


THE ROLE OF STUDENT ASSISTANCE AT IFMS: CHALLENGES AND IMPROVEMENTS AT PAES

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the role of student assistance at the Federal Institute of Mato Grosso do Sul (IFMS), based on the Student Assistance Program (PAES). As a public policy of social inclusion, PAES aims to promote permanence and academic success, offering conditions to students who face situations of socioeconomic vulnerability. The research, of exploratory and descriptive character, adopts a qualitative-quantitative approach, based on bibliographic review and documentary analysis. Data collection was carried out through a questionnaire, whose information was analyzed by Content Analysis. The results indicate that 57.4% of the students consider the program fundamental for their permanence in the institution; 38.3% stated that they would not be able to continue without the benefits; 51.1% highlight the positive effects on academic dedication; 66% point to the benefit as a financial relief and 53.2% stated that it partially meets their financial needs. It is concluded that the PAES plays an important role in the academic trajectory, reinforcing the need for strengthening and continuous improvement of the policy to expand its effectiveness and reach in the institution.

Keywords: Student Assistance. Public Policy. Social inclusion.

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INTRODUCTION

Ensuring school permanence and success represent great challenges for public educational institutions in Brazil, especially in the field of professional and technological education. At the Federal Institute of Mato Grosso do Sul (IFMS), many students face socioeconomic difficulties that directly impact their academic trajectory, reflecting in school dropout and retention rates. Given this scenario, this study seeks to analyze how the Student Assistance Program (PAES), aligned with the National Student Assistance Program (PNAES), contributes to mitigating these challenges, enabling social inclusion and reducing educational inequalities.

Recognized as a public policy, student assistance plays an important role in minimizing the obstacles encountered by students in their academic trajectory. Based on specific actions, this policy seeks to ensure permanence and academic success, contributing to the reduction of social inequalities and strengthening inclusion through education.

Education, guaranteed by the Federal Constitution of 1988, is recognized as a fundamental right. This guarantee is strengthened by Law No. 9,394/96, the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDB), and by the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (ECA), instituted by Law No. 8,069/90. However, as Sacavino (2007) observes, the recognition of the right to education not only facilitates access to other rights, but its denial implies the deprivation of several fundamental rights, perpetuating inequalities and contributing to the maintenance of poverty.

In order to face the challenges related to ensuring equal conditions of access and permanence in educational institutions, specific measures were adopted. Among them, the establishment of the National Student Assistance Program (PNAES), established by Decree No. 7,234, of July 19, 2010, stands out. Prepared by the Ministry of Education (MEC), the program represents a significant milestone in the consolidation of student assistance, by establishing and strengthening conditions that enable students to remain in higher education, including the Federal Institutes. Among its main objectives, the democratization of permanence conditions, the mitigation of the effects of social and regional inequalities, the strengthening of social inclusion and the reduction of school retention and dropout rates stand out (BRASIL, 2010).

Law No. 11,892, of December 29, 2008, established the Federal Network of Professional, Scientific and Technological Education within the Ministry of Education. With this legislation, the Federal Institutes of Education, Science and Technology (IFs) were created, unifying technical schools, agrotechnical schools and Federal Centers for

Technological Education (CEFETs) into a national education network. The integration of the IFs into the PNAES expanded the reach of student assistance policies, reinforcing actions aimed at promoting equal access and permanence in education, enabling equal opportunities for students.

Being a multi-campus and multicurricular institution, IFMS offers basic, professional and higher education, based on comprehensive training and commitment to its quality. Its mission is to promote educational excellence, training professionals with a humanistic and innovative vision, trained to contribute to economic and social development at local, regional and national levels. Among its fundamental values, social commitment stands out, reflected in its actions aimed at inclusion and the democratization of education (IFMS, 2018).

The student assistance policy at IFMS was formally instituted in 2014 through Resolution No. 002, of February 27, 2014, of the Superior Council (COSUP) (IFMS, 2014). However, even before its official regulation, the institution was already developing actions aimed at student assistance, in accordance with article 7 of Decree No. 7,234/2010 (Brasil, 2010).

PAES was regulated by COSUP Resolution No. 02, of January 29, 2018 (IFMS, 2018), in line with the objectives established by the PNAES. Its most recent update of the program took place with COSUP Resolution No. 26, of July 7, 2022 (IFMS, 2022). The PAES aims to promote equal conditions among students, improve academic performance and combat school repetition and dropout.

With the aim of democratizing access to education, IFMS implements student assistance as an essential part of its educational policy. PAES aims to promote the integral education of students, meeting their socioeconomic needs and facilitating their permanence in the institution. The program aims to expand access opportunities, mitigate the impacts of social inequalities on the school trajectory and strengthen support for the completion of courses. In addition, PAES contributes to improving teaching and learning processes, aiming to reduce failure, retention, and school dropout rates, especially in cases resulting from socioeconomic difficulties (IFMS, 2022).

Advancing in the construction and strengthening of inclusive education is fundamental, which requires the improvement and expansion of student assistance initiatives. Within the scope of the IFMS, the PAES stands out as an important instrument in promoting equal opportunities and enabling permanence and academic success.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

STUDENT ASSISTANCE AS A PUBLIC POLICY

Education is understood as an essential means for human emancipation, as it promotes the intellectual, cultural and social development of individuals, in addition to stimulating their potential. Through education, it seeks to form citizens with critical thinking and full awareness of their rights and duties.

Saviani (2013) argues that the right to education, although insufficient in itself, is a necessary condition for the full exercise of other fundamental rights, whether civil, political, social or economic. In this sense, education plays an important role in building a more just and egalitarian society.

