REFLECTION OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON STUDENT ASSISTANCE ACTIONS: AN ANALYSIS OF HIGHER EDUCATION FEDERAL INSTITUTIONS

REFLEXO DA PANDEMIA COVID-19 NAS AÇÕES DA ASSISTÊNCIA ESTUDANTIL: ANÁLISE NAS INSTITUIÇÕES FEDERAIS DE ENSINO SUPERIOR

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ABSTRACT

Around the world, organizations have had to respond to the Covid-19 outbreak with limited information and facing many uncertainties. Thus, this study aims to examine the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on student assistance actions. Specifically, it analyzes the actions taken before and during the Covid-19 pandemic in the 69 federal institutions of higher education in Brazil. Therefore, it reviews the literature on student assistance in IFES and the effects of the covid-19 pandemic on organizations and education. A descriptive study was used, with a qualitative approach and data collection obtained from documentary research. The results show that the changes in actions that did not involve pecuniary benefits, such as the offer of food in university restaurants and health, sport and cultural actions, which were previously carried out in the university structures, started to be offered, within the possibilities, remotely. Finally, the area of digital inclusion deserves to be highlighted, considering that these actions were the last place in the list of actions taken before the pandemic. The study contributes to demonstrating the weaknesses and limitations inherent in the actions taken by the IFES, as well as reflecting on the complexity of the actions that permeate student assistance during a pandemic period.

Keywords: Student Assistance. Covid-19. Pandemic. IFES. University Education.

RESUMO

Ao redor do mundo, as organizações tiveram que responder ao surto de Covid-19 com informações limitadas e enfrentando muitas incertezas. Assim, o presente estudo objetiva examinar o reflexo da pandemia Covid-19 nas ações da assistência estudantil. Especificamente, analisa quais as ações praticadas antes e durante a pandemia de Covid-19 nas 69 instituições federais de ensino superior do Brasil. Para tanto, revisa a literatura sobre assistência estudantil nas IFES e os efeitos da pandemia de covid-19 nas organizações e no ensino. Utilizou-se de um estudo descritivo, com abordagem qualitativa e coleta de dados obtida de pesquisa documental. Os resultados apontam que as mudanças nas ações que não envolveram benefícios pecuniários, como oferta de alimentação nos restaurantes universitários e ações de saúde, esporte e cultura, que antes realizadas nas estruturas da universidade, passaram a ser oferecidas, dentro das possibilidades, de modo remoto. Por fim, a área da inclusão digital merece um destaque, tendo em vista que estas ações configuravam última colocação no rol das ações praticadas antes da pandemia. O estudo contribui em demonstrar as fragilidades e as limitações inerentes as ações praticadas pelas IFES, bem como refletir sobre a complexidade das ações que permeiam fazer a assistência estudantil em época de pandemia.

Palavras-chave: Assistência Estudantil. Covid-19. Pandemia. IFES. Ensino Superior.

1 INTRODUCTION

Organizations and countries around the world have had to respond to the Covid-19 outbreak with limited information and facing many uncertainties (JANSSEN; VOORT, 2020). Many organizations have needed significant transformation, rethinking key elements of their business processes and the use of technology to maintain operations while adhering to a changing landscape (DWIVEDI *et al.*, 2020). The capacity to be agile and adaptable has been highlighted, particularly regarding the timing of policy measures, the level of decision centralization, decision autonomy, and the balance between change and stability (JANSSEN; VOORT, 2020).

The U.S., Brazil, and India are experiencing the highest number of daily cases (DWIVEDI et al., 2020) and the virus outbreak has brought a sense of urgency to adapt in order to combat the pandemic (JANSSEN; VOORT, 2020). Thus, adaptability is essential when facing a major and disruptive change, such as the Covid-19 pandemic (JANSSEN; VOORT, 2020), given the impact it brought on organizations to maintain operations during the pandemic (DWIVEDI *et al.*, 2020). Organizations were forced to adopt new forms of remote work and rethink their business models to adapt to the realities of the Covid-19 environment (CARROLL; CONBOY, 2020).

