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DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL SKILLS IN DE: THE ROLE OF TUTOR'S FEEDBACK

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ABSTRACT

The effectiveness of on-site Social Skills Training (SST) is well established in the literature, but there are few studies that assess the results of Distance Education (DE) courses aimed at promoting these skills. In these courses, the tutor plays a vital role by providing guidelines to student performance. Therefore, this study was an assessment on how tutor feedback affects the student's grades in SST in DE conditions. The feedbacks were classified according to presence, amplitude, effect, function and organization. The data seems to indicate that neither the presence nor the type of feedback affects students' performance. However, the data also signaled that some feedbacks were deleted and / or changed after the activity was repeated. New studies, with larger samples and further analysis of the records of the feedbacks provided by the tutors for each task, will be able to evaluate with greater precision how feedback interferes in the development of the participants' social skills.

Keywords: Feedback; social skills training; distance education.

Desarrollo de habilidades sociales en EaD: el papel del *feedback* del tutor

RESUMEN

La efectividad del entrenamiento de habilidades sociales (EHS) presencial está bien establecida en la literatura, pero son escasos estudios que avalúen el resultado de cursos en la modalidad de Educación a Distancia (EaD) destinados a promover esas habilidades. En esos cursos, el tutor asume un papel importante al orientar el rendimiento de los alumnos. Por lo tanto, este estudio evaluó cómo el fornecido por el tutor afecta las notas del alumno en un EHS en EaD. Los *feedbacks* fueron clasificados cuanto a presencia, amplitud, efecto, función y organización. os datos parecen indicar que ni la presencia ni el tipo de *feedback* afectan el rendimiento de los alumnos. Sin embargo, los datos también señalaron que algunos *feedbacks* fueron borrados y/o alterados tras la actividad hacerse otra vez. Nuevos estudios, con más muestreos y analizando el histórico del *feedback* suministrado por el tutor a cada tarea, podrán evaluar con más precisión como el *feedback i*nterfiere en el desarrollo de las habilidades sociales de los participantes.

Palabras clave: *Feedback*; entrenamiento de habilidades sociales; educación a distancia.

Desenvolvimento de habilidades sociais em EaD: o papel do *feedback* do tutor

RESUMO

A efetividade do treinamento de habilidades sociais (THS) presencial está bem estabelecida na literatura, mas são escassos estudos que avaliam o resultado de cursos na modalidade de Educação à Distância (EaD) destinados a promover essas habilidades. Nesses cursos, o tutor assume um papel importante ao orientar o desempenho dos alunos. Portanto, este estudo avaliou como o *feedback* fornecido pelo tutor afeta as notas do aluno em um THS em EaD. Os *feedbacks* foram classificados quanto a presença, amplitude, efeito, função e organização. Os dados parecem indicar que nem a presença nem o tipo de *feedback* afetam o desempenho dos alunos. Contudo, os dados também sinalizaram que alguns *feedbacks* foram apagados e/ou alterados após a atividade ser refeita. Novos estudos, com amostras maiores e analisando o histórico do *feedback* fornecido pelo tutor a cada tarefa, poderão avaliar com maior precisão como o *feedback* interfere no desenvolvimento das habilidades sociais dos participantes.

Palavras-chave: *Feedback*; treinamento de habilidades sociais; educação à distância.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the importance of providing children with conditions to develop socio-emotional skills has gotten increased recognition within the school environment (Abed, 2016). Such skills are understood as a multidimensional construct related to "acquiring and effectively applying knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, define and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions" (Domitrovich, Durlak, Staley, & Weissberg, 2017, p. 408).

