



Chapter 51

An action in the perspective of digital inclusion that enables access to rights in UFSM: experience report

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to report the experience of the activities of transposition of the process of delivery of documents to the Selection Process of Socioeconomic Benefit (BSE) at the Federal University of Santa Maria, during the period of suspension of administrative and academic activities of the Federal

Institutions of Higher Education (IFES), due to the Coronavirus pandemic (SARS-Cov-2). It is the result of participant observation performed by authors who are Technical-Administrative Servants in Education (TAES) with the Student Care Center (NAE) and the Administrative Secretariat of the Pro-Rector of Student Affairs (PRAE) at the Federal University of Santa Maria. The study is based on the actions of the National Student Assistance Plan (PNAES), which at UFSM are materialized by the Socioeconomic Benefit Program (BSE) and discussions about digital inclusion. The aim of this study is to reflect on the potential of measures in the field of digital inclusion, as an opportunity to access students with social vulnerability to their rights. It is structured as a research of qualitative, exploratory approach and applied to the context of professional performance of researchers. The data were constructed through qualitative, bibliographic and documentary research and participant observation. The study points out that the adoption of the delivery of documents to the BSE selection process by UFSM, organized digitally, through the Socioeconomic Benefit Portal, streamlines the process of delivery of documents and, consequently, socioeconomic evaluation, allowing students in situations of social vulnerability to access the BSE Program, as well as having guaranteed their right to Student Assistance.

Keywords: Assistance; National Student Assistance Plan, Digital inclusion, Socioeconomic Benefit.

1 INTRODUCTION

This paper presents an experience report of the activities of the Socioeconomic Benefit Sector (BSE) of the Pro-Rector of Student Affairs (PRAE) of the Federal University of Santa Maria (UFSM) and reflections on the process of transposition of part of its Selection Process for the entry of students into the Socioeconomic Benefit Program (BSE), from the physical delivery format (documents delivered to the institution) to the digital format, from the perspective of digital inclusion.

This is a research of the type involved, which is part of the observations made in the daily professional of researchers, as Technician-Administrative in Education, crowded in prae. Thus, we sought to describe the reality of work experienced in the course of the Coronavirus pandemic (SARS-Cov-2), during the suspension of administrative and academic activities by the Federal Educational Institutions (IFES), as a sanitary measure of isolation and strategic/social distancing for the prevention and containment of the contagion of new disease.

In February 2020, after the emergence of Coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) in Asia at the end of 2019, Brazil begins to record the first cases of the disease; a serious pandemic is therefore highlighted in a global context. Signs of a new infectious disease with a high lethality rate mobilizes radical transformations in the daily lives of people and societies. He abruptly jumps out of the rush and noise of cities to silence and concern for health within our homes. In this context, subjects and institutions are guided to the proposition of new ways of living, working, studying and organizing dialogue and life in society.

At the Federal University of Santa Maria (UFSM), likewise, in line with the global context and with measures proposed by the health authorities, isolation/distancing measures are adopted to avoid the spread of cases of the disease. Thus, access and circulation to institutional environments becomes restricted and work processes end up being transposed into new formats that allow the security of the academic community and its realization remotely.

With this scenario, the Socioeconomic Benefit Sector, which at UFSM is responsible for socioeconomic evaluation for the entry of university students into the Benefit Program Socioeconomic Status (BSE), which in turn becomes the materialization of the National Student Assistance Plan (PNAES) in the institution, needs to build new ways to meet its institutional purpose and promote students' access to the program. The team is concerned and proposes to reflect on the following question: **How to enable students to access the BSE Program and guarantee this right, considering the impossibility of performing physical delivery of documents in the prae facilities, due to the suspension of administrative and academic activities such as the confrontation of COVID-19?** Such reflections drive the Socioeconomic Benefit Sector team to transpose the document delivery process into a new format, the digital format. The report of this experience is configured in the present work that aims to reflect on the potentiality of measures in the field of digital inclusion, as a mechanism for expanding opportunities for access to Student Assistance by students who experience situations of fragility and social vulnerability.

The methodology is structured in a research with a qualitative approach, exploratory type and applied to the context of professional performance of researchers. The data were constructed through bibliographic and documentary research, in addition to participant observation. The text is organized as follows: the presentation of the problematization and the objective of the research, the theoretical-methodological perspectives of the work, the contextualization of the Student Assistance of ufsm, the exhibition on some reflections about digital inclusion, the experience report of the Socioeconomic Benefit Sector and, finally, the on the study.