One sector that has undergone a substantial digital transformation is the global higher education sector (DWIVEDI *et al.*, 2020). Soon, it was no different with Brazilian Federal Institutions of Higher Education (IFES), as the pandemic caused federal education, mostly, to migrate to the online form, which resulted in professors and academics learning new online teaching techniques, with little or no prior training and experience. In the case of student assistance, which seeks to democratize the permanence conditions of young people in federal higher education, minimize the effects of social and regional inequalities in the permanence and completion of higher education, reduce retention and evasion rates, and contribute to the promotion of social inclusion through education, the challenge was even greater, given that in developing countries, as it is the case of Brazil and students assisted by the National Program for Student Assistance (PNAES), the digital exclusion is more apparent due to social and cultural barriers (SOUZA; CINTRA, 2020).

Therefore, the pandemic forced governments and decision makers to reevaluate the use of information systems and technology (DWIVEDI *et al.*, 2020) and provide a path forward, even if there are hit and misses, because of the emergency that the decision was

required. In addition, and because of the outbreak, the literature has not offered a consolidated view of actions related to IFES student assistance to deal with a pandemic situation. In this context, this paper aims to examine the reflection of the Covid-19 pandemic on the priority actions of the PNAES Decree n. 7.234/2010. Specifically, it seeks to compare the actions practiced by the IFES before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. The research offers a timely and relevant contribution to the existing literature by presenting a holistic view of the 'new' actions in student assistance. Nevertheless, it reinforces the need and the importance of actions of assistance to less favored students, as a way to equalize the conditions of maintenance and permanence in higher education. Finally, it contributes to demonstrating the weaknesses and limitations inherent to the actions practiced by the IFES, as well as reflecting on the complexity of the actions that permeate student assistance at a time of pandemic.

The remaining sections of the paper are organized as follows: section 2 presents a theoretical background oriented on the discussion of student assistance in IFES and the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on organizations and teaching; section 3 presents the methodological procedures of the research (type, data collection, and analysis); and section 4 presents and discusses the results. Finally, section 5 concludes the paper with practical and theoretical implications.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 STUDENT ASSISTANCE IN FEDERAL INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher Education in Brazil brings in its development trajectory students from different social classes. The actions that ensure the democratization of education and the access and permanence of many students who do not have the conditions to enter and continue in the university are developed by the Student Assistance programs. These programs are essential for most of these students to be able to complete a higher education course (ESTRADA; RADAELLI, 2014).

After a long trajectory of social achievements in promoting democratic access and permanence of low-income students in higher education, the regulation of PNAES occurred through Decree No. 7234 of July 19, 2010, which aimed at democratizing the conditions of permanence of students found in conditions of social vulnerability, equalizing inequalities, reducing dropout rates, and contributing to social inclusion (SOUZA; CINTRA, 2020). The decree points out Student Assistance (SA) in the areas of food, housing, health, transportation,

digital inclusion, culture, sports, daycare, pedagogical support, and access for people with special needs. The objective in these areas is to achieve equality for students in higher education opportunities, combating situations of retention and evasion. The management of the programs is discretionary so that each university can carry out the actions that are necessary (SANTANA *et al.*, 2015).

The organization of the SA in the IFES happens through Sectors, Divisions, Boards, Superintendence, and Pro-Rectories, which act as management units and coordinate the assistance actions. These units are composed of professionals from different areas who work together to articulate the demands and implement the assistance programs (ASSIS *et al.*, 2013). Universities have different sectors responsible for the development of SA at the institutional level. The government's financial incentive for the maintenance of SA programs meets a need to enable equal opportunity in higher education. Considering that many students do not have the financial conditions to continue studying at the university, the SA programs have the main objective of contributing to the permanence of students, improving academic performance, and promoting preventive actions to minimize situations of dropout (VASCONCNCELOS, 2010). The PNAES establishes the implementation of assistance programs by the IFES to promote student housing, food programs through the URs, transportation assistance, health, culture, digital inclusion programs, daycare, pedagogical support, and special education. Selection criteria and methods are under the responsibility of the institution (GRAEFF, 2014).

The SA is discussed on several dimensions, with most studies from the perspective of the implementation of welfare policies, investigating the advances of SA in higher education after the decree of the PNAES, followed by discussions on the evaluation of policies and reflections of the results of actions and the perception of SA from the student's perspective (SOUZA; CINTRA, 2020). The use of indicators in program evaluations in this context is a topic that is raised in recent research, with results that point to the need for the proposal of indicators in order to subsidize information at the institutional and national levels (FAVA; CINTRA, 2020).