Playing a very relevant role in this context, teachers are the ones in charge of promoting an environment in which students can develop both cognitive and socio-emotional skills (Domitrovich et al., 2017; Rosin-Pinola, Marturano, Elias, & Del Prette, 2017; Weissberg, Durlak, Domitrovich, & Gullotta, 2015). However, in order to do that, teachers must be equipped with an elaborate repertoire of social skills, among other factors (Del Prette, Del Prette, Torres, & Pontes, 1998; Del Prette & Del Prette, 1997; Rosin-Pinola et al., 2017). According to Z. A. P. Del Prette and Del Prette (2010, p. 31, free translation), "the term social skills refers to the existence of different types of social behavior in an individual's repertoire to deal adequately with the demands of successful interpersonal interaction". Some of the characteristics of these behaviors are: (a) they are highly appreciated by a given culture, (b) they are have a high probability of producing positive results for all people involved (individual, interlocutor and community) and (c) they contribute to a socially competent performance (Del Prette, & Del Prette, 2017a).

According to Del Prette (2016), the existence of advisory processes directed to the development of teachers' social skills has been advocated for some time so that these professionals get better training in order to promote a more comprehensive education system (which would cover socio-emotional skills), and inclusion in the school environment. Social skills training programs aimed at continuous teacher training are a way to follow this trend (Corrêa, 2008; A. Del Prette et al., 1998; Z. A. P. Del Prette et al., 1998; Del Prette & Del Prette, 1997; Vila, 2005).

According to A. Del Prette and Del Prette (2010, p. 128, free translation), the Social Skills Training (SST) program is understood as

> ... a set of planned activities that provide a structure for learning processes, mediated and conducted by a therapist or coordinator, aiming to: (a) increase the frequency and/or improve the proficiency of social skills already learned, but deficient, (b) teach new significant social skills, (c) decrease or extinguish competitive behaviors with such skills.

The SST, as suggested by A. Del Prette and Del Prette (2010), is based on three fundamental principles: (a) social skills are learned and, therefore, can be taught; (b) learning these skills may occur accidentally or may be planned through structured conditions; and (c) social skills have a situational-cultural character and, therefore, should be thought of as a set of practices that are appreciated in certain contexts.

Another important aspect of SST refers to the model adopted. According to Del Prette and Del Prette (2011), there are two main models: the therapeutic model and the pedagogical model. The *therapeutic model* refers to the application of SST to the population of patients with psychiatric disorders and is characterized mainly by the use of instructional, modeling, and simulation. The *pedagogical model,* as pointed out by these authors, refers to the application of SST to non-clinical populations (i.e., without diagnosis of psychiatric disorders) with the intention to promote social skills as a means of improving the quality of interpersonal relationships and, consequently, the quality of life of participants. The authors highlight that this model is characterized by the approach-evaluate-copy learning scheme, so that participants can learn to act like the models presented.

Regardless of the model, SST comprises two stages: evaluation and intervention (Myrtle, 2005; Del Prette & Del Prette, 1999). Evaluation seeks to assess the resources and deficits of social skills and the situational (antecedents, consequences, context, interlocutors and cultural norms), personal (cognitive, motivational, social roles, etc.) and sociodemographic variables (age, gender, schooling, etc.) among participants by means of direct (observation, self-observation and physiological self-record) and indirect methods (assessment of reports by others or self-reports) (Del Prette & Del Prette, 2009). Intervention consists of procedures and techniques employed throughout the SST sessions. The most commonly used ones are "providing instructions, behavioral testing, modeling, simulation, verbal and video feedback, homework, cognitive restructuring, problem solving, relaxation ... and, in case of group interventions, experiential strategy" (Murta, 2005, p. 284, free translation). The experiential strategy are structured activities, analogous to daily-life situations, which allow facilitators to observe specific performances by the participants and establish conditions for the acquisition and/or strengthening of social skills (A. Del Prette & Prette, 2010).

It is also important to highlight that, in SST, facilitators or coordinators play a vital role in the process of conducting the program. They need to have an elaborate repertoire of social skills that allows them to: observe, show empathy and willingness to help, present feedback, encourage participants, coordinate

the group, provide information, and so on (Z. A. P. Del Prette & Del Prette, 2010).

Studies describing the application of SST on basic education teachers have shown that this type of program, by providing conditions for teachers to develop social skills, results in more dialogue and opportunities for active student participation in the classroom (Z. A. P. Del Prette et al., 1998; Del Prette & Del Prette, 1997), improvements in the teacher-student relationship and in classroom discipline (Corrêa, 2008), and more expressions of affection from the teachers to students (A. Del Prette et al., 1998; Vila, 2005). These on-site training sessions have been carried out within the pedagogical model, in groups, and with the use of experiences.