With the entry into force of the Federal Constitution of 1988, Brazil took a significant step towards the democratization of access to education. This legislation recognizes education as a right of all and a duty of the State, by establishing, in article 205, that education is a right of all. Among its principles, in article 206, item I, it ensures that all individuals should have the same opportunities to enter educational institutions and remain in them, successfully, until the conclusion of their education (Brasil, 1988).

Article 208 of the Constitution stands out, which defines as the duty of the State the provision of "supplementary programs of school didactic material, transportation, food and health care" (Brasil, 1988). This provision in the legislation already evidenced the intention to adapt to social demands as they arose, especially in the face of the worsening of social inequalities, through the implementation of a policy to support students.

However, although the legislation has provisions provided for in clear guidelines, it is important to evaluate how these policies are presented in practice and what impacts they have on the daily lives of students, especially those in situations of social vulnerability. As Ghiraldelli Júnior (2001) points out, ensuring school success requires not only initial access to education, but also facing economic, social and cultural barriers that often compromise school permanence.

According to Zago (2006, p. 228) the democratization of education "certainly requires policies to expand access and strengthen public education, at all levels, but it also requires policies aimed at the permanence of students". In this sense, student assistance emerges as a necessary response, seeking to create conditions that allow not only entry into educational institutions, but also the necessary conditions for permanence and completion of studies, especially for the most socially vulnerable groups. According to Dutra and Santos (2017), the incorporation of student assistance into the Federal Government's education agenda was the result of struggles and debates that faced reductionist views on

the subject. These mobilizations allowed this policy to be recognized not as a welfare expense, but as a strategic investment for the educational and social development of the country.

In view of the recognition of education as a right, it is necessary to promote public policies, such as student assistance. We agree with Ciavatta (2005), when he emphasizes that the school cannot be alien to its educational project, prioritizing the material conditions that enable students to have a complete academic trajectory, including needs such as transportation, food and a minimum income to ensure their permanence in school.

In this sense, the PNAES, established in 2010, stands out as an important reference for student assistance. Although initially conceived to meet the emerging needs of students, over the years it has consolidated itself as a structuring policy. Acting in multiple dimensions, the program seeks to ensure permanence and academic success, in addition to contributing significantly to the reduction of social and regional inequalities, which still significantly impact the reality of students.

NATIONAL STUDENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM – PNAES

At the end of the 1980s, Brazil experienced an intense process of democratization that boosted debates and mobilizations in various sectors, including education. Several professionals in the area, members of the student movement and managers linked to the National Forum of Pro-Rectors of Community and Student Affairs (FONAPRACE) and the National Association of Directors of Federal Institutions of Higher Education (ANDIFES) led efforts to consolidate a public policy of student assistance at the national level.

This movement culminated in the approval of the National Student Assistance Plan, whose foundations were outlined in 1997, as established by Normative Ordinance No. 39, of December 12, 2007. However, it was with the enactment of Decree No. 7,234, on July 19, 2010, that the National Student Assistance Program (PNAES) acquired greater legitimacy and impact, consolidating itself as a fundamental policy to strengthen the conditions of permanence and support for students throughout the national territory.

The consolidation of the PNAES by Normative Ordinance No. 39 represented a milestone in the educational agenda, the result of a long trajectory of mobilizations of various sectors of society in the implementation of educational policies aimed at social inclusion. With this initiative, student assistance was consolidated as a social right, with the objective of promoting equal opportunities in the context of public higher education (Vasconcelos, 2010).

In this context, the PNAES has the mission of expanding the conditions that favor the permanence of students in Federal Educational Institutions. As highlighted in Article 2 of Decree No. 7,234/2010, the objectives of the program are:

- I - democratize the conditions of permanence of young people in federal public higher education;
- II - to minimize the effects of social and regional inequalities on the permanence and completion of higher education; III - to reduce retention and dropout rates; IV - contribute to the promotion of social inclusion through education (PNAES, 2010, p. 1).

Although the program was instituted as a structuring policy, its implementation and strengthening present challenges arising from socioeconomic inequalities and regional differences present in our country. The program is contextualized within this reality, being structured to mitigate the impact of socioeconomic inequalities and ensure conditions for students to remain in educational institutions (Imperatori, 2017). This policy not only favors the permanence of students, but also promotes a more inclusive and egalitarian school environment, offering conditions to combat the inequalities present in society.

The PNAES is effective through student assistance actions developed in the following

Areas:

- I - student housing; II - food; III - transportation; IV - health care; V - digital inclusion; VI - culture; VII – sports; VIII - day care center; IX - pedagogical support; X - access, participation and learning of students with disabilities, global developmental disorders and high abilities and giftedness (PNAES, 2010, p. 1).

The Federal Institutes of Education, Science and Technology play a key role in the implementation of PNAES. With Decree No. 7,234/2010, these institutions began to design and develop their own policies aimed at student assistance, aligned with the priority areas of the program. By providing financial aid, pedagogical support and other actions, the Federal Institutes seek to mitigate the consequences of socioeconomic inequalities that can compromise the permanence and training of students in professional and technological education.

The Federal Institutes also stand out for their educational approach, which integrates teaching, research and extension, promoting citizenship and professional training. This conception is guided by the integration between science, technology and culture, inseparable dimensions in the promotion of full human development (Pacheco, 2015).

As a public policy of national scope, PNAES represents a collective achievement by consolidating student assistance as a social right, oriented towards the promotion of equal opportunities for students, enabling conditions for students to access and remain in

education. As highlighted by Kowalski (2012, p. 94), "it was not enough to guarantee access; it was also necessary to foster concrete conditions for the permanence of these students".

