



Article

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1982-57652024v29id2756283>

Pedagogical support policy in higher education: a case study

Política de apoio pedagógico no ensino superior: um estudo de caso

Política de apoyo pedagógico en la educación superior: un estudio de caso

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Abstract: Pedagogical support actions in higher education are recent in the history of Brazilian universities, being instituted through the National Student Assistance Program - PNAES, in the 2010s. The program designates to universities the responsibility for student assistance by promoting ten areas, including the pedagogical support. With this responsibility, the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC) created in 2013 the Institutional Program for Pedagogical Support for Students (PIAPE), which has developed support and pedagogical guidance for undergraduate students on the five campuses of the institution. With almost ten years of activities carried out, it was observed the need to evaluate the program's actions and results for its improvement. For the development of the research, a formative evaluation was conducted, guiding the collection and analysis of program data, enabling its evaluation. The research context is PIAPE and its actors, so the documentary research was carried out through the program's guiding documents; the student evaluations collected by PIAPE were considered; and a focus group with the management team was responsible for identifying limitations and possibilities of the program. The research demonstrates that PIAPE has been an important pedagogical strategy to support students and the professors' teaching work, and contributes to the improvement of academic performance. This study also enables understanding the function and possibilities of pedagogical support in higher education, as well as providing a methodology for evaluating pedagogical support actions that can be replicated in other institutions.

Keywords: university management; formative assessment; pedagogical support program.

Resumo: As ações de apoio pedagógico no ensino superior são recentes na história das universidades brasileiras, sendo instituídas por meio do Programa Nacional de Assistência Estudantil - PNAES, nos anos 2010. O programa designa às universidades a responsabilidade da assistência estudantil pela promoção de dez áreas, entre elas o apoio pedagógico. Com essa incumbência, a Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC) criou em 2013 o Programa Institucional de Apoio Pedagógico aos Estudantes (PIAPE), que tem desenvolvido ações de apoio e orientação pedagógica aos graduandos nos cinco *campi* da instituição. Com quase dez anos de atividades desenvolvidas, observou-se a necessidade de avaliar as ações e resultados do programa, intencionando seu aprimoramento. Para o desenvolvimento da pesquisa, foi realizada uma avaliação formativa que orientou a coleta e análise dos dados do programa, possibilitando avaliá-lo. O contexto da pesquisa é o PIAPE e seus atores, logo o estudo foi realizado por meio dos documentos norteadores do programa; das avaliações discentes coletadas pelo PIAPE; e do grupo de foco com a equipe de gestores para identificar limitações e possibilidades do mesmo. A pesquisa demonstra que o PIAPE tem sido uma importante estratégia pedagógica de apoio aos estudantes e ao trabalho de ensino dos docentes, e colabora para a melhoria do desempenho acadêmico. O presente estudo possibilita compreender a função e as possibilidades do apoio pedagógico no ensino superior, assim como propicia uma metodologia de avaliação das ações de apoio pedagógico que pode ser replicada em outras instituições.

Palavras-chave: gestão universitária; avaliação formativa; programa de apoio pedagógico.

Resumen: Las acciones de apoyo pedagógico en la educación superior son recientes en la historia de las universidades brasileñas, establecidas a través del Programa Nacional de Asistencia Estudiantil – PNAES, en la década de 2010. El programa asigna a las universidades la responsabilidad de la asistencia estudiantil en la promoción de diez áreas, incluido el apoyo pedagógico. Con esta responsabilidad, la Universidad Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC) creó en 2013 el Programa Institucional de Apoyo Pedagógico a los Estudiantes (PIAPE), que ha desarrollado acciones de apoyo y orientación pedagógica para los estudiantes universitarios en sus cinco campus. Después de casi diez años de actividades desarrolladas, se ha reconocido la necesidad de evaluar las acciones y los resultados del programa, con el objetivo de mejorarlo. Para llevar a cabo la investigación, se realizó una evaluación formativa que guió la recolección y análisis de los datos del programa, permitiendo su evaluación. El contexto de la investigación es el PIAPE y sus actores, por lo tanto, el estudio se llevó a cabo mediante los documentos orientadores del programa; las evaluaciones realizadas por los estudiantes recopiladas por el PIAPE; y un grupo de enfoque con el equipo de gestores para identificar las limitaciones y posibilidades del mismo. La investigación demuestra que el PIAPE ha sido una estrategia pedagógica importante de apoyo a los estudiantes y al trabajo docente, y contribuye a mejorar el rendimiento académico. Este estudio permite comprender la función y las posibilidades del apoyo pedagógico en la educación superior, así como proporciona una metodología de evaluación de las acciones de apoyo pedagógico que puede ser replicada en otras instituciones.