The availability of SST in hybrid mode and its implications

The results of SST, described in the literature, seem to be quite desirable in the school context. Therefore, in an attempt to expand teachers' access to this type of intervention, the association named "Grupo Relações Interpessoais e Habilidades Sociais da Universidade Federal de São Carlos" (RIHS/UFSCar), or Group of Interpersonal Relations and Social Skills of the Federal University of São Carlos, in partnership with the Bureau of Distance Education (SEaD/UFSCar) of the same university, elaborated the "Programa de Habilidades Sociais na Escola Mediadas pelo Professor", or Teacher-Mediated Social Skills Program. The program was designed to be offered in the hybrid mode (Vaughan, Cleveland-Innes, & Garrison, 2013), involving activities in the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and weekly on-site meetings to present and discuss the contents of each unit.

Concerning structure, the program consisted of three theoretical-practical modules – containing theoretical (cognitive) and practical activities (interpersonal tasks) – and a supervised practice module in conducting activities in the classroom (Del Prette, 2016). The modules were named as follows: Module I - Social Skills Program (SSP), Module II - Social Skills in Childhood Program (SSCP), Module III - Educational Social Skills Program (ESSP) and Module IV - Socioemotional Development Program for Schoolchildren (SDPS).

The availability of SST in the hybrid modality, focused on the continuous training of teachers, may bring some implications that, at first, do not seem to exist in on-site programs with teachers (described above). The first implication refers to the fact that the program is planned in the form of a course, emphasizing the instructional role of SST. This leads to three important developments. The first one refers to the presence of more academic content (texts and theoretical tasks of a cognitive character) and less practical activities when compared to the SST performed in the on-site modality. The second one concerns the need for a grade to be given to the activities carried out by participants, in such a way that it is possible to evaluate the approval (or not) of participants in the course. The third development concerns the challenge of adapting the look-evaluate-copy model and the use of experiential strategy for the VLE. This is because it is necessary to think of activities that allow participants to practice their social skills by means of contact with models that produce socially competent performances in the face of different interpersonal demands of the school context.

The second implication concerns the role played by coordinators or facilitators. While in the on-site SST there are one or two facilitators who take part in the functions of conducting activities and observing the performance of participants in the proposed activities (Del Prette & Del Prette, 1999), in a hybrid course there is the presence of multiple facilitators. Like other courses conducted in the hybrid mode, the program (described in the present study) had a "poly-teaching" team supporting its operation. According to Mill (2017), the term "poly-teaching" refers to an explanatory category used to examine the teaching condition in Distance Education (DE), which is generally characterized by the fragmented collaboration of a group of different professionals. According to this author, the number of team members and the roles performed by these members may change. However, the group of professionals involved in poly-teaching is composed of "... a teacher-author (or content lecturer), a teacher-trainer (or teacher-applier), a virtual teacher-tutor (or distance teacher-tutor), a teacher-tutor in person, an educational designer (or instructional designer), a multidisciplinary team, a coordinating team, etc." (Mill, 2017, p. 11, free translation).

Specifically concerning the course in question, the application of the SST itself was supported by two groups of teachers: (a) teacher-trainers, responsible for carrying out on-site meetings, and (b) teacher-tutors, responsible for accompanying students in the VLE, and providing feedback for the performed tasks. In this sense, an important aspect, produced by the presence of different facilitators, refers to the assessment on the performance of participants. Although there are established criteria for the assessment of expected performance in each task, the assessment of the student's performance in the task, the assignment of grades and what is emphasized in the feedback provided by the tutor inevitably involves a subjective component: the tutor's perception. Therefore, the existence of multiple tutors may imply the existence of different requirement levels for student performance, which may result in differences in assessments and in the development of social skills.

