ACADEMIC ADAPTATION EXPERIENCED BY STUDENTS ENTERING AN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION IN THE INTERIOR OF ESPÍRITO SANTO WITH INNOVATIVE CURRICULUM

Amanda Ribeiro Farias Brum[1]; Vanessa Galhardo Milanezi[1]; Mariana Rambaldi do Nascimento[2]

[1]Graduate student in Psychology at the Centro Universitário do Espírito Santo. [2]Graduated in Psychology from Universidade Federal Fluminense (2016), Master in Administration from Universidade Federal Fluminense (2020). She is currently a PhD student in Psychology in the Postgraduate Program in Social Psychology at the State University of Rio de Janeiro. Professor of the Centro Universitário do Espírito Santo - UNESC.

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to identify factors that affect the adaptation of incoming students to an innovative curriculum. Quantitative research was conducted with a focus on incoming students at a college in the interior of Espírito Santo. The Academic Experiences Questionnaire, reduced version (QVA-r), comprises 55 items and 5 dimensions: personal, interpersonal, career, study, and institutional. The data were analyzed using statistical procedures in the JASP 0.17.2.1 software. The study was conducted with 199 students across various courses: Information System, 2.5% (n = 5); Nursing, 6.0% (n = 12); Psychology, 30.7% (n = 61); Administration, 2.0% (n = 4); Law, 1.0% (n = 2); Pharmacy, 2.5% (n = 5); Physiotherapy, 9.0% (n = 18); Medicine, 2.5% (n = 5); Veterinary Medicine, 19.6% (n = 39); Nutrition, 3.5% (n = 7); Dentistry, 20.6% (n = 41). The sample consisted of 67.8% (n = 135) female, 30.7% (n = 61) male, and 1.5% (n = 3) non-binary participants. Medicine and Physiotherapy students demonstrated the highest adaptation rates in Career and Institutional dimensions. The findings suggest that learning resources contribute to students' psychological well-being, and students' perceptions and appreciation of the college appear to be associated with their expectations. The results indicate a particular emphasis on adaptation in relation to Career and Institutional dimensions. The implementation of an innovative curriculum yielded positive outcomes.

Keywords: *Students; career; training; study; institutional.*

1 INTRODUCTION

Higher education offers professional instruction and training, and also provides education and training for professionals capable of performing skills appropriate to the society in which they live (Gomes; Rego, 2011). With this, it aims to encourage the performance of social, cognitive, affective and ethical skills (Soares; Poubel; Mello, 2009).

Entering a higher education institution is marked by great emotion. This period becomes challenging because it involves acquiring new knowledge, building new emotional and professional bonds, the need to meet academic demands and deal with family expectations (Geirdal; Nerdrum; Bonsaksen, 2019; Murrell *et al.*, 2018). This challenge of integrating into an academic environment brings a range of stimuli such as: adapting to a new context, a new routine, the need to organize time and study strategies, reduced leisure time, a high level of demand, among others. These stressors require students to develop a behavioral repertoire in order to organize themselves and cope with these conditions (Domênicis *et al.,* 2022).

As elucidated by Dvořáková, Greenberg and Roeser (2019), students' lack of adjustment to university and unfulfilled expectations of academic life can lead to demotivation, a drop in performance and fewer career prospects, increasing the chance of failure and dropping out before the end of the course. The emergence of emotional symptoms has shown a high prevalence, generating a negative impact on academic performance and satisfaction with the course (Graner; Cerqueira, 2019; Park; Choi; Lee, 2019).

Almeida, Soares and Ferreira (1999) defined academic experiences as a set of variables in the daily lives of university students that depend directly onpersonal, cognitive and social development. The Questionnaire of Academic Experiences (QVA) was developed using the study by Almeida, Soares and Ferreira (1999), which correlates a set of personal, relational, academic and institutional dimensions and their relationship to the university context.

2 ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES

Academic experiences refer to experiences acquired in the school context, inside or outside the institution. It encompasses a challenging process of integration into a new social and academic environment, which can be viewed positively or negatively. Problems outside the institution, such as financial constraints, family pressure and possible physical separation from friends and family, can create obstacles to remaining in the course, as can dissatisfaction with the routine, structure and relationships within the university (Akeman *et al.*, 2020; Chow; Choi, 2019; Murrell *et al,* 2018; Tanaka *et al,* 2016).