Palabras clave: gestión universitaria; evaluación formativa; programa de apoyo pedagógico.

1 Introduction

As proclaimed by Panúncio-Pinto and Colares (2015), the university has been experiencing a movement of reorganization and redefinition of methods, practices, objectives, policies, and curricula, which implies stimulus to discussions about its educational objectives. In this movement, pedagogical support becomes one of the areas of student assistance under the responsibility of universities, when established by the National Student Assistance Program (PNAES) (Brazil, 2010), and the literature affirms its central role in the student's academic development, especially for those who were admitted to university with a history of educational fragility (Heringer, 2018).

In this way, the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC) created the Institutional Program for Pedagogical Support for Students (PIAPE) in 2013, as a pedagogical support strategy aimed at all university undergraduate students,

[...] considering their specific learning needs, whether related to disciplinary content historically associated with high retention rates or other fields of knowledge aimed at integral development and training (UFSC, 2013, p. 7).

The main program objective is to develop support actions and pedagogical guidance that

[...] favor the reception, permanence and quality of training processes for undergraduate students on the five UFSC campuses, contributing to qualified academic training in relation to the human, professional, critical and ethical dimensions (UFSC, 2022, p. 19).

Among the main specific objectives, the program proposes to create support strategies and pedagogical guidance according to the students' needs; enable students to develop autonomy in studying; monitor retention and dropout indicators in UFSC courses; promote actions together with other institution sectors in favor of student permanence; promote reception and academic integration strategies to freshmen; promote continuous program evaluation within the academic community, and contribute with training proposals to the Continuing Training Program aimed at professors (PROFOR) (UFSC, 2022).

Given that the need for a public pedagogical support policy that benefits the learning processes and contributes to academic success and student permanence at UFSC, and also considering PIAPE responsibility for meeting such objectives, one observed the need to evaluate the program as an institutional public policy with 10 years of activities carried out.

Formative evaluation was proposed for the research because it enables management to know the viability of a program and, if necessary, to adapt the proposed objectives or redesign the actions developed (Cavalcanti, 2006). Such evaluation aims to provide important and useful information to the program management team or policy, in order to improve it during the execution cycle and maximize its results. It is a partial and contextual diagnosis, and leads to decisions about the development of the program or policy, including reviews and modifications when necessary (Rua, 2010).

For Cavalcanti (2006), formative evaluation seeks to investigate the program functioning and the strategies used to achieve results, however focusing not on results but on the processes. Therefore, it is necessary to raise questions such as: What has worked? What should be improved? How can improvements be made? (Rua, 2010). Accordingly, this research contributed to improving PIAPE management by promoting in-depth knowledge of this local public policy. Furthermore, the formative evaluation enabled assertive decision-making when planning and executing institutional interventions that aim to promote university student permanence and success.

This article addresses the formative evaluation methodology developed on PIAPE, and the program limitations and possibilities that were found in the analysis. Besides this Introduction, the work has four more sections, namely: Methodological Aspects; Program for Pedagogical Support for Students (PIAPE); Research Results, and Conclusion.

2 Methodological aspects

This is a applied qualitative descriptive study, conducted as a case study and through bibliographical and documentary research (Triviños, 1987; Yin, 2001; Vergara, 2009).

For the formative evaluation, documentary research was carried out on the program's legal documents in order to contextualize it. One also analyzed the responses to student evaluation questionnaires applied by the management, which addresses the perception of students who participated in PIAPE activities offered at the five UFSC campuses; besides, a focus group was formed with civil servants who act as program managers at each university campus to discuss the topic under study.

The student evaluations analyzed correspond to activities carried out in the second half of 2021 and the first half of 2022. This time frame considers the last two academic semesters of activities that precede this study. The delimitation considered the volume of data possible to be collected and analyzed during the study period.

It is important to highlight that the second semester of 2021 included UFSC remote activities due to the social isolation imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, and the first semester of 2022 included in-person undergraduate classes, when students were allowed to return to the institution's spaces. However, this difference in teaching did not make it impossible to achieve the objectives proposed by the study, considering that the evaluation instrument analyzed is the same in both semesters.

Within this time frame, all 783 student evaluations corresponding to the following areas offered by the program were analyzed: Pedagogical Guidance, Mathematics, Reading and Text Production, Statistics, Biochemistry, IT, Chemistry, Physics, and Biology.