2 STUDENT ASSISTANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF UFSM

The Federal University of Santa Maria is located in the central region of the State of Rio Grande do Sul and develops its teaching, research and extension activities, being a reference for the region, both with regard to early childhood education, as well as in high school and higher education, including graduate studies, as well as a reference in the area in order to have the University Hospital of Santa Maria (HUSM), acting as a teaching hospital, which treats medium and high complexity cases throughout the region.

Over time and, mainly due to the high investment in resources in student housing, UFSM's student assistance has become a reference in Latin America. The Student Housing Program, one of the structuring axes of student assistance, currently has 2,200 vacancies, distributed among *the campuses* of Santa Maria, Palmeira das Missões, Frederico Westphalen and Cachoeira do Sul. It is also noteworthy that in addition to student housing, university restaurants, also present on the *four campuses*, directly reflect on the conditions of permanence of students by ensuring free access to three meals a day.

Until the mid-2000s, resources for student assistance were decentralized, that is, there was no exclusive public policy to guarantee students' permanence. However, with the expansion of policies for access and democratization of higher education, the panorama of universities has changed and the journey of the implementation of Student Assistance has begun through the National Student Assistance Program, established by Normative Ordinance No. 39 of December 12, 2007, establishing itself as a strategy, within the scope of the Secretariat of Higher Education (SESu), to combat social and regional inequalities with a view to expanding and democratizing the conditions of access to federal public higher education by low-income students.

A few years later, Student Assistance achieved the status of National Student Assistance Plan (PNAES), through Decree 7,234 of July 19, 2010. Considered a milestone of student assistance, the PNAES now allocates to IFES financial resources that will be allocated for the implementation of student assistance actions. Veloso and Maciel (2015) address the importance of the Plan for students with socioeconomic vulnerability:

In the public sector, The PNAES plays an important role in the permanence of students. From 2008 to 2010, there was a considerable increase of 397.91% of the budget allocation assigned to the PNAES and, subsequently, it is forwarded to federal universities, benefiting 3,515,854 students. From 2010 to 2012, the increase in funds occurred in 64.84%, this increase may also have occurred due to the link between *sisu's* support with student assistance funds. (VELOSO; MACIEL, 2015, p. 234)

It is noteworthy that access policies and student residence policies should excel in keeping the student at the university so that the academic course of the student is successful. For the student to develop fully academically, it is necessary to associate the quality of teaching with a comprehensive care policy that guarantees not only the right to housing, food, health, but also guarantees culture and

leisure among other rights (VASCONCELOS, 2010). It is necessary, therefore, to invest in affirmative action policies for the democratization of access, as well as in the strengthening of care policies so that it does not fall into the ruse of promoting and expanding access to the university of vulnerable students, to the setback of not ensuring the means for their stay (MOCELIN, 2018).

The student's permanence in the university cannot be determined only by access to housing and food, but must be strongly stimulated by a comprehensive policy that effectively accompanies him throughout his/her journey, that is, since his entry until the conclusion of his course, considering the peculiarities of this moment of transition, also offering the necessary support and emotional support.

At UFSM, PRAE is responsible for the implementation and management of student assistance actions, among which the following axes of attention stand out: student housing, food (through free access to University Restaurants), student assistance grants, student training grants (for participation in events transportation, assistance to the acquisition of pedagogical materials, dental care and psychosocial care.

The Socioeconomic Benefit Program (BSE), the object of study of this study, is considered the "gateway" to the benefits of student assistance in the institution and "[...] consists of a set of student assistance actions developed by the Pro-Rectorate of Student Affairs (PRAE) of the Federal University of Santa Maria (UFSM), aimed at students in situations of social vulnerability [...]". (UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA MARIA, 2015, n.p.).

The BSE, as popularly known by the academic community, guarantees access to student housing to students who come from other cities, gratuity in meals held in the university restaurant, subsidy in urban public transport, scholarship for the acquisition of pedagogical material, among others. To this end, the student should participate in a selection process that aims to conduct a study of the socioeconomic situation of the student and her family group, considering *per capita family income* and situations of vulnerability experienced by the family. With the implementation of affirmative action policies and expansion of higher education, there has been an increase in student demand for the selection process in recent years.