These experiences are divided into five dimensions: personal, interpersonal, career, study and finally the institutional dimension.

The personal dimension includes physical and mental well-being, interpersonal and emotional aspects, autonomy and self-concept. This dimension can positively enhance other dimensions such as the institutional one, since feelings of appreciation for the university can be correlated with students' psychological well-being (Anjos; Aguilar-da-Silva, 2017). Antecedent factors, such as resilience, are positively related to this dimension (Rosendo *et al.*, 2022).

The interpersonal dimension deals with concepts such as establishing intimacy and meaningful relationships, in other words, it refers to relationships with colleagues, including establishing friendships, and seeking help. This dimension can be better evidenced by students who have been at the university for some time, where bonds are already more strongly established (Anjos; Aguilar-da-Silva, 2017).

Another dimension is career, which involves the production of projects and academic satisfaction, including satisfaction with the course and the perception of competences for the course. This dimension tends to have significant results in incoming students, showing a positive degree of satisfaction in relation to course and career choices (Igue; Bariani; Milanesi, 2008).

The study dimension relates to learning skills, everyday relationships and work. This factor assesses the student's judgment of their own ability to study, which indicates self-confidence about their competence. Studies have shown that women are more competent, systematic and organized in their work (Cunha; Carrillo, 2005; Rodrigues *et al.*, 2019).

Finally, the institutional dimension, which is related to infrastructure, deals with the use and appreciation of the college's services and instruments (Domênicis *et al.*, 2022). This factor may be influenced by the institution's recognition for excellence in teaching, research and extension (Didoné *et al.*, 2022) and its social status (Rodrigues *et al.*, 2019).

2.1 INNOVATIVE CURRICULUM

One of the main characteristics of today's society is its great capacity to be changeable, flexible and capable of undergoing rapid transformations in its various dimensions. In this way, the innovative curriculum adds value by offering answers to the emerging needs of the market in context (Gaeta, 2020).

The innovative curriculum model within universities reaffirms the role that the higher education institution aims to play, prioritizing activities that contribute to flexible,

non-fragmented learning and the acquisition of skills for the job market (Brazil, 2014; Stella, 2007).

A curriculum needs to respond quickly and efficiently to the demands of training qualified professionals, so the mission arises not only to innovate a curriculum, but to keep it innovative, in a continuous cycle of construction, evaluation and reconstruction. To keep the curriculum in constant innovation requires systemic management, which is made up of elements that interact with each other, such as: diagnosis, planning, implementation, management and monitoring, which, interconnected, improve in cycles, characterizing a continuous construction (Gaeta, 2020).

The aim of this study was to assess the adaptation of new students to the innovative curriculum. As an extension of the general objective, this study aims to identify the factors that interfere positively and negatively with student adaptation.

3 METHOD

This is a descriptive and correlational cross-sectional study, based on the quantitative methodology of analysis and interpretation of data (Hammond, 2010). We will use statistical tests to make inferences, so that, based on the results found in a given sample, we can make inferences for the wider population from which the sample was drawn, assessing the risk of error.

3.1 VENUE

A survey was carried out with new students at a higher education institution in the interior of Espírito Santo in the process of implementing an innovative curriculum.

3.2 PARTICIPANTS

The study was carried out with 199 students from the Information System, Administration, Psychology, Law, Pharmacy, Physiotherapy, Medicine, Veterinary Medicine, Nutrition, Dentistry and Nursing courses.

3.3 INSTRUMENT

The Questionnaire of Academic Experiences, reduced version - QVA-r (Almeida; Soares; Ferreira, 2002) was used. The Brazilian version of the QVA-r consists of 55 items and 5 dimensions: personal, interpersonal, career, study and

institutional. The instrument consists of a scale with Likert-type scores, ranging from 1 (nothing to do with me) to 5 (everything to do with me), which evaluates students' thoughts and feelings about university.