The questionnaires aimed at students consist of an online tool with questions divided into 4 blocks. The first block deals with student information such as personal data; campus; course; phase; how the student entered the institution, and how they have learned of PIAPE; the second block deals with which type of support the student had; interest in the area which the student enrolled in, and the factors that encouraged the student to seek it; the third block addresses issues related to the tutor; and the fourth block brings questions that deal with access to the virtual environment; contribution of the activity undertaken to academic performance in that semester, and possibility to give suggestions concerning other activities to be offered by the program and make comments on the academic semester.

The seven civil servants who act as program managers were invited to participate in the focus group. PIAPE has four local coordinators (one at each campus), and two civil servants and a general coordinator who work at the Florianópolis campus. Of these seven civil servants, six participated in the group voluntarily and one was unable to be present on the scheduled date.

3 Institutional Program for Pedagogical Support for Students (PIAPE)

PIAPE's guiding documents characterize the program as a pedagogical strategy for student permanence and support for undergraduate teaching work, through support activities and pedagogical guidance aimed at all undergraduate students at the university. Furthermore, the documents indicate that the program is in line with PNAES (Brazil, 2010), a national policy that establishes pedagogical support as a student assistance action at federal universities (UFSC, 2019; UFSC, 2022).

In accordance with the program theoretical-methodological assumptions, PIAPE proposes to

[...] contribute to the reception, the learning of curricular contents, to a better understanding of study dynamics, to the expansion of the sociocultural repertoire, to the organization of academic activities and to the quality of the training processes of undergraduate students (UFSC, 2022, p. 28).

The program is also concerned with the inclusion of the different university student profiles, and develops its actions in favor of inclusive and democratic education (UFSC, 2022).

The Institutional Self-Assessment Report carried out by UFSC's Own Assessment Committee states that the program has developed universal monitoring actions directed at undergraduates according to spontaneous search or referral via course coordinators or professors, in addition to "monitoring of academic trajectories of indigenous and quilombolas students, international students, refugees and humanitarian visa holders and students with neurodiversities" (UFSC, 2023, p. 62).

The documents give voice to the program management by reinforcing the university's responsibility for the teaching and learning process, and understand pedagogical support as a central assistance for academic development, considering the student profile diversity and educational weaknesses (UFSC, 2022). In this way, the program management confirms UFSC's commitment to Education, as it considers student assistance a fundamental right to student training, besides being responsible for implementing educational policies that contribute to student success and permanence, as recommended by Vargas and Heringer (2017).

The program establishes to:

[...] offer reception, support and pedagogical guidance activities to undergraduate students from the five campuses, through a set of continuous and/or specific activities, with relevant content to the different areas of training; organize events on topics of interest to the academic community; give attention to learning needs; offer complementary content, and the possibility of offering exchanges with services provided by other sectors of UFSC (UFSC, 2022, p. 7).

The program offers pedagogical support activities in different modalities, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 – Pedagogical support modalities offered by PIAPE

Pedagogical Support Modalities offered by PIAPE	Characteristic	Enrollment	Certification	Workload
Module	Long-term theoretical or theoretical-practical course	Yes	Yes	Minimum of 6 hours
<i>Aulão</i>	Specific short-term class on a given topic, open to the public (one-off activity)	No	No	1 hour to 2 hours
Mini-course	Short-term theoretical or theoretical-practical course (one-off activity)	Yes	Yes	2 hours to 5 hours
Workshop	Essentially practical and short activity (one-off activity) Ex: academic writing workshop	Yes	Yes	1 hour to 4 hours
Lecture	Transversal theme, expository in nature and with short duration (one-off activity)	Yes	Yes	1 hour to 4 hours
Conversation circle	Transversal theme, interactive in nature and with short duration (one-off activity)	Yes	Yes	1 hour to 4 hours
Pedagogical guidance group	Long-term pedagogical guidance activity	Yes	Yes	Minimum of 6 hours
Friendly reception workshop	Reception provided at the beginning of the semester	No	No	1 hour to 4 hours
Pedagogical guidance	Individual assistance	Yes	No	1 hour

Source: Adapted from: UFSC (2022, p. 30).

In research on the pedagogical support modalities offered in Brazilian universities, Toti (2022) identified the most recurrent actions, with individual assistance coming first, followed by collective actions (workshops, lectures, conversation circles), individual monitoring, high school content revision, administrative actions, tutoring between peers or with professors, and actions directed at professors. Dias (2021) and Toti and Dias (2020) also found in their research that individual assistance is the most frequent action in the institutions analyzed.

This action and three others identified by Toti (2022) are developed by PIAPE: collective actions on all fronts (workshops, lectures, conversation circles and tutoring), actions directed at professors (program collaboration with PROFOR), and high school content revision, which deals with the content present in the program modules. Thus, PIAPE offers a wide variety of pedagogical support activities, working on multiple fronts in accordance with what other universities consider pedagogical support actions in higher education.