PNAES has evolved even more recently, with the enactment of Law No. 14,914, of July 3, 2024, which gave the program the status of law. This legislation, sanctioned by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, strengthened the commitment to student assistance, consolidating it as a fundamental policy not only for higher education, but especially for Professional and Technological Education (EPT), expanding its scope and impact in a challenging educational scenario.

STUDENT ASSISTANCE POLICY AT IFMS - PAES

The Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology of Mato Grosso do Sul (IFMS) is a federal agency linked to the Ministry of Education (MEC). Its creation dates back to the enactment of Law No. 11,892, of December 29, 2008, which established the Federal Network of Professional, Scientific and Technological Education (RFEPCT), establishing the Federal Institutes of Education, Science and Technology.

As of 2014, the IFMS regulated the student assistance policy (IFMS, 2014), with the approval of resolution No. 002, on February 27, 2014, by the Superior Council (COSUP). However, even before this regulation, the institution had already implemented student assistance actions, as provided for in article 7 of Decree No. 7,234/2010 (Brasil, 2010).

In 2018, with the objective of improving the student assistance policy, the Dean of Education (PROEN) prepared a new version of the institutional policy, approved through COSUP Resolution No. 001, of January 29, 2018 (IFMS, 2018). In this way, the IFMS Student Assistance Program (PAES) was regulated through COSUP Resolution No. 002, of January 29, 2018 (IFMS, 2018). Before this regulation, clearer guidelines were prepared for the offer of aid and actions aimed at students.

The student assistance policy, implemented at IFMS, aims to democratize the access, permanence and success of students in the courses offered by the institution, promoting encouragement to the development of teaching, research and extension activities, in line with the PNAES, instituted by Decree No. 7,234/2010 (IFMS, 2018).

Thus, the policy has as its objectives, the promotion of the integral education of students, meeting their socioeconomic and psychopedagogical needs through the development of plans, programs, projects and actions aimed at their well-being and academic success.

In this sense, COSUP Resolution 001/2018 defines that the policy developed at IFMS will be organized in two dimensions. The first dimension is the socioeconomic one, which is aimed at students in situations of social vulnerability, as provided for in the PAES. The teaching, research and extension dimension is formed by programs and actions aimed at the integral development of students.

The main objectives of the IFMS PAES are to support the integral training of students, seeking to meet their needs, especially in socioeconomic aspects. In addition, it seeks to democratize the conditions of permanence, ensuring that all students have equal access to opportunities that favor their continuity in the institution.

The program also proposes to reduce the impacts of social inequalities in relation to the permanence and completion of courses, collaborating to improve teaching and learning processes. With this, it seeks to reduce the rates of failure, retention, and school dropout resulting from socioeconomic difficulties (IFMS, 2018).

The IFMS Institutional Development Plan (PDI 2024-2028) presents the initiatives developed and strengthened by the institution in relation to social responsibility issues. In this sense, this institution develops actions to encourage permanence and success in order to achieve the objectives and institutional goals of the IFMS, ensuring not only access to education, but also the full development of students.

The recent enactment of Law No. 14,914, of July 3, 2024, which institutes the National Student Assistance Policy, represents a new milestone for the IFMS. This legislation reinforces the commitment to student assistance, by consolidating its importance in the scope of Professional and Technological Education (EPT). The regulation of this new law by the IFMS will further strengthen institutional actions, enabling improvements in the academic trajectory of students.

Therefore, the need to strengthen student assistance actions is evident, aiming at the democratization of the conditions of permanence and success of students, in addition to mitigating the impacts of social inequalities. The continuous improvement of these initiatives not only reinforces the possibility of equal opportunities in access and permanence, but also expands the possibilities of social inclusion and contributes decisively to the training and academic and professional development of students.

METHODOLOGY

As for the theoretical-methodological approach, this research adopted a qualitative-quantitative approach. As Minayo (2016, p. 20) points out, qualitative research is characterized by attributing meanings to subjective contexts, working with the "universe of

meanings, motives, aspirations, beliefs, values, and attitudes".

Also from the perspective of Minayo (2016, p. 22), the quantitative approach allows the complementation and foundation of qualitative research, considering that between both approaches "[...] there is a complementary opposition that, when well worked theoretically and practically, produces a wealth of information, deepening and greater interpretative reliability".

As for the objectives, the research was characterized as exploratory and descriptive. Exploratory research, as highlighted by Gil (2008, p. 27) seeks to "provide an approximate overview of a given fact." Descriptive research, on the other hand, aims to "study the characteristics of a group: its distribution by age, sex, origin, level of education, income level, state of physical and mental health, etc." (Gil, 2008, p. 28). In this context, a survey of relevant information on the implementation and consolidation of the public policy of student assistance was carried out, making it possible to understand its main aspects and challenges.

Regarding the research procedures, it was decided to carry out a case study due to the nature of the investigation, which involved the analysis of a real situation. The case study is widely employed in educational research.

As highlighted by Yin (2015, p. 17) he offers the following definition:

The case study is an empirical investigation that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and in its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context may not be clearly evident (YIN, 2015, p. 17).

The development of the research began with the bibliographic research, which, as highlighted by Gil (2008, p. 50) who describes this type of research as "developed from material already prepared, consisting mainly of books and scientific articles". In this sense, one of the main advantages of this method, according to Gil (2008, p. 50), "lies in the fact that it allows the investigator to cover a much wider range of phenomena than that which he could research directly".

To investigate the perception of the beneficiaries about the PAES in the IFMS, the questionnaire was used as the main instrument for data collection. According to Lakatos and Marconi (2017), the questionnaire is a data collection instrument composed of a series of questions, which can be open or closed, and does not necessarily require the presence of the researcher to be answered.

