

# Supervision and mentoring in higher education

## Dynamics of success

### Summary

**INTRODUCTION.** Based on the inherent benchmark of mentoring and perceptoring, and conscious of the challenge of reducing the estimated school dropout rate of 12% for the Polytechnic Institute of Viseu (IPV), the main aim of the project Supervision and Mentoring in Higher Education: Dynamics of Success (SuperES) is to promote the development of pedagogical supervision skills with focus on teacher – student dyads, and thus enhance the quality of teaching in the IPV. The direct beneficiaries are the IPV assistants, and subsequently the students, who will benefit from a pedagogical didactic literacy program (Cunha et al., 2017).

**OBJECTIVE.** To promote the pedagogical supervision skills of the IPV assistants, which can reduce failure and school dropouts.

**METHODS.** The sample will consist of approximately 210 assistants and 900 students. The methodology is based on an experimental research with two groups: the experimental group, which will receive training, and the control group. To monitor the effectiveness of the program, a battery of questionnaires will be applied before and after its implementation.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.** Of the 17 activities executed, the evaluation of the pedagogical supervision skills is highlighted. They are: (i) the construction/implementation/evaluation of the SuperES Program; (ii) the construction of a computer platform/website – Didactics & School Supervision: Caixa Geral de Ajudas; (iii) the creation of a tool, “Supervision +”, used for the self-monitoring of pedagogical skills.

**CONCLUSIONS.** The SuperES program integrates a research action that aims to implement/test training and research tools on the process of pedagogical supervision.

**KEYWORDS:** PROGRAM; PEDAGOGICAL SUPERVISION; STUDENTS; HIGHER EDUCATION.

### Introduction

In Portugal, school failure and dropout in higher education are a reality that have been worrying the most diverse educational agents and government officials. In recent years, they have reached prevalences that in public education range between 13%<sup>1</sup> and 17.4%<sup>2</sup>, figures that are higher than expected. Other European countries present rates of 11.1%<sup>2</sup>. The focus here is therefore an intervention priority recognized by the Portuguese government, since dropouts in higher education are one of the greatest obstacles in the consolidation of the educational system and contribute highly to the perpetuation of social, economic and cultural inequalities. This is even more noticeable in regions of the interior of the country if we bear in mind that

### Authors

**MADALENA CUNHA:** Escola Superior de Saúde de Viseu, Viseu, Portugal. CI&DETS – Centro de Estudos em Educação, Tecnologias e Saúde. Instituto Politécnico de Viseu, Viseu, Portugal.  
**DANIEL SILVA:** Escola Superior de Saúde de Viseu, Viseu, Portugal. CI&DETS - Centro de Estudos em Educação, Tecnologias e Saúde. Instituto Politécnico de Viseu, Viseu, Portugal.  
**MARGARIDA REIS SANTOS:** Escola Superior de Enfermagem do Porto (Nursing School of Porto), Porto, Portugal. CINTESIS – Center for Health Technology and Services Research, Porto, Portugal.  
**CARLOS ALBUQUERQUE:** Escola Superior de Saúde de Viseu, Viseu, Portugal. CI&DETS - Centro de Estudos em Educação, Tecnologias e Saúde. Instituto Politécnico de Viseu, Viseu, Portugal.

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the ‘Europe 2020’ strategy has defined for Portugal the need to reach 40% of higher education graduates within the age range of 30-34, a goal considered to be still fairly equidistant if we take into account that in 2014 this figure was 31%<sup>3</sup>.

From this referential and conscious of this enormous and daring desideratum, the team of the project “Supervision and Mentoring in Higher Education: Dynamics of Success (SuperES)”, intends to give body to a set of tasks whose main purpose is translated in the promotion of pedagogical supervision skills, which are conducive to reducing failure and dropouts in higher education. The direct beneficiaries will be the IPV teachers with the category of assistants (who, from a survey of training needs in the area of pedagogical supervision skills, will benefit from intervention programs, advanced courses, guidelines and various devices and tools of technological character, promoters of pedagogical didactics literacy), and subsequently the IPV Students with whom they work with. The relationships with partners will also boost synergies of scientific knowledge that are capable of reducing the knowledge gap and improving the good pedagogical

cal practices inherent to the supervision of learning. The need to promote school success has been a challenge acknowledged by the European Commission, which emphasizes, on the one hand, the need for interventions to promote teachers' pedagogical skills as a domain for improving the quality of education and training systems, for improving the process teaching/learning and individualized student guidance throughout the school year. On the other hand, there is a need to promote the skills and intervention of the student mentor as a facilitator of the integration and adaptation of new students in Higher Education, both nationally and internationally.