4 Research results

The program's quantitative data are shown in (Table 2), which represents the number of places, number of enrollees and students that completed the pedagogical support activities offered by PIAPE over a longer period, from 2016.1 to 2022.1.

Table 2 - Number of PIAPE places, enrollees and students that completed the activities - 2016.1 to 2022.1

Year/Semester	Offered places	Number of enrollees	Percentage of enrollees per place	Number of students that completed the activities	Percentage of students that completed the activities per enrollees
2016.1	1573	1172	74.50%	557	47.52%
2016.2	2254	1355	60.11%	535	39.48%
2017.1	2904	2684	92.42%	930	34.64%
2017.2	2857	2876	100.66%	836	29.06%
2018.1*	-	-	-	-	-
2018.2	4095	2743	66.98%	889	32.40%
2019.1	2074	1676	80.81%	513	30.60%
2019.2	2400	1761	73.37%	357	20.27%
2020.1	4443	3606	81.16%	1140	31.61%
2020.2	4962	2420	48.77%	642	26.52%
2021.1	8275	4761	57.53%	1634	34.32%
2021.2	7135	3718	52.10%	1158	31.14%
2022.1	7258	4627	63.75%	1136	24.55%
Total	50230	33399	-	10327	-

Note: *During the 2018.1 period there were no PIAPE activities offered because of the hiring of the new support foundation to manage the program.

Source: Adapted from: UFSC (2020, p. 100) and in the PIAPE biannual reports.

It can be seen that PIAPE made 50,230 places available in the last seven years, had 33,399 enrollees, and 10,327 students completed the activities. From 2016 to 2019, the enrollments per places ratio varied between 60.11% and 100.66%. In the remote learning period, from 2020.1 to 2021.2, it was between 81.16%, 48.77%, 57.53% and 52.10% respectively, with decrease in the ratio compared to previous years, although there was an increase in places and enrollments resulting from the increase in the number of tutors. In the first semester of in-person learning, in 2022.1, the ratio was 63.75%, accounting for an increase of almost a thousand enrollments compared to the last remote-learning semester. Although there is a variation in enrollment rates in the semesters analyzed, the numbers demonstrate that the demand for pedagogical support actions is lower than the number of places offered by the program.

Considering the need for pedagogical support activities in higher education, as the literature points out, there is a reduced demand for PIAPE activities to the detriment of the number of places. Some hypotheses, which deserve study, may be related to inefficient dissemination, schedules that are incompatible with the curriculum, students' lack of time for yet another academic activity, or the need to raise awareness among the student public of the importance of pedagogical support for good academic performance and to reduce retention rates.

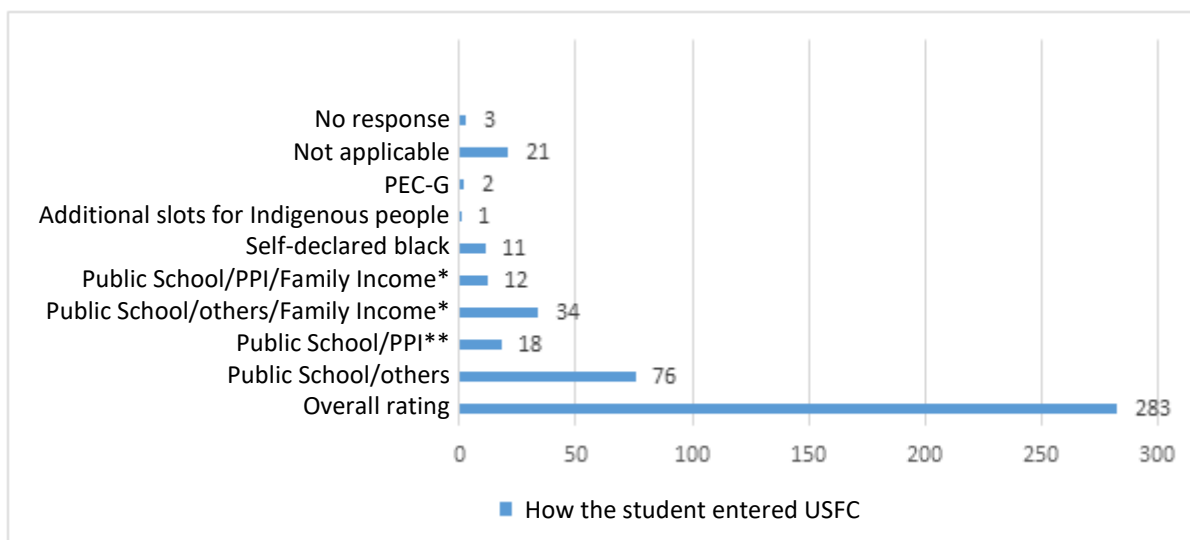
The low student demand for pedagogical support activities at universities is also observed in the research by Dias (2021, p. 164), who states that, "professionals assess that, in some cases, the demand for workshops and courses is low on the part of students, possibly because they are optional activities and compete with mandatory ones."