Tutors play an important role in courses in hybrid or DE mode, since they "provide students with personalized support during their training process" (Silva, 2017, p. 8, free translation). Therefore, tutors are assigned with an important task which consists of providing feedback on the performance of the students. There are multiple definitions of feedback (Abreu-e-Lima & Alves, 2011; Archer, Crispim, & Cross, 2016; Z. A. P. Del Prette & Del Prette, 2010; Shute, 2008), but the central point in all of them refers to the fact that feedback consists of providing information about a person's performance, that is, about specific behaviors presented by an individual.

Feedback can be classified in several ways. For example, Del Prette and Del Prette (2017b) suggest that feedback can be classified according to the effect it produces on other people's behavior, and may be considered positive (when it appreciates a certain behavior and contributes to the maintenance or increase of its frequency) or negative (when it disapproves the behavior and may contribute to the reduction of its frequency). An interesting strategy in order to combine these two effects is what has been known as the "sandwich feedback", which consists of the presentation of the following sequence: (a) a positive aspect of the individual's performance, (b) an aspect that needs to be improved (negative aspect) and (c) another positive aspect (Abreu-e-Lima & Alves, 2011; Z. A. P. Del Prette & Del Prette, 2010).

From Shute's contributions (2008), feedback can also be classified as to the amplitude, function and way of organizing it. As for amplitude, feedback can be general (general comments on a student's performance) or specific (emphasizing specific aspects of a student's performance). As for function, feedback can be labelled as verification (a simple judgment as to whether the answer is correct or not) or elaboration (a set of tips and guidelines on how to obtain the expected result). Regarding organization, feedback can be classified as directive (pointing out what needs to be corrected or revised) or facilitator (presenting comments and suggestions to guide students in the process of reviewing their own activity).

Despite the different ways of classifying feedback, when writing it, tutors need to keep in mind that, their most important task is to provide information that will contribute to the improvement of students' performance. In this direction, Shute (2008) suggests that when writing feedback, tutors should take into account that (a) the focus should be on the task performed, (b) they should be clear and specific, (c) they must clarify doubts concerning student performance and task objectives, (d) they must encourage students to continue in the learning process, (e) they should avoid providing too much information, and (f) they must avoid comparisons between students.

The present study

The effectiveness of on-site SST programs is already well established in the literature (z. A. P. Del Prette & Del Prette, 2011), but there are still few studies assessing the results of hybrid courses aimed at promoting the development of such skills. In addition, it is known that the feedback provided by the facilitator or coordinator of SST, in the on-site mode, is extremely important for the acquisition and/or improvement of the skills addressed (Z. A. P. Del Prette & Del Prette, 2010), but there is still no data that points out whether tutors' feedback would perform the same function. Therefore, in an initial attempt to examine this phenomenon, the present study aims to evaluate how the feedback provided by tutors affects student's grades throughout the activities proposed in a course, in the hybrid mode, aimed at promoting the development of social skills among basic education teachers. In addition, there are secondary objectives:

1. Identify the predominant feedback subclasses, based on their classification regarding the presence, or absence of amplitude, effect, function and organization;
2. Examine whether there are differences in the grades attributed to tasks depending on the presence of feedback and the different possibilities of classification;
3. Check for differences in grades depending on the type of task (academic tasks and interpersonal interaction tasks);
4. Check whether there are differences in the frequency of the subclasses of each feedback classification (amplitude, effect, function, and organization) depending on the type of task.

METHOD

In this study, data from Module I of the Social Skills Program in the teacher-mediated school were analyzed. The assessment took place from May 6th 2016 to July 5th 2016. The project was approved by the Ethics Committee on Research with Human Beings of the Federal University of São Carlos (Protocol CAAE 50409115.4.0000.5504) and the participants, by means of a Free-Informed Consent Form, authorized the information provided to be used for research purposes, provided that their anonymity was preserved. In addition, the coordinator responsible for the project also provided authorization for the researcher to access the system and extract the information necessary for this research.

Participants

Two groups of participants took part in the study:

the students and their respective tutors. The students were 37 teachers from the public elementary school of a city in the countryside of São Paulo, who were invited to participate in the project by the Municipal Department of Education.

