement teaching strategies in the remote model?; How to get around the social and psychological challenges of the pandemic and ensure that students learn?; What are the main differences between the experience of men and women during the pandemic and

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how has the pandemic affected existing gender inequalities?; What is the impact of the health and economic crisis on the financial health of private HEIs?; Faced with a changing higher education, is it possible to reverse the evasion and decrease in enrolments?; What is the role of HEIs in the midst of this crisis?

The initial literature on the ERT and the mapping of this transition in the Northeast leaves some clues. First, the mapping reinforces an important point in the initial literature on the subject: the difficulties of planning and meeting the different needs of students and professors. The ERT, in fact, exacerbated inequalities and showed that HEIs and students were not ready for this reality, with a mix of intensive use of technologies (when available) in an emotionally draining context (with risk of illness, death, increased unemployment, social distancing, etc.). This is a context, per se, difficult, which becomes even more dependent on: the socioeconomic context; the way each HEI and professor was thinking about the teaching-learning process of their students; the planning of HEIs in times of crisis and their response capacity (both in infrastructure and decision-making processes), and access to autonomy and digital literacy for students and teachers.

Another key point is to recognize the relevance of digital media for education in the midst of an unprecedented pandemic. Surely, the losses would be greater if there were no greater access to these resources. In this sense, there is a lot of speculation about the acceleration of the use of Digital Information and Communication Technologies (DICTs) in the teaching-learning process and even a large increase in enrolments in distance education courses themselves.

Studies made available by ABMES throughout 2020 show the growing relevance of DL¹⁰ and point out the opportunities lost by HEIs that did not have a mature distance education. In addition, in the interviews, some reports related a level of migration of students to this modality. With regard to the relevance of DICTs, Silus, Fonseca and Jesus (2020) state that technological advances in recent years have already forced reflection on pedagogical practices. This becomes more urgent in view of the difference between DL and ERT, pointed out by the literature, among which is the reflection on the pedagogical model and strategies that each HEI and professor adopts. This does not mean that digital

¹⁰ ABMES makes available on its website several surveys carried out in the remote period. Five of them are surveys that took place at different times in 2020 and reflect some of the concerns and opportunities observed by the institution. Available at: https://abmes.org.br/covid-19#covid_pesquisa. Access July 4th de 2021.

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tools will only be used in distance education, but that they can be used to achieve learning objectives, adapting them to each reality.

However, it is noteworthy that there is no declaration of death to in-person teaching in sight. On the contrary. Some of the challenges highlighted and issues inherent to teaching through digital means make clear the importance and essentiality of classroom teaching, either because of the inequalities still present in access to DICTs, or for the development of social and motor skills and the relevance of a 'private' space for professors and students to work and study.

From now on, it becomes urgent to plan the return, which is already foreseen, unlike what happened with the classroom classes suspension. In this context, it seems relevant to continue discussing the consequences of the ERT period and understanding the context of students and teachers of each HEI, in order to be able to contribute to the recovery of learning gaps that have arisen and possible social and psychological consequences, such as the worsening inequalities and increased stress and overload.

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A – HEIs Interviewed

Private HEIs

- Centro Universitário Tabosa de Almeida (Asces-Unita) (PE)
- Universidade Católica de Pernambuco (UNICAP) (Universitas) (CP) (PE)
- Damas College (PE)
- Stella Maris College (CE)

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- Estácio Recife University Centre (PE)
- Jorge Amado University Centre (Unijorge) (BA)
- Salvador University (UNIFACS) (BA)
- Potiguar University (UnP) (RN)

Public HEIs

- Federal University of Sergipe (UFS) (SE)
- Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB) (PB)
- Federal University of Pernambuco (UFPE) (CP/RI) (PE)
- Paraíba State University Paraíba (UEPB) (PB)
- University for the International Integration of Afro-Brazilian Lusophony (UNILAB) (BA)

Except for the HEIs with Political Science courses interviewed, the others make up the total universe of HEIs offering a bachelor's degree in IR in the Brazilian Northeast, according to E-MEC data.

Attachment B - Questions for the semi-structured interview

How long (weeks, months) did the institution offer a way out to deal with the pandemic?

How did the institution prepare for the remote system?

What virtual resources are available?

Were the teachers prepared to use the new virtual teaching instruments?

Has the students been prepared to use them?

The students were consulted on which ways to adopt whether only remote access, or whether a hybrid regime and, later, the in-person model will be introduced?

Was there any type of facilitation/subsidy/scholarship for acquiring internet for students?

Was there a significant student dropout? Are the new classes smaller?

What do you think has changed from the challenges of the beginning of the remote period to now?

Was there any face-to-face feedback at any time?