However, the pandemic and its impacts on academic life is a recent field of study, with little literature. With actions implemented as of March 2020, with the suspension of face-to-face classes and the authorization of the MEC for classes through virtual learning platforms, most IFES were faced with the impossibility of offering remote classes and ensuring the

principles of equality, equity, and inclusion in the teaching process, since students do not have the same condition of technological infrastructure (MAURICIO *et al.*, 2020). Thus, the issue deserves to be highlighted.

2.2 THE EFFECTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON ORGANIZATIONS AND TEACHING

The environment of organizations is turbulent and constantly changing. What is different in the digital age is that changes are occurring at unprecedented rates of speed and scale (BROSSEAU *et al.*, 2019). The current destructive situation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic is an example of this. Today, for example, many organizations no longer enjoy the luxury of developing strategies for multi-year intervals but struggle to find survival plans for the next quarter or month (BLACKBURN *et al.*, 2020). Simultaneously, digital technological advances occur at lightning speed, such as big data analytics, artificial intelligence, machine learning, autonomous system, 3-D printing, virtual reality, and so on.

These technologies are not only changing the way organizations operate and people live but have also proven valuable in combating social problems (LEE; TRIMI, 2021). Advanced digital technologies are widely applied to test, track contacts, and treat people for Covid-19, to rapidly restructure supply chains, and most importantly, to support telework and distance education, which will permanently change the nature of work and education in the future (SNEADER; SINGHAL, 2020).

The pandemic crisis enables many organizations to be in a state of urgency for innovation (redirecting business, products, materials, etc.) in order to implement it for solutions to problems such as critical material shortages given supply chain disruptions and reopening the economy safely (STOLL, 2020). In this regard, innovative solutions have become indispensable as a strategic priority for every type of organization, be it business, government, or non-profit enterprises (LEE; LIM, 2018).

In the higher education sphere, the pandemic brought about a change in the way education was conducted. Most governments around the world have temporarily closed educational institutions to contain the spread of COVID-19. In addition, professors, parents, and students seek to secure the essential services that universities provide, such as education, childcare and meals, health care, and social services on which many families depend (BILLY, 2020).

Many countries demonstrate considerable creativity in serving college students while educational institutions remain closed (BILLY, 2020). As an example, Los Angeles (USA) has spread 60 fast food centers, 40 childcare centers, and launched a distance learning application that involves interactive study and partnership with public television that includes English and Spanish programming for each age group with lesson plans and assignments. Also in the US, the example of Miami-Dade County and California have offered teacher support hotlines (BILLY, 2020).

In this sense, the pandemic is a great example of complex, intensified, and unpredictable change (DOYLE; CONBOY, 2020). In light of this, organizations have had to rethink their key elements of their processes and use of technology to maintain operations, at the same time as they adhere to a scenario of changing guidelines and new procedures (DWIVEDI *et al.*, 2020). To survive, as well as flourish in times of crisis, organizations need to rely on their ability to innovate (LEE; TRIMI, 21).

3 METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

Based on the objective proposed, this research used a descriptive study, with a qualitative approach, with data collection obtained through documentary research. The data collection considered the websites of the 69 IFES in Brazil, based on the following elements: specific student assistance section, edict section, and news portal. For these elements, we considered the search for information related to student assistance, aid, support, and Covid-19. It is noteworthy that some information was not available for the Federal University do Norte do Tocantins (UFNT), due to the fact that it is in a transition process, after the split of the Araguaína and Tocantinópolis Campuses, which previously belonged to the Federal University do Tocantins (UFT).

The data collection period was from January 18 to 20, 2021 (during the pandemic), which attempted to collect the maximum number of actions involving student assistance and covid-19 since the beginning of the pandemic. When accessing the institutional website of the IFES, it was observed the existence of a link or quick access to the student assistance section; in the absence of these, it was sought through the menus of the websites the respective links to the student assistance services or Pro-Rectory. In these sections, we verified the existence of information about the actions and aid related to covid-19. In the absence of this type of data, the edict section was verified, available in most of the IFES, and from there, the location of

artifacts related to research. Finally, it also considered the news portal, which met the researched demand. Figure 1 illustrates the procedures used in data collection.