The tutors were 14 psychologists with experience in on-site teaching and research in the theoretical-practical field of social skills. Each student was accompanied by a single tutor. The tutors received a manual containing guidelines on how to act in the AVA.

Materials

Module I was composed of six teaching units. Each unit consisted of a didactic text (available in the VLE), activities in the VLE and a classroom activity (which took place once a week). The activities were of two types: (a) academic tasks at home (ATH), which corresponded to conceptual activities, and (b) interpersonal tasks at home (ITH), which corresponded to interaction activities with other people in which the student had to put into practice one of the skills addressed in the unit. The data generated during the tasks and analyzed in the present study were: (a) the students' grades and (b) the tutors' feedback on the students' performance in these tasks. In order to assign a grade to students in each activity, tutors compared the students' response to the activity evaluation criteria. The score, therefore, represented how successful the students' performance was in reaching the evaluation criteria proposed for the activity in the tutors' perception.

Data collection and analysis

Both the students' information and the tutors' information were extracted from the VLE after the end of the course. The tutors' feedback reports were categorized according to: (a) their presence or absence, (b) amplitude, (c) effect, (d) function and (e) organization. The data were organized on an Excel spreadsheet and statistical analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 20. Due to the size of the sample, non-parametric statistical tests were used (Dancey & Reidy, 2006).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

14 of the 37 students were excluded from this analysis because they did not perform any of the activities (6 students) or did not complete the module (8 students). Therefore, the following results refer to the data obtained from the 23 students who completed the module.

Presence/Absence of feedback

Throughout the module, 20 tasks were proposed. Table 1 presents an overview of the participation of the students in the tasks.

As we can see on Table 1, the following results stand out: (a) 65.0% of the tasks were of the ATH type; (b) 80.0% of the tasks were answered by all the students who completed the module (except for tasks T3.3, T4a1, T4a3, and T5.1); (c) the number of students who received feedback in each task ranged from 5 (in T2.1) to 22 (in T6.2); (d) in 75.0% of the tasks the median of the notes without feedback was higher than the median of the notes with feedback (except for tasks T2.1, T2.3, T4b1, T4b2, and T6.2); (e) the difference was statistically significant only in tasks T1.1 and T5.2, both of the ATH type. Therefore, the results seem to suggest that, in general, there are no statistically significant differences in the grades due to the presence of feedback. However, in cases where the difference was significant ($p < 0.05$), participants who did not have feedback received higher grades than those with feedback.

It was also examined whether there were differences in the final average of the module depending on the number of tasks with feedback. The students were divided into three groups: (a) those who received feedback on up to three tasks, (b) those who received feedback on 4 to 11 tasks and (c) those who received feedback on 12 tasks or more. The Kruskal Wallis test showed that there were no statistically significant differences between the groups (x^2 (2) = 1.41, p = 0.49).

The presence/absence of feedback from tutors to the answers provided by the students does not seem to interfere with the grades for most tasks. However, tasks without feedback generally have higher grades than tasks with feedback. One aspect that seems to be important to highlight is the fact that students could, within the time frame of each unit, review and/or improve their answers, based on the feedback provided by the tutor, in order to obtain a better grade. Unfortunately, a history of the feedbacks provided by the tutors for each of the tasks was not kept in the VLE, and it is possible that tutors deleted their feedbacks after participants improved their response.

This hypothesis seems to be corroborated by some feedbacks that indicate that some students did the task one more time and that the tutors provided a fresh feedback. That can be observed in the following examples: T04: *Congratulations on the reviewed task!!*; T10: *Your example became more complete when you put forward more arguments to support your opinion*; and T12: *Congratulations on the task. You have reviewed it very carefully and have appropriately used the denominations of the classes and subclasses of social skills presented in this Unit!!!!*

This could partly justify the fact that: (a) the grades of tasks without feedback are higher than the grades of tasks with feedback and (b) there is no statistically significant difference between students who have different numbers of tasks with feedback in the VLE. In addition, the possibility that some tutors deleted