Within the framework of the Council of Europe and the European Union, Portugal has made a compromise regarding the implementation of investment policies in education, in which continuous teacher training is a privileged setting. As a future investment, the prevention of social inequalities is also built through education. Therefore, the investment in continuous teacher training is a keystone in the construction of solidarity and social justice, thus increasing the country's productivity and the quality of life of its citizens.

In short, the SuperES project, whose goal is to promote the development of pedagogical supervision skills with a focus on teacher-student dyad, mainly aims to increase the skills of the IPV assistants who participate daily in the training of citizens of the future.

The Team who delineates the foundation of this project considered the contributions of national and international theoretical references as a theoretical frame of reference.

## Methodology

### Problem statement

The promotion of pedagogical supervision skills, which are a factor in the reduction of school failure and dropouts in higher education, is the focus of the Project "Supervision and Mentoring in Higher Education: Dynamics of Success, SuperES" (fig. 1). It includes 17 sequential activities with emphasis on the revision of the scientific literature, monitoring and evaluation of the pedagogical supervision skills of the assistants of the Polytechnic Institute of Viseu (IPV), whilst structuring axes for the consolidation of the project's actions.

The project will use active methodologies, since it is acknowledged that "... there is no quality education, [...] nor pedagogical innovation, without an adequate training of teachers"<sup>4</sup>.

In order to fulfil the research unit requirement, a project identification logo was created, shown in figure 1.



Figure 1. Project SuperES Logo

## Research questions

In order to guide the research of the SuperES Project, the following research questions were made: "What pedagogical supervision skills do the IPV assistants hold?"; "What are the expectations of the students attending higher education in the IPV regarding the benefits of the mentor and the pedagogical supervision skills?".

## Purpose of the study

Monitoring the effectiveness of the training intervention program of the SuperEs Project will be done in two different moments (one before and another after its implementation), through a protocol of questionnaires. Their aim is to reinforce the reflective component of the participants in a face-to-face methodology through a participatory evaluation process. The contribution of stakeholders will foster an assessment that is capable of verifying the operationalization of the targets set, analysing the quality of the training program, and will support the introduction of improvements that are conducive to the adoption of good supervision practices. In the line of the so-called "fourth-generation evaluation" or participatory evaluation, the basic philosophy of this model focuses on the recipients of the project as well as partners in the activities to be promoted (School of Health in Oporto, Portugal; Escuela Universitaria de Enfermería, University of La Rioja, Spain).

Within this scope, the main objective of the SuperES Project was defined: To promote pedagogical supervision skills of the IPV assistants, promoters in reducing school failure and dropouts. Accordingly, the following are specific objectives of the project<sup>5</sup>:

(A0) 1. To design the implementation of the project in the best scientific evidence.

(A1) 1. To monitor the training needs on pedagogical supervision skills of the IPV assistants.

## INDICATORS OF THE SuperES PROJECT

1

Indicators	2017 Expected	2017 Already achieved	2018 Expected
Books			2
Papers in international journals			6
Papers in national journals			5
Communications in international meetings		3	6
Communications in national meetings			5
Reports	1		1
Organization of seminars and conferences	2		3
Master's Theses			3
Other Theses			2
Models	1		
Non-expected Indicators, but already achieved			
Posters		1	