In turn, the ratio of enrollees to students that completed the activities is 47.52% in 2016.1, with progressive regression, until reaching 20.27% in 2019.2; between 26% and 34% in remote-learning semesters (2020.1 to 2021.2), and 24.55% in 2022.1, showing a drop in the number of students completing activities during the semesters analyzed. This result shows a high PIAPE courses dropout rate, which varies between 53% and 80%, showing that this event needs to be analyzed.

Regarding the analysis of student evaluation, 783 evaluations were collected, corresponding to the number of students who participated in this process in the time frame stipulated for the research, that is, the 2021.2 and 2022.1 semesters. In total, 2,108 students that completed the program activities were invited to participate in the student evaluation through the electronic form. Thus, 37.14% of students that completed the program activities participated in the evaluation process in the aforementioned semesters. Low participation was observed, which may be related to the non-obligation of students to evaluate the program. Pedagogical support services at other universities also report little student participation in online evaluation questionnaires, and consider the evaluation process one of the main challenges of these programs (Toti; Dias, 2020).

Regarding the diagnosis of the student profile that participates in PIAPE activities, Graph 1 shows how the student entered the university.

Graph 1 - How the student entered USFC



Note: * Gross family income equal to or less than 1.5 minimum wage per capita. ** PPI: black, brown and indigenous people.

Source: Elaborated by the author based on student evaluation of 2021.2 and 2022.1 semesters

Respondents who marked “not applicable” are students who probably started the course by means of transfer or return to undergraduate course, or people who are not regularly enrolled students at UFSC. It is observed that 64.31% of the students who participated in the evaluation process of PIAPE activities entered UFSC through general classification, and 34.54% due to quotas. In a survey on how PIAPE students entered the university in the second semester of 2018, from Florianópolis campus alone, Macedo and Ioppi (2021) observed that 58% of 36 students entered the university due to quotas.

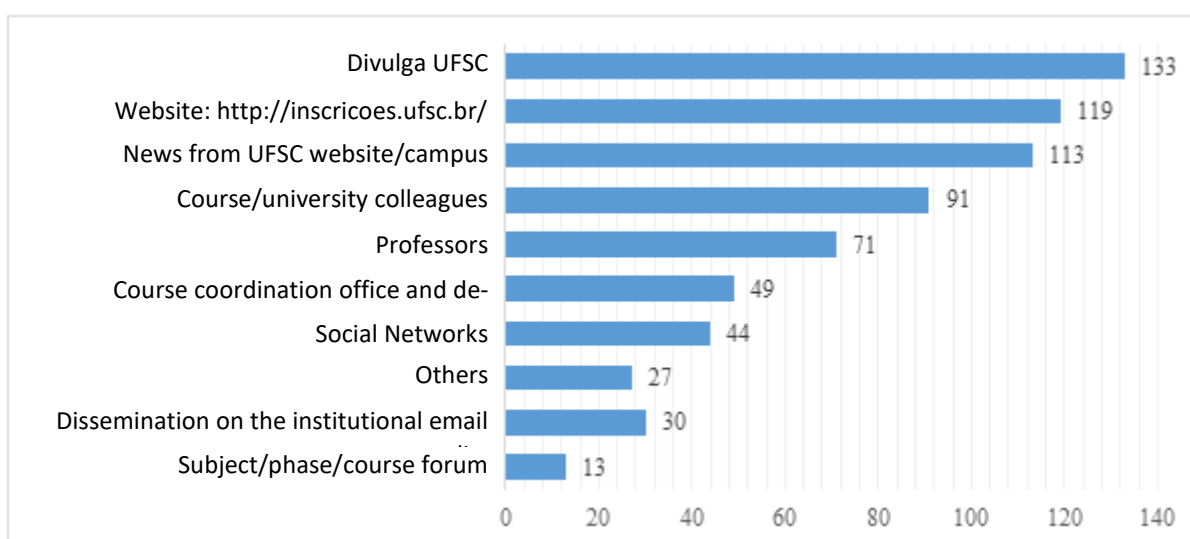
The data suggest that quota students and non-quota students need pedagogical support. Although it emerged as a student assistance policy in conjunction with the quota policy, it is concluded that pedagogical support is not an exclusive need of the affirmative action audience. There is a considerable number of non-quota students who seek pedagogical support activities, demonstrating that all institution students need PIAPE, which justifies its universality and refers to the need intertwined with insertion into academic culture and the undergraduate teaching and learning processes.