Table 1. *Overview of the students' participation in the tasks.*

Unit	Task	Activity Type	N	Feedback responses	Notes		
					Median		Mann-Whitney's U test (p)
					With Feedback	No Feedback	
1	T1.1	ATH	23	11	9.05	14.71	33.50 (0.04)
	T1.2	ATH	23	7	10.36	12.72	44.50 (0.41)
	T1.3	ITH	23	10	11.10	12.69	56.00 (0.58)
2	T2.1	ITH	23	5	12.20	11.94	44.00 (0.94)
	T2.2	ATH	23	7	9.36	13.16	37.50 (0.21)
	T2.3	ATH	23	7	13.07	11.53	48.50 (0.58)
3	T3.1	ATH	23	7	10.43	12.69	45.00 (0.42)
	T3.2	ITH	23	7	11.86	12.06	55.00 (0.94)
	T3.3	ITH	22	8	8.56	13.18	32.50 (0.06)
4	T4a1	ATH	22	8	9.88	12.43	43.00 (0.36)
	T4a2	ATH	23	9	10.11	13.21	46.00 (0.26)
	T4a3	ITH	22	9	8.61	13.50	32.50 (0.07)
	T4b1	ATH	23	11	12.23	11.79	63.50 (0.88)
	T4b2	ITH	23	10	12.35	11.73	61.50 (0.82)
5	T5.1	ATH	21	12	10.13	12.17	43.50 (0.44)
	T5.2	ATH	23	11	7.73	15.92	19.00 (0.01)
	T5.3	ATH	23	11	9.91	13.92	43.00 (0.14)
	T5.4	ITH	23	10	10.50	13.15	50.00 (0.33)
6	T6.1	ATH	23	10	9.25	14.12	37.50 (0.58)
	T6.2	ATH	23	22	12.32	5.00	4.00 (0.26)

Note: ATH - Academic Tasks at Home; IHT - Interpersonal Tasks at Home; N - Number of students who performed the task.

feedback after correcting a reviewed task may affect the other results presented below.

Feedback rating

By multiplying the total number of students (n=23) by the total tasks of the module (n=20), it is possible to verify that up to 460 feedbacks could be found. However, at the time the data was extracted from the VLE, there were 192 feedbacks on the platform, which represented 41.7% of the total possible feedbacks. The number of feedbacks per task and per unit were different. The average number of feedbacks was 32.0 per unit and 9.6 per task. Units 4 and 5 presented the greatest number of feedback notes. That was not unexpected since those are the units with the greatest number of tasks, respectively, 5 and 4 tasks.

The feedbacks were classified as to amplitude, effect, function and organization. Table 2 shows the distribution of feedback frequency in each of the classes and subclasses assessed. Regarding amplitude, 79.2% of the feedbacks were more specific, highlighting some aspect of the participant's performance in the task (e.g., T06: *You performed a good analysis of the videos, indicating the justifications for empathic and pro-empathic performance and making it clear that you understood the concept*.) or in the course (e.g. T13: *Congratulations on the task. I can see that you are dedicated and learning what is proposed, but it is necessary to provide a more detailed description of the context and behaviors*).

According to Archer et al. (2016, p. 478, free translation), "when assessing students' performances, teachers must provide feedback as accurately and unequivocally as possible concerning which aspects of the performances can be improved, or better adjusted." In addition, according to Z. A. P. Del Prette and Del Prette (2010), feedback should allow students to clearly see the consequences of their behavior and their actions. Therefore, a higher frequency of specific feedback is

Table 2. *Distribution of feedback frequency in each of the evaluated classes and subclasses.*

Classification	Subcategories	Unit						Total	%
		1	2	3	4	5	6		
Amplitude	General	6	3	3	9	11	8	40	20.83
	Specific	22	16	19	38	33	24	152	79.17
Effect	Positive	13	11	13	20	16	16	89	46.35
	Negative	4	2	2	7	5	1	21	10.94
	Sandwich	4	2	4	9	6	0	25	13.02
	Positive/Negative	5	3	1	9	16	14	48	25.00
	Negative/Positive	2	1	2	2	1	1	9	4.69
Function	Check	10	8	9	26	16	20	89	46.35
	Preparation	18	11	13	21	28	12	103	53.65
Organization	Directive	7	4	5	19	18	13	66	64.08
	Facilitator	8	4	4	8	10	3	37	35.92

not only expected, it is also desirable when it comes to generating better and more accurate results in the process of developing and/or improving social skills.