Figure 1 Flow of procedures used in data collection
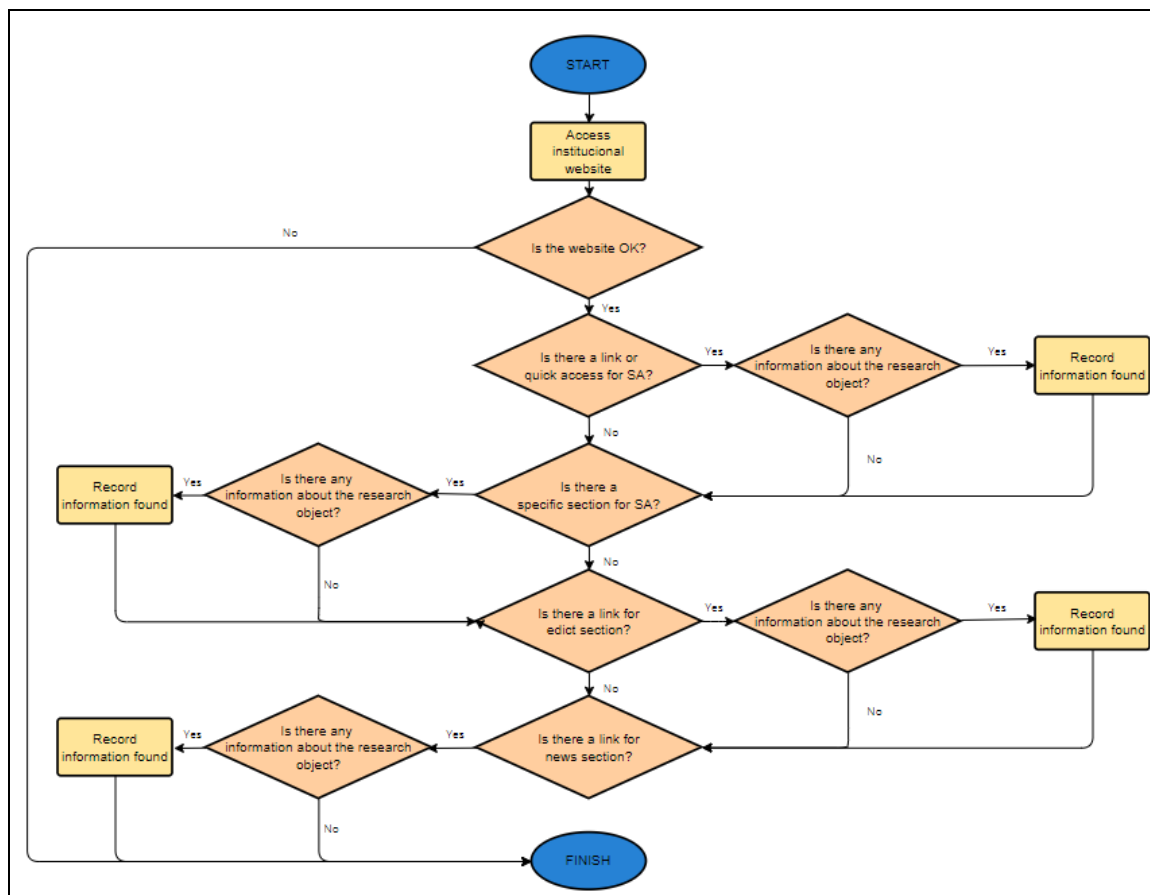
Source: Authors' elaboration.
**Note**: SA: Student Assistance

The data collected in the various sections of the website comprised as many artifacts as possible that portrayed the actions of the IFES in the scope of SA, especially in meeting the ten priority actions of the PNAES, as a result of the pandemic caused by Covid-19, which gave visibility to what was offered to the academics.

The data collected were organized in spreadsheets, with records for each IFES in the areas of PNAES, based on the actions developed by each institution. The digital inclusion actions were also registered, considering the various existing possibilities (programs and mechanisms that the IFES used in the scope of their actions). The data analysis was done in comparison with the survey pointed out by Fava and Cintra (2020), when they point out the actions of the PNAES before the Covid-19 pandemic.