The collected data were submitted to Content Analysis, which, as highlighted by Minayo (2002), aims to:

[...] establish an understanding of the data collected, confirm or not the assumptions of the research and/or answer the questions formulated, and expand knowledge about the researched subject, articulating it to the cultural context of which it is part (MINAYO, 2002, p. 69).

The research was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Dom Bosco Catholic University (UCDB), on 07/10/2024, under Opinion No. 6.942.115 and CAAE No. 79735424.4.0000.5162, ensuring the integrity and confidentiality of the participants. The target audience included students from the Integrated Technical Courses in Administration and Internet Informatics at IFMS – Campus Dourados, enrolled in the years 2022 to 2024. The objective is to investigate the perception of these students in relation to the importance of student assistance in their school trajectories.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

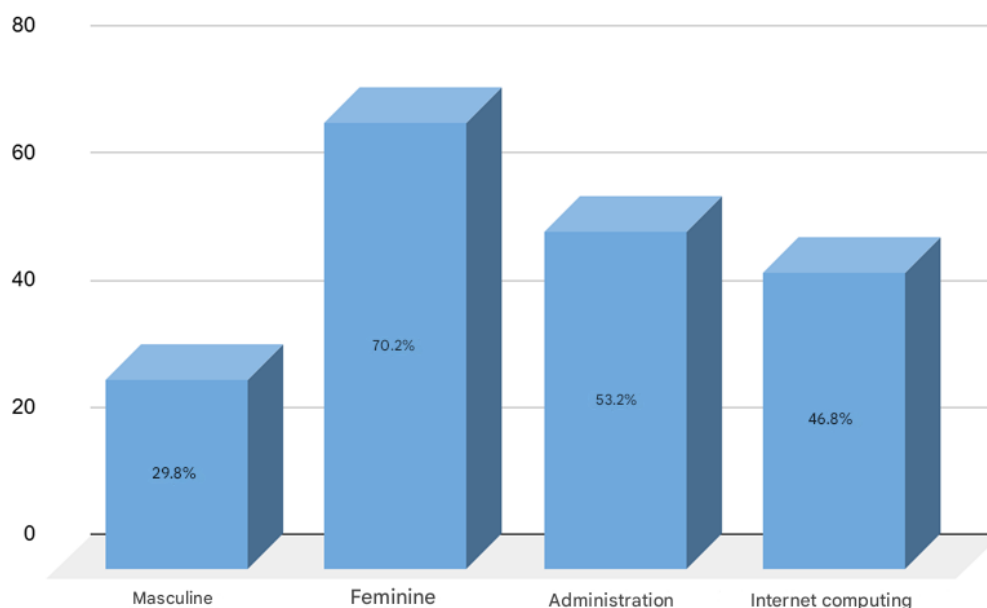
The data collected through a questionnaire applied to PAES beneficiary students at IFMS – Campus Dourados will be presented and analyzed, with the objective of evaluating the relevance of the program in permanence and school success.

The survey aimed at 273 students benefiting from PAES in 2023, enrolled in the Integrated Technical Courses in Administration and Informatics for the Internet. The questionnaire was made available between October 14 and 25, 2024, reaching 47 responses, which corresponds to approximately 17% of the target audience. The sample includes students from all grades of Integrated High School, allowing for a greater number of participants.

STUDENTS' PROFILE AND PERCEPTION OF THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

In this subsection, the profile of the research participants is presented, considering age, gender and course attended. Their perceptions of student assistance are also discussed, offering a contextualized view of their experiences with PAES at IFMS - Campus Dourados.

Figure 1 - Distribution by Gender and Course



Source: Prepared by the author (2024).

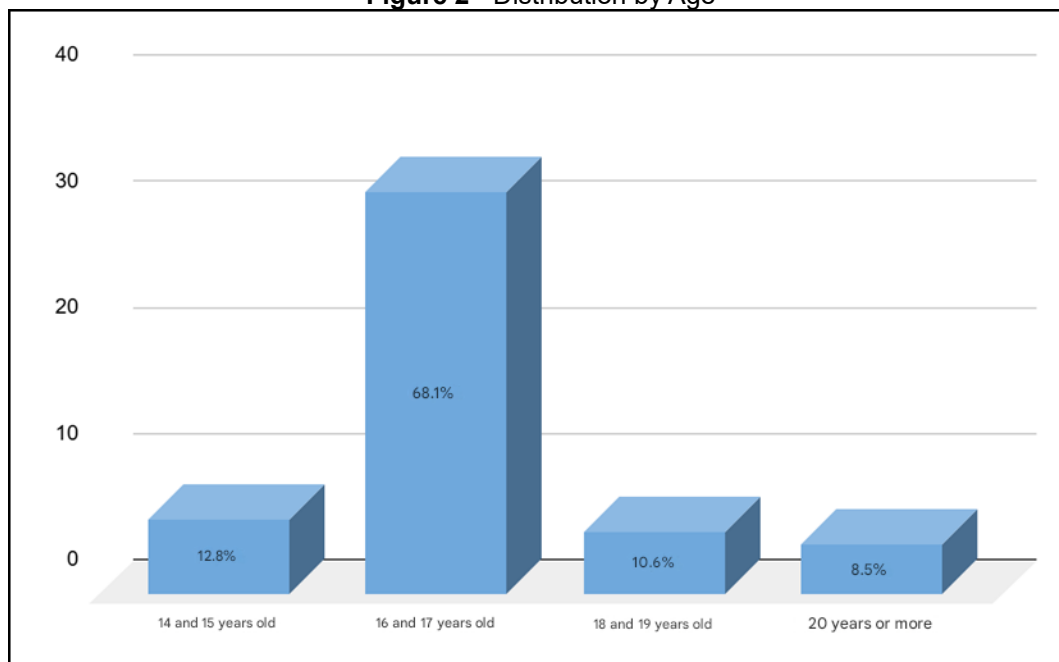
The analysis of gender distribution among the research participants revealed a greater representation of the female gender, with 70.2% (33), while the male gender corresponded to 29.8% (14), as illustrated in Figure 1. This pattern follows the general distribution of enrollments at IFMS – Dourados Campus in 2023. According to information provided by the Nilo Peçanha Platform (PNP), 579 enrollments in integrated high school were registered, representing 53.71% (311) of the female gender, and 46.29% (268) of the male gender.