- (A2) 2. To evaluate the pedagogical supervision skills of the IPV assistants.
- (A3) 3. To monitor students' expectations about the added value of mentoring and pedagogical supervision skills.
- (A4) (A5) (A6) 4. To build, implement and evaluate the effectiveness of the SuperES Program of training intervention in order to train 95% of the participants with pedagogical supervision skills.
- (B1) 5. To provide the assistants of the IPV with the structuring literacy teaching didactic of pedagogical supervision skills.
- (B2) 6. To organize Conferences that favour pedagogical supervision skills and successful learning in higher education.
- (C1) 7. To elaborate prescriptive guidelines so as to support recommendations and guidelines of evidence-based good practices within the scope of pedagogical supervision skills.
- (D1) 8. To provide specialized support to the development of pedagogical supervision skills. 9. To provide updated research data on pedagogical supervision skills.
- (D2) 10. To create a system to support the self-monitoring of pedagogical supervision skills.
- (E1) 11. To increase new knowledge on pedagogical supervision skills and thus define guidelines for their promotion. 12. To participate in the achievement of the objectives of the institutional plan and mission of the IPV.
- (E2) 13. To produce scientific/technical papers.
- (E3) 14. To disseminate the results of the research carried out in scientific events, highlighting those with an implication in the promotion of the pedagogical supervision skills.
- (E4) 15. To create the opportunity of sharing experiences among higher education teachers, favouring the development of pedagogical supervision skills. 16. To disclose results of the research that was carried out.
- (F) 17. To demonstrate the development and evolution of the actions of the Project.
18. To document performance indicators.
19. To evaluate the effectiveness of interventions...

## Methods

The target group is made up of 5025 students and 413 teachers of the IPV.

The sample will consider about 210 assistants and 900 students. The methodology is based on an experimental research with two groups: the experimental group consisting of 20% of the population that will receive training, and the control group. To monitor the effectiveness of the program, a battery of questionnaires will be applied in two different moments of 2017 (before and after its implementation).

Students will share their viewpoint on the added value of the Student Mentor.

The research protocol developed by the research team includes data collection instruments aimed at obtaining, among other things, direct information on supervisory practices before and after the training intervention as well as the collection of information supported by the online completion of the following instruments:

- Ad hoc questionnaire Higher education students' opinion on preferences regarding the effectiveness of the pedagogical supervision process and the existence of the student mentor.
- Ideal Mentor Scale by Cunha (2017), with figures adapted from Botas, Gabriel & Welling (1997/1998).
- Supervisor Core Skills Scale.

The study obtained a favourable opinion from the Ethics Committee of the ESSV, it was authorized by the institutional leaders of the organic units of the IPV and the participation of those who volunteered willingly gave their written consent.

### Findings

The main focus of the training intervention is to develop talents/attitudes and skills in the didactics of supervision. Its mobilization and transfer will consolidate favourable changes, which translate into the safeguarding of pedagogical practices and of quality teaching and, consequently, into greater academic success. The SuperES Project, supported by an action research, takes on with the participants a co-path that aims to implement/test training and research tools to lessen the knowledge gap on the process of pedagogical supervision.

It should be noted that the model program of the training intervention SuperES already developed aims to equip assistants with pedagogical supervision skills and foster quality higher education. Therefore, following is: (i) the evaluation of the impact of the training intervention program –SuperES Program– for the assistants; (ii) the construction of a computer platform/website – Didactics & School Supervision: Caixa Geral de Ajudas for training support; (iii) the creation of a tool for the self-monitoring of pedagogical skills “Supervision +” based on new technologies. As for the expected results, regarding the implementation of the 17 activities envisioned during the SuperES Project, the research team planned to materialize the ones described in table 1:

### Conclusions

The SuperES training intervention program integrates an action research, assuming with the participants a co-path that aims to implement/test training and research tools to lessen the knowledge gap on the process of pedagogical supervision. Of the 17 expected activities, the following are highlighted: (i) Diagnosis of the training needs on pedagogical supervision skills. (ii) Monitoring and evaluation of pedagogical supervision skills. (iii) Construction/implementation/evaluation of the SuperES Program. (iv) Assessment of the mentor’s added value to the students.

In addition to the aforementioned indicators, the achievement of the project will be relevant and have implications in the loco-regional, national and international community, since scientific knowledge will be built to support the development of guidelines for the promotion of good practices of pedagogical supervision and mentoring with academic success of higher education students.

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