4 PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

When considering the actions before the pandemic (January 2020), we have the distribution of the IFES in each of the ten priority areas of PNAES, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 Quantity of IFES by PNAES areas (before the pandemic - January 2020)
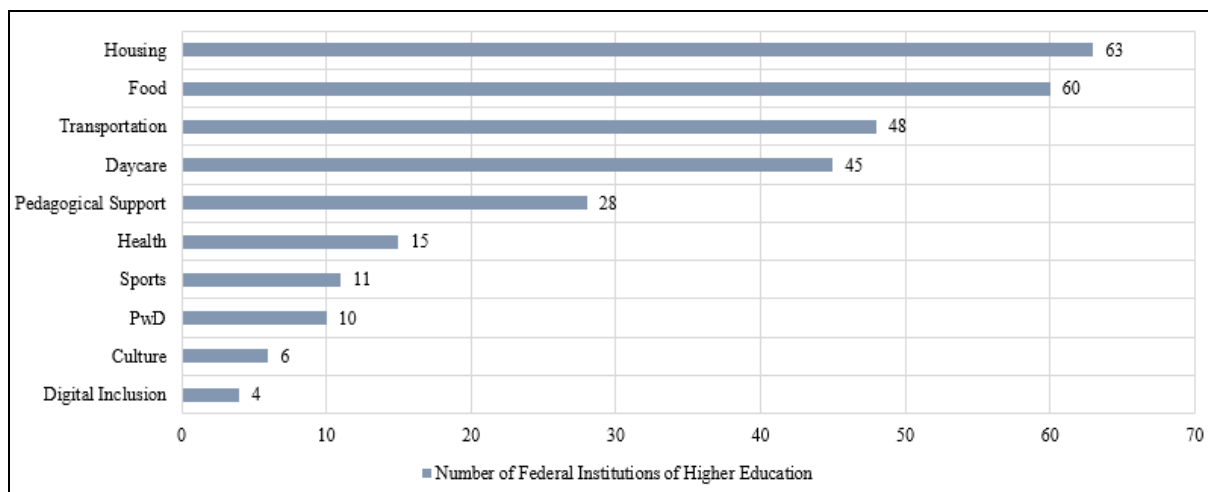
Source: Fava e Cintra (2020, p. 8).

Thus, it is noticeable that the vast majority of the IFES had, before the pandemic, their actions focused on minimizing the housing, food, transportation, daycare, and pedagogical problems of their students assisted by PNAES. Still, it is worth pointing out the uniformity of the actions in view of the complexity of student assistance, given the perceived homogeneity of the actions. Therefore, for the most part, the IFES maintained the payment of the benefits already granted before the beginning of the pandemic. Thus, in order to understand the impact, the actions were tabulated considering January 2021 - Figure 3.

Figure 3 Number of IFES by PNAES areas (during the pandemic - January 2021)
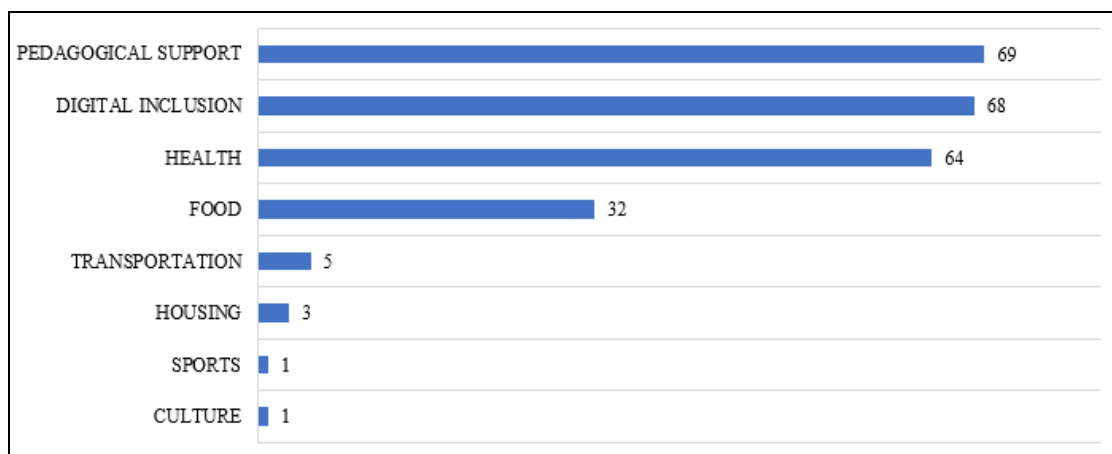
Source: Survey data (2021)

The biggest changes observed involved actions that did not involve pecuniary benefits, such as the supply of food in the university restaurants and health, sports, and cultural actions that were previously carried out in the university facilities but are now offered, as far as possible, remotely. The pedagogical support actions were unanimous, due to the classes offered in an online mode. Several sections with information and reports of the procedures were available, and the pedagogical support services, previously performed in person, were offered remotely, through telephone contacts, e-mails, or virtual environments.