In the 2023 student assistance selection notices, this predominance was also observed. In public notice 001/2023, of the 122 students benefited, 67.2% (82) of the beneficiaries were female, and 32.8% (40) male. In Public Notice 019/2023, which had 105 applicants, this ratio was 65.7% (69) for females and 34.3% (36) for males.

The distribution of participants among the integrated technical courses showed a balance. The integrated technical course in Administration concentrated 53.2% (25), while the integrated technician in Internet Informatics represented 46.8% (22). This proportionality allows for a comparative analysis between the perceptions of students from the two courses.

In addition, according to PNP data, the number of enrollments in integrated high school at IFMS – Campus Dourados has remained stable in the last five years, with an average of approximately 536 students per year. In 2023, a growth of 0.7% was recorded compared to 2022, indicating a slight expansion in the demand for integrated high school courses, which continues to play an important role in the educational context of the region.

Figure 2 - Distribution by Age



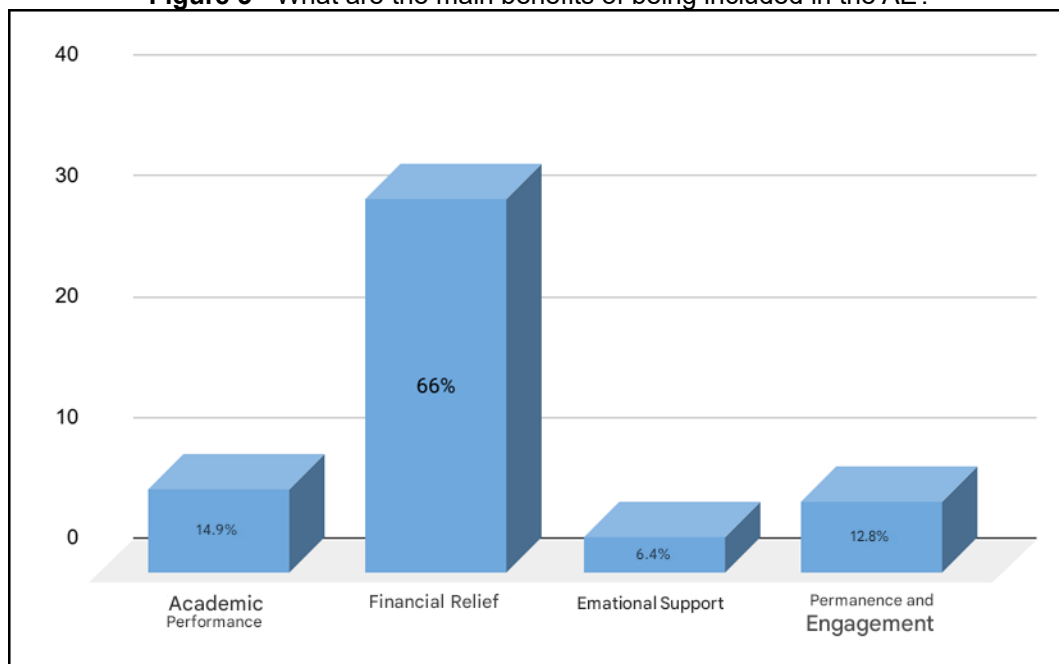
Source: Prepared by the author (2024).

Based on the information presented in Figure 2, the age group of the students shows that the majority, 68.1% (32), are in the age group of 16 to 17 years. According to data from the PNP, referring to the year 2023, it is observed that the age group from 15 to 19 years old corresponds to 92.06% of those enrolled in integrated high school at IFMS – Campus Dourados.

These data reinforce the importance of the IFMS Institutional Development Plan (PDI 2024-2028) which highlights actions such as pedagogical support to mitigate inequalities and overcome learning gaps, favoring inclusion and academic success (IFMS, 2024).

The second highest percentage, 12.8% (6), corresponds to the age group of 14 to 15 years, indicating the presence of younger students, possibly entering the initial grades of integrated technical courses. On the other hand, 10.6% (5) are in the 18-19 age group, representing older students who are still completing high school, possibly due to educational discontinuities. In addition, 8.5% (4) are 20 years of age or older, reinforcing the presence of students who have resumed their studies after interruptions in their school trajectory, possibly as a result of school failure.

Figure 3 - What are the main benefits of being included in the AE?