Nevertheless, the literature states that the student population originating from affirmative actions needs pedagogical support, which raises questions about the reason why this audience is currently the smallest portion of PIAPE enrollees. Taking into consideration that, according to UFSC's quota policy (UFSC, 2015), 50% of freshmen enter the university because one of the stipulated quota types, it can be inferred that PIAPE has not served this student population to the same extent. What has prevented these students from enrolling in pedagogical support actions?

Some assumptions may be related to the time students dedicate to their jobs to support themselves or to university scholarships, which compete directly with the availability to participate in complementary academic activities. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the factors that hinder the quota students' engagement in PIAPE actions, in order to enable and promote the inclusion of this important student population.

Regarding the dissemination of the activities offered, Graph 2 shows how student learned of PIAPE activities at the five campuses.

Graph 2 - How did the student learn of the activities [in the area]?



Source: Elaborated by the author based on student evaluation of 2021.2 and 2022.1 semesters.

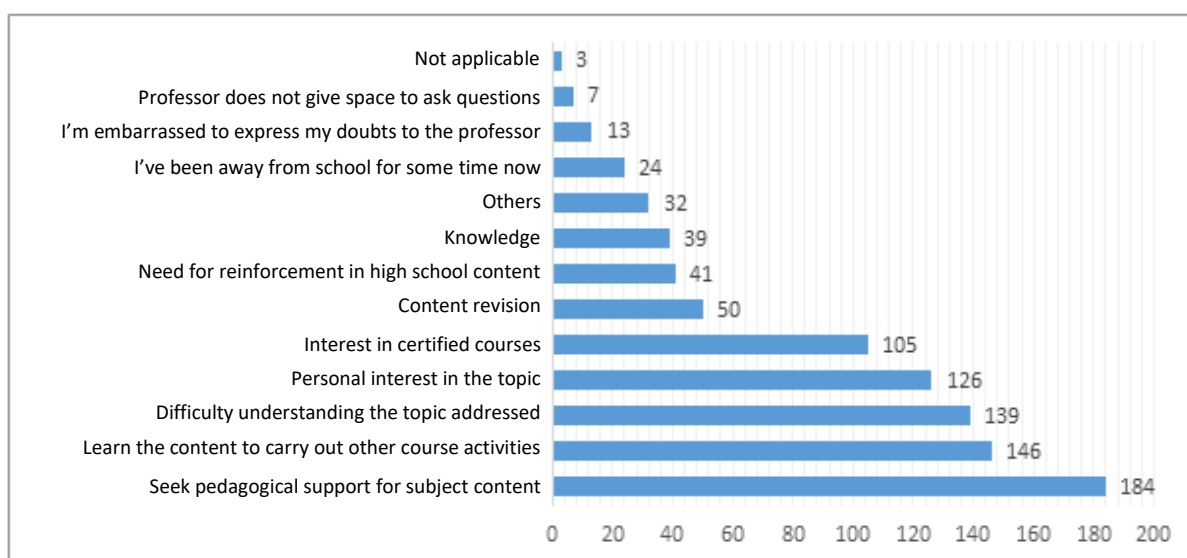
Divulga UFSC, the institution's enrollment website, and the news highlights on the campus website are among the main means of disseminating the program, reaching more than 100 students. However, considering the low demand by students in comparison to the total number of undergraduates, there is a need to intensify the program dissemination through all means used, especially through dialogue with course coordinators and other professors.

Teaching support from coordinators and other professors represents only 17.39% of dissemination, far below the expected engagement. According to Toti and Dias (2020), teaching support for pedagogical support actions is essential to transform demands into institutional themes, ceasing them to be exclusive responsibility of professionals who work in these services. Furthermore, the professors' suggestions given in the classroom have a greater weight in the students' choice regarding the academic paths to be followed within the university.

It is therefore necessary to sensitize the faculty to the institution's support actions in order for professors to collaborate to disseminating and above all to indicating referring students with low performance and/or educational weaknesses to PIAPE, understanding the entirety of the teaching-learning process that can be achieved through joint work between PIAPE, professor and student.

Regarding the reasons that encouraged the student to enroll in PIAPE activities, Graph 3 presents the answers according to the indices found in the questionnaires.