The actions that involved the health area are also noteworthy, especially with regard to psychological support for students and the entire academic community. Several initiatives were taken in order to continue the existing service, as well as to offer new services, such as remote assistance via skype, whatsapp, lives, and reports about mental health care during the pandemic.

In the area of transportation, some IFES maintained the aid previously available, besides offering others for those students who wished to return to their families, often in other cities, during the pandemic. As far as food is concerned, the great majority of the IFES with university restaurants created other mechanisms to provide this action, such as food donations and food baskets or the provision of monetary aid, due to the university restaurants were closed and the need to keep the students assisted.

The actions related to 'access, participation, and learning for students with disabilities, global developmental disorders, and high abilities and talented' were included in the information regarding pedagogical support and digital inclusion, since some IFES provided financial aid for the purchase of equipment for pedagogical development in this period, as well as in the granting of aid for students to accompany scholars with disabilities, thus configuring actions for pedagogical support in general. Many cases found in this sense were impossible to be accurately assessed, given the approximation between these two actions in this scope of application, allowing the concatenation of these areas as if they were one.

Nevertheless, other supplementary actions had many occurrences, such as: the inclusion of new fixed-term financial aid; the distribution of food baskets to residents of student housing; the readjustment and/or extension of benefits already granted; the reallocation of existing aid; the distribution of non-perishable foodstuffs, with the extension of benefits including post-graduate studies.

The area of digital inclusion deserves a highlight, considering that digital inclusion actions were in last place in the ranking of actions, and with the pandemic things took a different turn. In the research carried out by Fava and Cintra (2020), the actions of this scope before the pandemic were offered, with pecuniary aids, in only 4 IFES. With the pandemic and the offer of online and remote classes, the need for computer equipment and Internet access were essential mechanisms for a special look at this action. With the exception of UFNT (in a transition process), all the other IFES presented actions towards the digital inclusion of the academics, according to Chart 1. To deal with the pandemic, there was the need to enter the digital world, causing a drastic change in the way of working (SEIN, 2020).

Chart 1 Digital inclusion actions as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic in IFES

IFES	Connected Students project	Financial aid for internet connection	Financial aid for acquisition of IT equipment	Loan of Equipment	Financial aid	Others
UnB	X	X	X	X		Donation (natural or legal person)
UFCat	X		X			
UFG	X	X	X	X	X	
UFJ	X	X	X			
UFGD					X	
UFMS	X		X		X	
UFMT		X	X	X		
UFR		X	X			
UFAL	X		X			
UFBA	X		X			
UFOB	X	X	X			
UFRB	X		X			
UFSB	X		X			
UFCA	X	X	X			
UFC	X		X			
UNILAB	X					*Tablets*
UFMA	X			X		
UFPB	X	X	X			
UFCG	X	X	X			
UFPE	X		X	X		
UFAPE	X				X	
UFRPE	X		X			
UNIVASF	X		X			
UFDPar	X	X				
UFPI	X	X	X			
UFRN	X	X	X			
UFERSA	X	X	X			
UFS	X	X				
UFNT	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
UFAC	X		X			
UFAM	X	X	X			
UNIFAP		X	X			
UFOPA	X	X				Distribution of *Chromebook*
UFPA	X		X			
UNIFESSPA	X	X	X	X		
UFRA	X	X				
UNIR	X		X			
UFRR	X	X	X			
UFT		X	X			
UFES	X	X	X			
UNIFAL	X	X	X	X		