Regarding their effect, five feedback subclasses were identified according to the presence of statements that praised (positive) and/or disapproved (negative) aspects of the participants' responses. 46.3% of the 192 feedbacks present in the VLE were only positive and 15.6% were only negative or started with a negative aspect of the participants' performance. Z. A. P. Del Prette and Del Prette (2010, p. 69, free translation) argue that positive feedback is more likely to produce the desired results because:

a) It avoids resentments and defensive reactions, commonly associated with negative feedback.

b) Students tend to listen more carefully to the positive observations made by their interlocutor, which leads to an expansion of their awareness of their own performance and/or its results.

c) It motivates people to invest more in the improvement of their most appreciated assets.

d) It increases the likelihood of valued performances occurring again.

In this direction, the sandwich feedback seems to be the most appropriate type of feedback when it is necessary to point out at an aspect of the participant's performance that needs to be corrected. By using this type of feedback, tutors can help students feel encouraged, because their feedback starts and ends with appropriate aspects of the response and/or attitudes to be maintained (Silva, 2017). Only 13.0% of the total feedback present in VLE could be classified as sandwich feedback. However, because it is possible that many feedbacks have been deleted and/or modified after the participants reviewed their responses, this percentage may not represent the actual frequency of this type of feedback throughout the course.

Regarding function, 53.6% of the feedback provided sought to present tips and guidelines on how to give the expected answer, instead of presenting a simple judgment about whether the answer is correct or incorrect. According to Shute (2008), while verification feedback boils down to informing students whether their answer is correct or not, the elaboration feedback can take a number of different directions, such as: (a) a topic or aspect of the content addressed by the task, (b) the response to an expected result, (c) the discussion of particular errors, (d) examples that will lead to students' better understanding the content and/or to a situation where misunderstandings are detected and (e) guidance provided in a gentle way. Therefore, elaboration feedback could contribute to a further comprehension of content. It also helps students to reflect on their own social skills.

The last category of analysis refers to the organization of feedbacks. Only negative feedbacks were classified as to organization, that is, those who disapproved of some aspect of the participant's response. This decision was made because this last way of classifying feedback is related to how tutors ask participants to modify their incorrect answers. 64.1% of the 103 feedbacks that involved failing in some aspect of the response directly pointed out what needed to be corrected or revised. Only 35.9% of them presented comments and/or suggestions in order to guide students in the process of reviewing the task. For Shute (2008), feedback should assume a formative function, that is, it should help students increase their knowledge, skills

and understanding in some area of content or skills. In this sense, feedback is important for students to accurately identify what in their response differs from the expected result, because it specifies what needs to be changed. The facilitating feedback seems to be more related to the process of leading students to a broader understanding of what is being addressed. Thus, the predominance of one type or another of feedback may depend on the tutors' perception of the "seriousness" of the students' mistakes, the importance attributed to the theme addressed by the task, and the comprehension of how the feedback provided interferes in the process of developing social skills. The differences found above may be related to the diversity of tutors who worked in the module.

It was also examined whether there was a difference in the grades for each of the tasks, due to any of these characteristics of the feedback. Mann-Whitney's U Test was used for amplitude, function, and organization. The Kruskal Wallis test was used for Effect. No statistically significant differences were found in any of the tasks, except for two cases. In T6.2, the students who received feedbacks with general amplitude got higher grades (median = 18.5) than the students who received feedback with specific amplitude (median = 8.88) U = 6.0 and p = 0.01. In T6.1, the difference was in relation to the Effect of feedback (x^2 = 7.6 and p = 0.02). The students with positive feedback got higher scores (median = 8.00), when compared to those who received positive/negative feedback (median = 3.2) and those who received negative/positive feedback (median = 2.0). However, the size of the effect was negligible. Furthermore, as there was no access to the feedback history provided to the same task, this information needs to be interpreted with caution. Further studies are needed to verify whether these results will keep their validity.