Graph 3 - What motivated the student to enroll in the PIAPE activity [in the area]?



Source: Elaborated by the author based on student evaluation of 2021.2 and 2022.1 semesters.

It can be observed that the reasons why students enroll in the program's pedagogical support activities are congruent and mostly deal with issues related to learning the content covered in the areas of knowledge. It is concluded that the student needs to learn the contents of the high school curriculum or cross-cutting themes such as reading and text production and IT, which are fundamental to the monitoring of curricular subjects in higher education. The fact that students need learning/reinforcement/revision/understanding may be due to different factors mentioned in the literature and corroborated in the program's Political-Pedagogical Project (PPP), which comprises the new student profile recognizing ethnic-racial, socioeconomic, and generational diversities and their influence on the student trajectory.

Regarding the content offered in the modules, Table 3 presents the student perception of its need. This question was not asked in the evaluation questionnaire at the Blumenau campus, therefore a total of 471 responses were collected.

Table 3 – Does the student consider that the content [of the area] met their needs?

Responses	Number of responses	%
Yes	407	86%
Partially	55	12%
No	4	1%
I was not able to participate in/conclude	4	1%
No response	1	0%
Total	471	100%

Source: Elaborated by the author based on student evaluation of 2021.2 and 2022.1 semesters.

According to (Table 2), 86% of students consider that the content met their needs, 12% consider that it partially met their needs, 1% consider that it did not meet their needs, and 1% were unable to participate in/complete the activities. Therefore, it is inferred that the contents listed to be worked on in the modules are in accordance with the educational needs of the public that seeks PIAPE in search of educational support, contributing to the learning of curricular subjects. In this way, the program has achieved its objectives of positioning itself as a pedagogical strategy to support students and the professors' teaching work and undergraduate courses, contributing to the constant educational activity improvement.

Furthermore, the program's actions are in accordance with the literature regarding the characterization of pedagogical support, stated by Toti (2022, p. 158) as

[...] institutional interventions that aim to produce positive impacts on student learning [...] actions that focus on the processes of teaching and learning, the process of integration into the university and, also, actions to support the learning of specific content.

With regard to students' perception of the pedagogical support contribution to improving grades, Table 4 shows the results of the student evaluation. This question was not asked in the evaluation questionnaire of the Florianópolis campus IT area; therefore a total of 509 responses were collected.

Table 4 - Did the pedagogical support activity [in the area] helped improve grades in curricular subjects?

Responses	Number of responses	%
Yes, my grades got higher	243	48%
It was not possible to identify if there was improvement or not	245	48%
No, my performance and grades remain the same	18	3%
Not applicable	3	0%
Total	509	100%

Source: Elaborated by the author based on student evaluation of 2021.2 and 2022.1 semesters.

According to the responses, 48% of students consider that the pedagogical support activity they participated in helped improve their grade, another 48% stated that it was not possible to identify whether there was an improvement or not, 3% stated that performance and grade remained the same, and for 1% the question does not apply. It is important to consider that the evaluations of the pedagogical support modules at the Florianópolis campus are sent at the end of each module, and in some cases they do not coincide with the end of the semester. In these cases, students have not yet taken the tests and consequently cannot observe the results in the subjects, which justifies the 48% of responses with regard to the impossibility of identifying an improvement in the grade.

Nevertheless, it can be considered that 243 students (48% of respondents) stated that their grades improved with the support from PIAPE activities, while only 3% stated that their grades remained the same. This significant data demonstrate that pedagogical support actions have been effective in the learning process of difficult content among undergraduate students, and provides improvements in successful academic performance in the subjects studied. Such student perception corroborates the importance given in the literature to pedagogical support actions at universities for student academic success and permanence (Andrade; Teixeira, 2017; Heringer, 2018; Toti; Polydoro, 2020).

When identifying the limitations and possibilities of the actions developed by PIAPE through the focus group with the program managers, the limitations were observed as little faculty involvement in the dissemination and referral of students to support due to lack of knowledge, and the consequent disadvantage to student participation in pedagogical support activities; little engagement of supervising professors of the program areas; student dropout of activities; fragility of decentralization of student evaluation; need to expand the areas of pedagogical support offered and increase the number of tutors to develop the program's actions; need to train management civil servants and of the formation of a multidisciplinary team with the support from a psychologist, and shortage of civil servants to meet the program demands at the institution's five campuses. Such limitations were diagnosed with the purpose of providing the management with a proposal for improvements to be implemented in the program as part of the formative evaluation process.