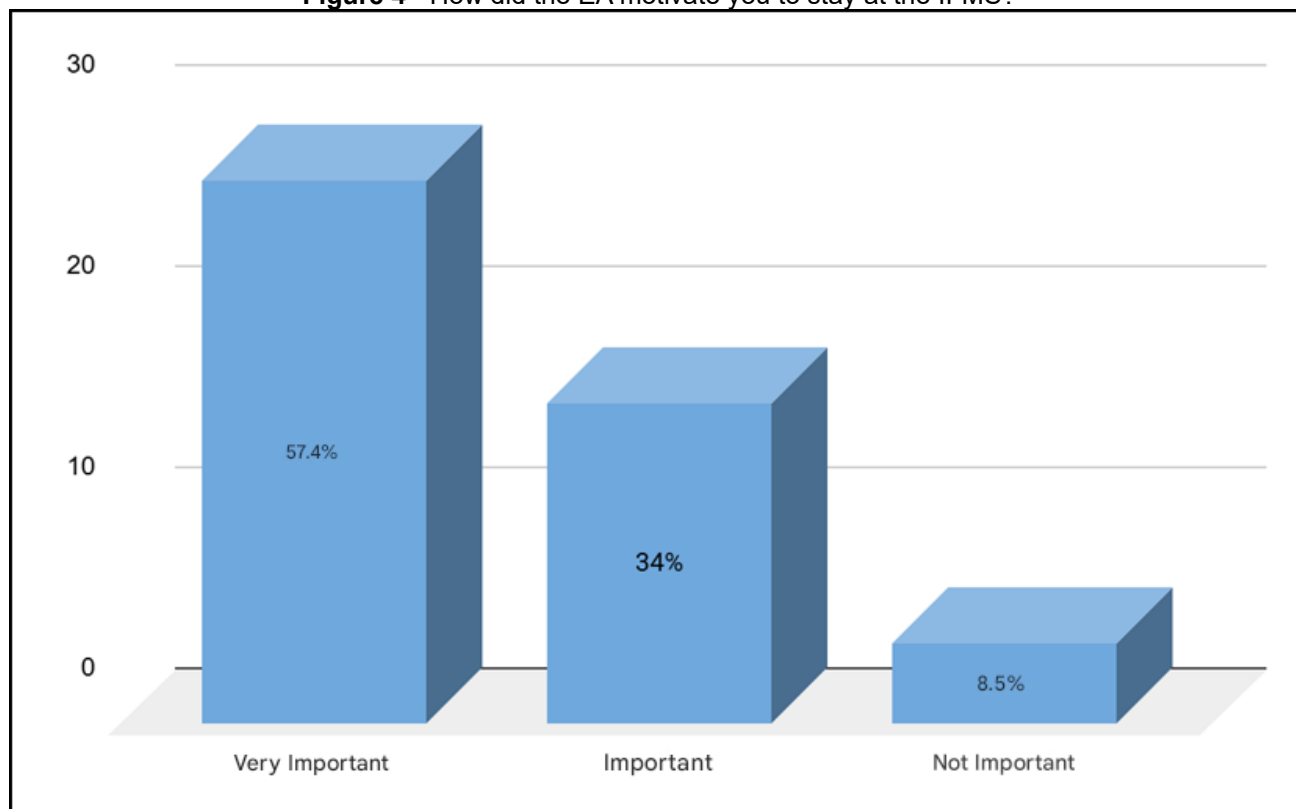
Source: Prepared by the author (2024).

The analysis in relation to the benefits of student assistance, Figure 3 shows that the majority, 66% (31) indicated the option of "financial relief". This result suggests that financial support is one of the great needs for school permanence. In this sense, we can highlight the thought of Souza (2017), who reinforces that the provision of financial resources is fundamental to overcome socioeconomic vulnerabilities that hinder continuity in studies.

In addition, 14.9% (7) selected the option "academic performance", justifying that the program had a positive impact on their academic performance. This percentage suggests that, for some, the benefit contributed to better academic performance, by offering resources and conditions that favor greater dedication to studies. According to Cavalcanti (2016), the beneficiary students present a favorable result to academic performance.

Another 12.8% (6) attributed to the benefit of student assistance an important role in "emotional support", while 6.4% (3) pointed to the contribution to "permanence and engagement" as a motivating factor to continue in school. These results indicate that, although relevant, these aspects are considered less of a priority in comparison to the financial impact and academic performance.

Figure 4 - How did the EA motivate you to stay at the IFMS?



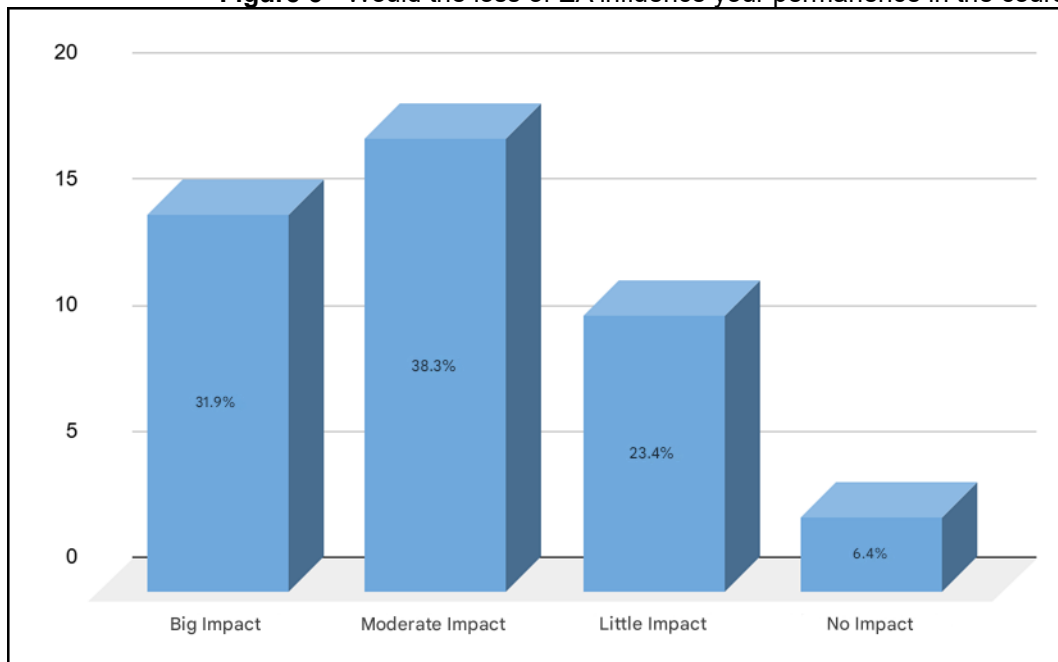
Source: Prepared by the author (2024).