IFES	Connected Students project	Financial aid for internet connection	Financial aid for acquisition of IT equipment	Loan of Equipment	Financial aid	Others
UNIFEI		X		X		
UFJF	X	X				
UFLA	X	X				
UFMG		X	X	X		Digital Sponsorship Scholarship
UFOP	X	X	X			Cash for maintenance
UFSJ	X	X	X			
UFU	X	X	X			
UFV	X	X				
UFTM	X	X	X			
UFVJM	X				X	
UNIRIO					X	
UFRJ		X	X			
UFF		X		X		
UFRRJ	X	X	X			
UFSCar			X			
UNIFESP	X	X		X		
UFABC	X			X		
UFPR	X			X		
UNILA	X	X				
UTFPR	X	X	X			
UFCSPA	X		X			
UFPel		X	X			*Chip* for smartphone
UFSM	X	X	X			
UNIPAMPA	X	X	X			
FURG	X				X	
UFRGS	X			X		
UFSC	X	X		X		
UFFS	X	X	X			

Source: Survey data (2021).
Note: NA: Not Available.

In the scope of digital aid, the Connected Students project aims to hire internet access service, through the availability of mobile data package and supply of chips (for students who do not have them yet), to serve students in socioeconomic vulnerability condition, for the implementation and development of academic activities resulting from the Covid-19 (RNP, 2020). This action, a result of the partnership between the Ministry of Education (MEC) and the National Education and Research Network (RNP) allowed the return of the IFES' academic activities still in 2020, in addition to "democratizing access to education, boosting digital inclusion and reducing inequalities in access to Information and Communication Technologies" (MEC, 2020).

The IFES that did not adopt the referred project (RNP/MEC) or even those that, even adopting it, had limitations arising from regions without 3G or 4G area coverage by the operator contracted by the project, provided their students with monetary benefits, characterized in the column 'financial aid for internet connection.' Notwithstanding, the financial aid made available in some IFES also had as a goal the acquisition of IT equipment (computers, laptops, tablets), disclosed through a specific edict, with the necessary rules and

guidelines for the concession of the respective benefits, as well as the description of the need to send proof of purchase invoices of the respective equipment.

The loan of equipment was also one of the alternatives found by the IFES as assistance measures. UNB, for example, made equipment available in accordance with the university's patrimony norms. UFF published a public notice with the possibility of emergency loan of Chromebooks and similar equipment for up to 500 students in a situation of socioeconomic vulnerability. It is important to note that the equipment loans made by the IFES are valid while the effects of the pandemic caused by Covid-19 subsist. The reflection of mass digital inclusion or the attempt to include the vulnerable is reflected by Sein (2020) as the movement of the group from "non-users by choice" to users, i.e., they were not given the choice of online education but were simply sucked into online education with the pandemic.

Among the other actions adopted by the IFES, the UFMG stands out, which developed a version of the sponsorship scholarship, already existing in its actions, this time for the scope of digital inclusion. Named digital sponsorship scholarship, this project consists in receiving, through the donation of laptops, desktop computers, or money, as a way to subsidize the actions of digital assistance to students (FUMP, 2020). Such actions for digital inclusion reinforce the commitment that the IFES have regarding equal access to education, as recommended by the federal constitution (MAURICIO *et al.*, 2020).

The variety of actions from the minimum areas defined by the PNAES decree comes to meet what the program itself guides when it advocates that the actions of SA should be implemented in an articulated manner with teaching, research, and extension, in order to democratize the conditions of permanence of students, in addition to minimizing inequalities, among other objectives; nevertheless, the autonomy given to the IFES allows each institution to define its criteria and mechanisms in favor of these actions (BRASIL, 2010). The permission for remote teaching provoked in the IFES the concern with the high inequality of access existing among students, in addition to the various pedagogical losses that could originate with the pandemic; in this context, the actions of the PNAES contributed to these structural problems to be alleviated (DIB, 2020).

The adversities and consequences caused by the pandemic and the social isolation have brought changes never seen in this century (BACKES *et al.*, 2020). The difficulties that many employees had in their institutions occurred because they were not familiar with technology, besides the unfeasibility of institutions in providing remote work. In the

educational context, this was no different. The IFES had the need to be resilient and adapt in this turbulent and unknown moment. Short-term decision-making and the lack of long-term planning in the face of such an adverse situation caused the IFES administrators to encounter a totally new and unfamiliar environment. The limitation of government funding and assistance capacity was another point that deserves to be highlighted in this scenario (BACKES *et al.*, 2020), besides being a challenge when facing the balance in the public budget in emerging countries, as is the case of Brazil (MONTEIRO *et al.*, 2021). According to Dib (2020), the delay in allowing remote education was due to the inequality of virtual access in the country, making it impossible for students to continue their education at home.