Among the possibilities, the group of managers observes a change in the student profile entering the institution, which includes worker students, neurodiversity students, or students from different social contexts, and it becomes necessary to offer support actions and pedagogical guidance, as also stated in the literature (Heringer, 2018; Oliveira; Silva, 2018). The management understands that the main objective of these actions is to promote the inclusion and integration of this plurality of students into university life.

Through the focus group, managers affirm the importance of support actions and pedagogical guidance that consider the diversity of the university student profile as one of PIAPE's main objectives. Furthermore, they validate affiliation for student success and permanence, as pointed out by Coulon (2008) and Heringer (2018), and, therefore, have planned actions that favor undergraduates to be received, inserted, and integrated into university culture.

5 Conclusion

The formative evaluation carried out reveals that PIAPE has achieved its objectives of positioning itself as a pedagogical strategy to support the students and professors' teaching work, contributing to the academic performance improvement. The student evaluation demonstrates that the program is an important action by the institution aimed at addressing educational vulnerabilities experienced in academia. Consolidating and strengthening this policy is essential to provide the student body with conditions to follow the subjects, overcoming academic difficulties that may permeate their university career, besides providing the faculty with support for pedagogical activities (Delatorre *et al.*, 2020).

From the research results, attention is drawn to the dropout of program activities and the low number of quota students enrolled. The research raises concerns about the reasons for this exclusion from pedagogical support actions, which may be based on the students' social context, such as the need to work and the consequent lack of time to dedicate themselves to complementary activities. It is essential to analyze the factors that obstruct the engagement of students from affirmative policies in pedagogical support actions, especially students on evening courses, whose difficulty in participating is even greater. It is necessary to enable and encourage the inclusion of this important audience in actions that stimulate university integration and student permanence developed in institutions.

The program managers consider that the pedagogical support activities offered by PIAPE contribute to student permanence in the course. The management team's assessment corroborates the literature regarding the positive repercussions of pedagogical support actions directed at student permanence and decreasing in retention rates (Heringer, 2018; Toti; Dias, 2020). The management understands the program's actions as a fundamental strategy to learning support, successful academic progress and student permanence, aimed at the institution's diverse student profile.

The proposal for improvements suggested to the management in accordance with the objective of the formative evaluation sought to meet the needs identified in the analysis of the data collected and suggest subsidies for improving the program's future actions, with the purpose of expanding and qualifying its service. The suggestion is that the inclusion of the actions listed in the program's agenda should be planned with monitoring of their development and evaluation of the results at the end of the semesters, in order to analyze the program growth and strengthening, and also to consider positive and negative results when re-planning the actions.

In addition to the PIAPE management, this in-depth study aims to provide the institution with knowledge of the pedagogical support policy developed and its contribution to the permanence of undergraduates, also affirming its importance as a space for equal learning conditions in higher education.

Considering the university's responsibility for the teaching and learning process, this study provides the institution with subsidies for expanding the program with the aim of reaching the entire student community, as in accordance with Toti and Dias (2020, p. 497), one believes it is necessary to "develop collectively the area of pedagogical support as undergraduates' right, as an important permanence action and as a tool for social justice." To strengthen this policy, investment in hiring and training employees is essential, in addition to expanding research in the area (Andrade; Teixeira, 2017).

This study made it possible to analyze an important student assistance and permanence action such as pedagogical support, which can serve as a basis for future studies on pedagogical support actions in other institutions, considering the need to strengthen this educational policy and the lack of scientific studies in the area (Dias, 2021).

Regarding the evaluation of pedagogical support actions in higher education, there is a gap, given the lack of research and the fact that most institutions offer assistance and monitoring but do not develop evaluation mechanisms regarding the efficiency of these actions (Toti, 2022; Toti; Dias, 2020; Toti; Polydoro, 2020). In this way, Dias and Sampaio (2020, p. 53) affirm it is necessary that "new studies to be carried out and good practices to be known and disseminated in order to subsidize the development and institutionalization of student support services in higher education institutions in the country."

One considers that actors directly involved in the programs and also other users can benefit from the evaluation process, since evaluation reports can serve as instruments for dissemination and public debate about intervention alternatives for a given reality (Trevisan; Van Bellen, 2008). Thus, this PIAPE formative evaluation contributes methodologically so that other programs and support actions can develop their evaluation, thus contributing to the analysis and strengthening of their pedagogical support actions.

Furthermore, the research allows for advances in the production of knowledge of student permanence beyond financial and material support. When this conception is expanded, other factors begin to be seen as important for student success, besides financial assistance, associating teaching quality with comprehensive permanence policies (Toti; Polydoro, 2020).

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