Regarding permanence, Figure 4 highlights the importance of student assistance for the continuity of students at IFMS – Campus Dourados. The analysis of the data reveals that the majority of the participants, 57.4% (27), considered it "very important". This result reveals the importance of the policy in supporting and reducing obstacles to school permanence. The numbers obtained corroborate the statements of Dumaresq (2014), who emphasizes the importance of politics in promoting permanence, reducing dropout and favoring academic success.

For 34% (16) of the students evaluated it as "important", but not decisive for permanence. As Bragança and Silva (2021) point out, care must transcend the financial character, creating conditions to address the social inequalities that affect academic life.

On the other hand, only 8.5% (4) considered care to be "not very important". For this group, the benefits offered had a reduced impact on the decision to remain in the institution. These results reinforce the importance of policies that encompass multiple dimensions of student support to promote inclusion and academic success.

Figure 5 - Would the loss of EA influence your permanence in the course?



Source: Prepared by the author (2024).

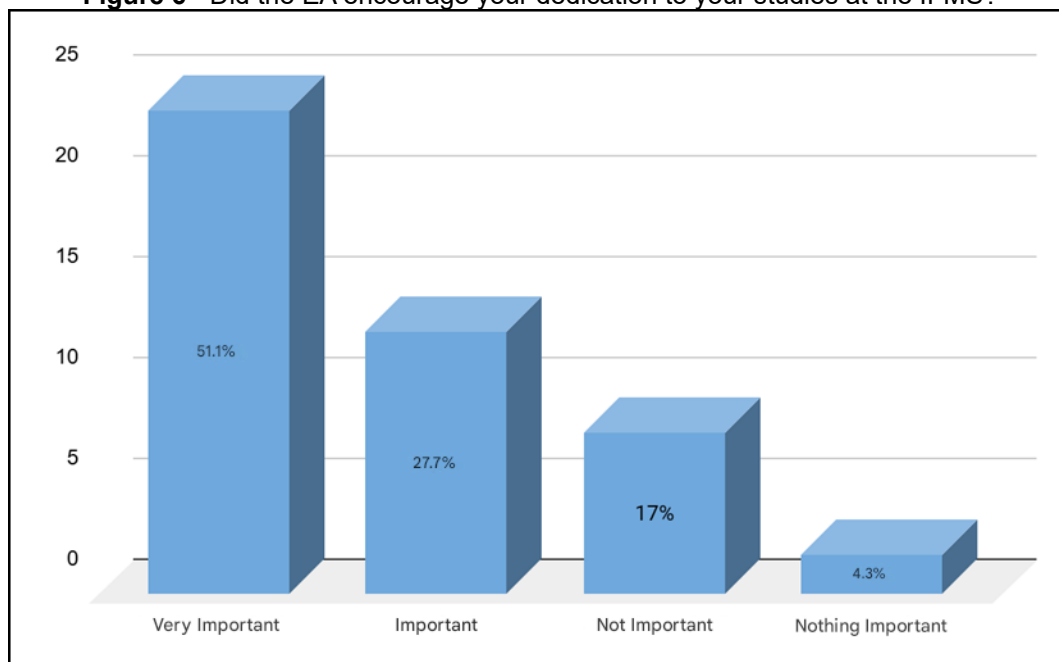
When asked about the possible effects of the loss of aid on the continuity of the studies, the participants presented varied perceptions. As illustrated in Figure 5, for 38.3% (18), the loss of the benefit would represent a "moderate impact", considering it positive, but not determinant for permanence. This indicates that student assistance acts as a complementary support, associated with other factors. According to Digiácomo (2005), school dropout and dropout are specific multifactorial, which have integrated and comprehensive solutions.

For 31.9% (15) stated that the aid had a "great impact", a proportion that probably gave up the course with the exclusion of the benefit. This data highlights the importance of the policy in the permanence of students in situations of vulnerability, to the extent that it can act to expand the opportunities for permanence".

On the other hand, 23.4% (11) evaluated that the aid had "little impact", stating that they would remain in the course regardless of being excluded from the benefit. In addition, 6.4% (3) indicated "no impact", suggesting that the loss of the benefit would not influence their decision to continue schooling.

These data reveal the presence of alternative factors, such as family support, personal motivation and interest in the course, which also play a significant role in the permanence of students.

Figure 6 - Did the EA encourage your dedication to your studies at the IFMS?



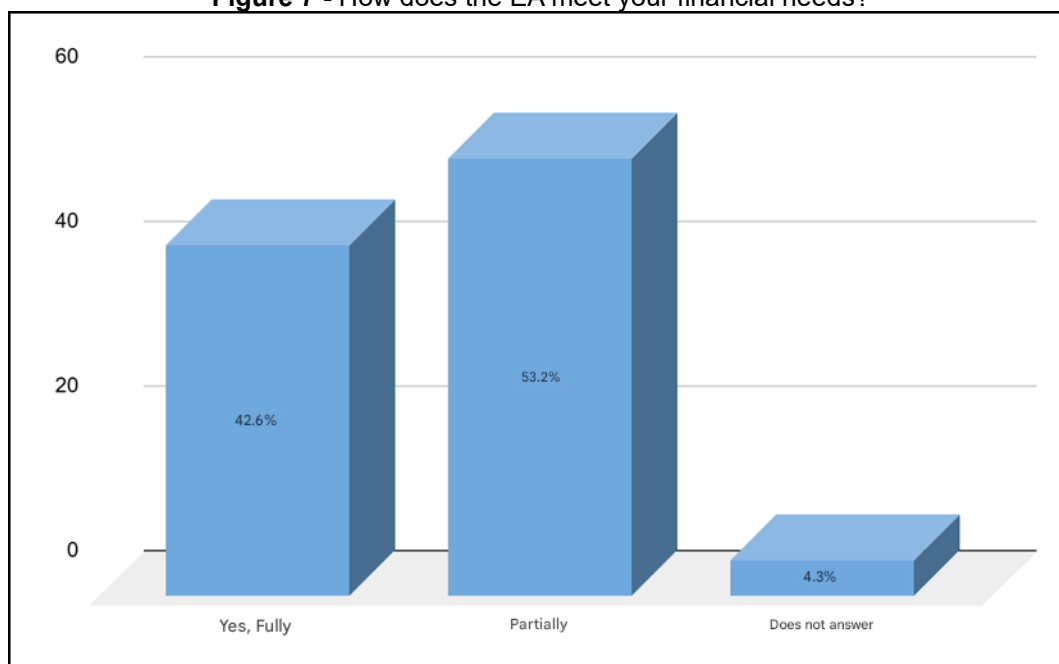
Source: Prepared by the author (2024).