The reality of the more intensified use of technological resources for remote teaching was triggered by needs, especially the use of digital technology systems, so that the activities and strategies adopted would allow the bond and communication between students and teachers (FREIRE; PAIVA; FORTES, 2020). The educational practices, as a result of the pandemic, had to change drastically, often in non-ideal circumstances, in a process not easy nor the most appropriate, considering the urgency of the teaching activities and the new and diverse scenario experienced until then (VIEIRA; SILVA, 2020). Even in the face of so many difficulties, remote education and the various resources have proven essential in this context, in the process of adapting to the new normal that will come with the end of the pandemic and future technological opportunities (CARNEIRO *et al.*, 2020).

The maturing of the experiences that are being lived in this period added to the various existing circumstances requires an urgency of digital transformation in the public sectors, always with a close look at the elements and aspects involved in the most diverse dimensions of the institutions, incurring the risk of doom to failure if this is not considered (RUIZ *et al.*, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic has only aggravated the limitations in student assistance actions, as well as the inequalities of access and permanence that have always been present realities in higher education in our country.

Paraphrasing Sein (2020): it is undeniable that many, if not all, of the issues raised here already existed, but the pandemic certainly amplified them and thus provided us with a magnifying lens to examine the depths of these issues. It is up to the student assistance the process of reinventing itself in the face of the numerous difficulties already known in policies involving society and education (SOUSA; DIAS, 2020). The crisis has demanded a lot from governments and has shown that they can be agile and adaptable - although public agencies

are often criticized for not having these characteristics (JANSSEN; VOORT, 2020). In addition, several lessons can be learned from the pandemic that will be useful for governments in the future. First, there is no single best response strategy. Responses vary by domain, and even within a government, there will be no single best approach (JANSSEN; VOORT, 2020).

Although IFES have looked into creating 'new' actions to minimize the effect of the pandemic on students, this type of strategy is risky in a crisis situation, as there may only be one chance for effective response (JANSSEN; VOORT, 2020). Another proviso made by Jannssen and Voort (2020) is that responses may need to change over time, because as the pandemic unfolds, responses that are effective at the beginning may not produce the same results in later stages. Thus, monitoring, learning, and adapting are critical. Finally, the pandemic has demonstrated the value of having a variety of response strategies available. Evolutionary theory suggests that variety is necessary, so that selection can occur to maintain fit with the environment (JANSSEN; VOORT, 2020).

5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper aimed at examining the reflection of the Covid-19 pandemic on the priority actions of Decree No. 7.234/2010 of PNAES in 69 Brazilian federal institutions. Specifically, it seeks to compare the actions practiced by IFES before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. A descriptive study was carried out, the approach to the problem was qualitative and as for the procedures, data collection was obtained through documentary research. The data analysis was according to the recent research of Fava and Cintra (2020), regarding the actions of the PNAES before the Covid-19 pandemic.

It was identified that the changes in the actions that did not involve monetary benefits, such as the supply of food in university restaurants and health, sports, and cultural actions, which were previously carried out in the university facilities, began to be offered, within the possibilities, in a remote way. The area of digital inclusion deserves a highlight, considering that these actions were the last on the list of actions practiced before the pandemic.

As a theoretical implication, the study discussed an issue in which the literature did not offer a consolidated view of the actions related to the IFES student assistance to deal with a pandemic situation. In this context, it contributes to demonstrating the weaknesses and limitations inherent to the actions practiced by the IFES, as well as reflecting on the

complexity of the actions that permeate student assistance during a pandemic. It is noteworthy that these notes will also serve the practical field, which becomes necessary in order to demand a policy that is effective for students.

The limitations of this study will certainly serve as an incentive for the development of new research. The main limitation was perhaps not being able to deepen a more qualitative analysis of the coverage of the actions, given the documentary focus of the research, as well as the response time of the actions in the various IFES. Certainly, understanding the impact of these actions on student permanence and/or performance should be the focus of future research, in line with other work already developed (BORDIM *et al.*, 2019; CINTRA; RIBEIRO; COSTA, 2018). In addition, understanding whether there was a distinct reflection in the various groups served is characterized as a new line of research.

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