Task type

13 of the 20 tasks proposed in the module were ATH and 7 were ITH. The ITH presented higher scores (median = 13.1) than the ATH (median = 9.1), but this difference was not statistically significant (U = 27.0, p = 0.14). At least two hypotheses can be raised to try to explain this result. First, it is possible that the students found it easier to perform the ITH, because they are practical activities, than to perform the ATH, since they required from the participants the mastery of a new area of knowledge. In this sense, it is possible that students would need more time to understand the concepts and become able to use them consistently.

A second hypothesis refers to how demanding tutors were concerning the content of the answers in each type of task. The ITH involved sharing the participants' personal experiences, which may have aroused the tutors' empathy in relation to the situations presented. That might have affected the grades attributed. The ATH required the students to demonstrate their understanding of the concepts of the area and their ability to apply them in the analysis of interpersonal interaction situations, which may have led the tutors to adopt more demanding criteria when assigning notes to the answers provided by the participants to these tasks.

Regarding feedback classification, there was only a statistically significant difference between ITH and ATH in relation to feedback effect. The ATH received more negative feedback (median = 12.3) than the ITH (median = 7.2), U = 22.5 and p = 0.05. On the other hand, the ITH received more sandwich feedbacks (median = 14.2) than the ATH (median = 8.5), U = 19.5 and p = 0.03. These two data seem to corroborate the second hypothesis presented above.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The present study is an initial attempt to assess how tutor feedback in SST, offered in the hybrid mode, can contribute to the development of the participants' social skills. Since the process of acquiring, strengthening and maintaining social skills has an eminently practical character (A. Del Prette & Del Prette, 2010; Z. A. P. Del Prette & Del Prette, 2010), one of the main concerns is to create conditions so that, based on the activities proposed by the VLE, students can effectively develop such skills. In this sense, the feedback provided by the facilitator plays an important role in the learning process.

The main contribution by this study was the presentation of an initial proposal to analyze the tutors' feedback scans available in the VLE. It has been observed that feedback can be assessed according to its presence or absence, amplitude, effect, function and organization. Each of these ways to rate feedback contributes to a reflection on its effects on student performance. According to Archer et al. (2016, p. 475, free translation), "the inappropriate use of feedback, or the non-use of feedback in performance assessments implies an increased probability that the graduates of a teaching program will have a limited behavioral repertoire. That may have consequences on the quality of their professional performance".

Results suggest that there is a relationship between the types of feedback and the performance of the students. However, the study has three major limitations. The first one concerns sample size. Because it is small, it is not possible to employ more robust statistical tests. The second limitation refers to the fact that the students' performance was assessed by different tutors, which contributed to the possibility that the comparison between the students' grades could be influenced by a subjective component: the

tutors' perception regarding the students' performance. Finally, the last limitation concerns the possibility that some feedback notes had been deleted after students reviewed the task and improved their performance.

In an attempt to correct these limitations, we suggest that future studies: (a) increase sample size; (b) increase the number of students per tutor in order to compare the grades of different students evaluated by the same tutor; and (c) create mechanisms to maintain a history of feedback provided by tutors to the responses of the students. In addition, in order to eliminate the subjective component of grades assigned to students, a system could be created for classifying the responses of the students according to the objectives proposed for the task (for example, tasks that fully met, partially met, or did not meet the evaluation criteria).

New studies may also assess other aspects involved in feedback, such as the presence of emoticons, the use of typographic features (e.g., combination of upper and lower case, bold, italic), the tone produced in the message from the analysis of the choice of words, and the time between responses and feedback delivery by tutors (Abreu-e-Lima, & Alves, 2011). Furthermore, an analysis of the measures of the participants' knowledge and repertoire of social skills, applied before and after the course, can contribute to a broader view of the feedback effect on cognitive performance and the development of students' social skills.

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