For the beneficiary students, the effects of student assistance on their studies were questioned. As shown in Figure 6, 51.1% (24) considered the program "very important", indicating that the benefit improves the conditions for greater academic dedication, reducing concerns that could compromise performance. This result reinforces the view of Vasconcelos (2010), who highlights student assistance as an essential mechanism to overcome obstacles that impact the school trajectory.

For 27.7% (13) of the participants, they evaluated that the program was considered "important", as it encouraged dedication to studies in some areas, although it was not a decisive factor in their academic trajectory. This result suggests that, despite the relevance of the benefit, many consider it insufficient to fully meet their needs, evidencing challenges for expanding its effects. In this sense, Magalhães (2012) argues that assistance should go beyond financial transfer, considering broader aspects of students' needs.

On the other hand, 17.0% (8) considered care "not very important", indicating few changes in their dedication. This perception may point to the existence of other sources of support or to the need for adjustments in the direction of the program's actions. Only 4.3% (2) stated that the benefit was "not at all important", indicating that external or personal factors may have a greater influence on their academic trajectories.

Figure 7 - How does the EA meet your financial needs?



Source: Prepared by the author (2024).

And finally, in the survey, students were asked about the impact of student assistance in meeting their financial needs. Figure 7 shows that 53.2% (25) indicated the option "partially". This number points to an important factor, that despite being relevant in the school trajectory, the amounts are not enough to meet the demands of the beneficiaries.

This result reflects the challenges faced by public education policies in Brazil, currently marked in a context of budget constraints and growing demand. As Zago (2006) points out, socioeconomic conditions have a significant impact on the academic trajectory, especially among students from the lower classes.

Thus, for 42.6% (20), they stated that the program "yes, fully" meets their financial needs. This number may indicate that, for this portion, the amounts made available have been sufficient to meet their financial demands, contributing to their permanence in the institution and to their academic performance.

In this sense, it is necessary to build strategies to meet the needs of these students. In 2023, the National Forum of Pro-Rectors of Community Affairs (FONAPRACE) intensified debates and mobilizations for the urgent recomposition of resources for PNAES, which has suffered significant cuts and contingencies in recent years.

In view of this scenario, ensuring the maintenance and strengthening of this policy is essential, as highlighted by Oliveira and Vargas (2012), the granting of student assistance represents values that "in general, unsatisfactory and the amount of benefits granted are not able to meet all the demand (Oliveira; Vargas, 2012).

For 4.3% (2), the program "does not meet" their needs. This data highlights the

importance of a more detailed analysis to identify the specific demands of this group, enabling a more accurate understanding of their financial difficulties and the formulation of strategies that make student assistance more effective and inclusive.

In this context, most students believe that the amounts made available by the policy are insufficient to meet their needs. This reinforces the urgent need for a budget recomposition, to ensure the effectiveness and inclusion expected by student assistance.

CONCLUSION

In view of the results of this study, we highlight the relevance of student assistance at the Federal Institute of Mato Grosso do Sul (IFMS), through the Student Assistance Program (PAES), emphasizing its role in promoting the permanence and academic success of students in situations of socioeconomic vulnerability. The analysis carried out demonstrates that the program has been an important mechanism in reducing inequalities, pointing out that in its absence, students face greater difficulties in their academic trajectory.

However, while the PAES represents a significant advance in educational inclusion, ensuring access to education alone is not enough. It is necessary to develop strategies that ensure not only permanence, but also academic success. For this, it is necessary to strengthen student assistance, associated with support programs, monitoring and initiatives that encourage student participation, enabling fair conditions for the educational trajectory, promoting social inclusion.

In addition, the challenges faced by the PAES, especially with regard to the amounts made available and the expansion of the program's reach, indicate the need for its continuous improvement. Measures such as expanding the budget allocated to the program and diversifying the types of aid offered can make the policy even more effective and aligned with the real needs of students. Monitoring the program is essential for future reformulations, making it possible to mitigate inequalities and contribute to the democratization of education.

These reflections are not exhausted in this study. Thus, it is recommended that future research deepen the analysis of the impacts of student assistance in different institutional realities, comparing the results between different campuses and teaching modalities. In addition, investigations that explore the experiences and perceptions of students benefited throughout their educational trajectory through the program will provide indicators to better understand the effects of the policy over time.

Thus, we hope that this study can contribute as a decision-making tool, aiming at the improvement and strengthening of the program at IFMS and other institutions. The



improvement of this policy is essential to ensure that public education fulfills its social function, enabling fair conditions for the educational trajectory, promoting social inclusion through education.

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