3 REFLECTIONS ON DIGITAL INCLUSION

In times of networked society, digital technologies have imposed themselves as an element capable of providing important changes in the daily lives of subjects and in the ways of living, thinking and communicating. Thus, without any surprise, it can be affirmed that "digital inclusion" enters the vocabulary of public policies. (PISCHETOLA, 2016)

In the context of public policies and from the perspective of this work, digital inclusion is an important device for the transformation of subjects and their empowerment in relation to the guarantee of rights. Thus, access to information by civil society becomes indispensable and it has been pointed out as one of the means for the development of both the creative and intellectual potential of individuals.

(NEVES, 2019). This has allowed the subjects, from the opportunity of access to equipment, technology and networked society, to contribute to the transformations of society.

According to Bonilla and Oliveira (2011, p. 23) " in a global analysis, the term digital inclusion comes into play in the social and political dynamics of the implementation of the so-called Information Society Programs, in the various countries, especially those that make up the European Union" and in Brazil, this agenda and discussions about digital inclusion from the dissemination of the Green Paper - Information Society in Brazil and are evident in 2000. (NEVES, 2019).

In the Brazilian context, the issues of digital inclusion are understood by the same logic and dynamics of social relations and the understandings of social exclusion and inclusion. Pischetola (2016, p. 09) believes that:

[...] digital inclusion is the social and political inclusion of citizens. Access to technology becomes an opportunity. From this perspective, the concept of social exclusion encompasses not only the inequality of economic, financial and material resources, but also the exclusion of development and, ultimately, knowledge.

As the author points out, digital inclusion understands the opportunity and in its counterpoint the digital exclusion would be the lack of it, the impossibility of access to the resources and conditions necessary for the transformation of the subjects. As an opportunity, in the context of higher education and student assistance, digital inclusion is understood as a powerful device for ensuring the right to education and access to Student Assistance policy, because students, asynchronously, need to keep in connection with what is provided in terms of teaching-learning, conditions of permanence by IFES and need to participate in the activities provided by their courses. It is this new scenario that signals digital inclusion as one of the necessary devices for the viability of education processes.

From this perspective, according to Marcon (2015, p. 23):

[...] digital inclusion presupposes the empowerment of people through technologies, the guarantee of social equity and the valorization of diversity, supplying individual and collective needs, aiming at the transformation of their own conditions of existence and the exercise of citizenship in the network.

The author mentions the understanding of digital inclusion as something that goes beyond access to technological resources and is configured in the effective use of technology for the transformation of people and their empowerment.

In education, digital inclusion presupposes paradigmatic changes ranging from teaching-learning practices to social practices, taking us to a vision beyond utilitarianism about technologies and valuing the subjects who learn. Thus, it is considered that students develop skills of using digital technology, but also have social practices, relationships with their sociocultural context and develop critical and personal forms of thinking (PISCHETOLA, 2016).

Therefore, it is believed that they are fundamental for digital inclusion and essential in the

education process, the guarantee of significant access to information, the free exercise of critical capacities for the choice of technological resources to be used and access to the social network as a possibility exchange of opinions, which can lead subjects to participate in political and social life, but also allow deepening of topics of interest and knowledge to interpret events. (PISCHETOLA, 2016). From the perspective of this work, the author's opportunistic list is added to the role, the necessary capacities for insertion and social participation and the potential to achieve and implement the guarantee of citizens' rights.

4 THE REPORT OF A MEASURE OF DIGITAL INCLUSION THAT ENABLES ACCESS TO RIGHTS IN UFSM

Ensuring the permanence and graduation of low-income students at federal public universities is a challenge that depends on several factors that must be from the amount of resources allocated by the federal government to the way they are employed in student assistance actions. For this to occur satisfactorily, it is necessary to plan and take a close look at the team responsible for these mechanisms within the IFES.

Thus, this work is based on a methodology of qualitative approach, exploratory and applied. As the authors are workers in the area of student care, it can be affirmed that the research is of the type applied to the context of professional performance of researchers, which configures that all actions described and applied in this work have a direct influence on the daily life of PRAE/UFSM and, consequently, on the academic path of students seeking the Selective Process of the Socioeconomic Benefit Program. There is a close relationship between the research object and professional performance, which makes the results contribute to transformative effects in the field of work.

As for the research data, these were obtained through bibliographic and documentary research, in addition to participant observation. The highlight for participant observation is highlighted again, as it goes through all stages of research: from the perception of the problem, the formulation of the problem and the objectives to the final results. Participant observation has as characteristic the proximity of the object with the research subjects and the easy access to data about the research situation. Stake (2011) also states that the researcher will have the opportunity to learn more when interacting with the participants.

In the case of this work, participant observation goes beyond the transposition of the document delivery model, as it will continue to be carried out in order to verify how the new practice reflects in the process of delivering documents and in the daily life of students, in which more and more the presence of technologies and digital inclusion is more necessary.

At UFSM, the selection process for the entry of students into the Socioeconomic Benefit Program (BSE) is governed by a specific notice, published every six months by PRAE. This notice provides for the completion of socioeconomic information by the student in an electronic form and the

delivery of the documentation indicated at the end of the completion of that information. The delivery of the physical documents took place in person by the student in the Præ Administrative Support Secretariat on the campus and in the respective Pedagogical Support Centers (NAP) in the other campuses.

Since the second semester of 2014, the completion of the socioeconomic form for BSE has been hosted on the Socioeconomic Benefit Portal and accessible digitally to students through the UFSM Student Portal as a result of the mobilization of the Socioeconomic Benefit Sector (SBSE) from the intense dialogue with the data processing center (CPD) of the institution and the previous experiences of using the Google Forms tool (available free of charge on the Google Workspace platform for preparation of forms/questionnaires), initiated in 2011. Thus, at the end of the completion of social and economic information, the system itself returns to the student the list of documents necessary to prove the socioeconomic reality, from the reality presented, and the student must present them in the period defined in notice.

However, with the health crisis installed due to the pandemic caused by Covid-19 and with the measures adopted to contain coronavirus, which implied the suspension of academic activities in person, the delivery of documents performed in physical format was indefinitely suspended. Thus, the sector had to reformulate the work process in order to make it accessible to students to deliver the documentation, ensuring the safety of the students and the teams involved. With this objective, the dialogue was resumed with the Systems Analysis and Development Division of the Data Processing Center (CPD) and after a calendar of meetings between the teams involved, the Socioeconomic Benefit Portal was redesigned in order to also host and host in its database the documents of students who began to be attached by the portal in digital format (files with jpeg, jpg and pdf extension).

In this period, prae also implemented a "Manual for sending documentation" with guidance on filling out the socioeconomic form and for the organization and annexation of documents in the new digital format. This material was made available on social networks and on the prae's institutional website.

With these measures, which can be considered digital inclusion, the socioeconomic evaluation process is not harmed by the impossibility of students' access to prae's physical structure to deliver documents and the subjects who demand BSE can access their right. The delivery of documents to the BSE selection process in a digital way, through the Student Portal, allows students to participate in the selection process without having to go to PRAE to deliver documents, and thus enables sanitary measures to ensure the safety of the academic community and produces agility in achieving access to the BSE Program, which is configured as a right to students in situations of social vulnerability, to guarantee their stay in university.

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS/CONCLUSION

In fact, the guarantee of student assistance aimed at undergraduate students in fragile situations is confused with the ufsm's own trajectory, since it was one of the first federal universities idealized and structured in the interior of the State of Rio Grande do Sul, welcoming countless students from other municipalities and other states that seek in higher education a perspective improvement of objective living conditions. Nevertheless, this path is also challenging for the institution facing a scenario of reduction of public investments with significant impact of financial resources for the implementation of student assistance actions.

In the context of suspension of the administrative and academic activities of ufsm during the Coronavirus pandemic, it is considered that the changes in the BSE Selection Process, which were implemented by the PRAE, had a significantly positive impact on the continuity of the activities enabling the continuity of access of countless students to institutional student assistance programs.

The delivery of documents to the BSE selection process organized to meet students digitally, through the Socioeconomic Benefit Portal, is structured as a potential measure for the inclusion of students, speeding up the process of delivery of documents and, consequently, socioeconomic evaluation, allowing students in vulnerable situations to access the BSE Program, as well as having guaranteed their right to stay at the university.

Certainly in this period, already called by many as "post-pandemic", many gaps are still to be filled, especially with regard to students in vulnerable situations since many of these were strongly impacted, either in access to income and work drastically affected, or in family ties and support affected by the losses of victims by covid-19. These students who reach to the student assistance professionals need support in their basic needs, such as housing and food, through aspects of digital and social inclusion, culminating in psychosocial support. Thus, Student Assistance in this scenario has more than ever an important and decisive role in the permanence of these students in the academic environment.

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