In its reduced version, it has five dimensions (table 1) relating to the areas of academic adaptation: personal (14 items), interpersonal (12 items), career (12 items), study (9 items) and institutional (8 items). The Personal dimension refers to physical and psychological well-being; it points to aspects such as emotional balance, affective stability, optimism, decision-making and self-confidence. The interpersonal dimension is linked to relationships with colleagues, the extent to which the individual is able to create relationships in more intimate situations; it includes establishing friendships, seeking help. The Career dimension refers to feelings related to the course attended and career prospects; it includes satisfaction with the course and perception of competences for the course. The Study dimension refers to study habits and time management; it includes study routines, time planning, the use of learning resources, test preparation. The Institutional dimension refers to the appreciation of the educational institution attended; it includes feelings related to the institution, the desire to stay or change institutions, knowledge and appreciation of the infrastructure (Almeida; Soares; Ferreira, 2002).

4 ETHICAL ASPECTS

In accordance with Resolution No. 466 of December 12, 2012, which regulates ethics in research involving human beings in Brazil, this study was approved by the Ethics Committee for Research Involving Human Beings (CEP) of the Centro Universitário do Espírito Santo (CAAE) No. 69394723.3.0000.5062. The study received an opinion number of 6.078.378

5 METHOD

The physical questionnaire was adapted into an online form on *Google Forms -* a survey management application. Next, the objective of the research was presented to the course coordinators in order to publicize the research.

Potential participants were informed about the objectives of the research, the guarantee of anonymity and voluntary participation. Participants could choose whether

or not to receive the results of the study. In order to start filling out the form, they had to agree to the Informed Consent Form (ICF).

The participants then answered sociodemographic data and the Questionnaire of Academic Experiences (QVA-r)

The data presented in the questionnaires was calculated using statistical procedures with the aid of the JASP 0.17.2.1 software. Exploratory analysis techniques were used, including the Shapiro-Wilk test to assess the normality of the data and Spearman's non-parametric correlation coefficient.

6 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study involved the voluntary participation of 199 undergraduate students from a private university center in the state of Espírito Santo.

Table 1 shows the variables: course, age, gender, university career, intention to continue in the course, paid work and distance between home and university.

TABLE 1: CHARACTERIZATION OF STUDENTS IN RELATION TO THE FREQUENCY OF VARIABLES

Variable	Category	N	%
Course	Information System	5	2.5
	Nursing	12	6.0
	Psychology	61	30.7
	Administration	4	2.0
	Law	2	1.0
	Pharmacy	5	2.5
	Physiotherapy	18	9.0
	Medicine	5	2.5
	Veterinary Medicine	39	19.6
	Nutrition	7	3.5
	Dentistry	41	20.6
Gender	Female	135	67.8
	Male	61	30.7
	Non-binary	3	1.5
University Career: First course?	1st degree	163	81.9
	Have already started another university course, without completing it	23	11.6
	2nd degree	13	6.5
Intention to continue in the course	Yes	196	98.5
	No	3	1.5
In paid employment	Yes	114	57.3
	No	85	42.7
Distance from home to college	Up to 15 km	89	44.7
	Up to 30 km	29	14.6
	Up to 45 km	27	13.6
	More than 60 km	54	27.1

Source: Authors, based on data collected

The courses covered were: Information System, 2.5% (n = 5), Nursing, 6.0% (n = 12), Psychology, 30.7% (n = 61), Administration, 2.0% (n = 4), Law, 1.0% (n = 2), Pharmacy, 2.5% (n = 5), Physical Therapy, 9.0% (n = 18), Medicine, 2.5% (n = 5), Veterinary Medicine, 19.6% (n = 39), Nutrition, 3.5% (n = 7), Dentistry, 20.6% (n = 41), of which 67.8% (n = 135) were female, 30.7% (n = 61) male and 1.5% (n = 3) non-binary.

With regard to university education, 81.9% (n = 163) said they were in their first course, 11.6% (n = 23) had already started another course and not completed it, and 6.5% (n = 13) had previously completed another degree.

Among the students, 98.5% (n = 196) said they intended to continue in their current course and 1.5% (n = 3) said they did not. Of the participants who answered that they did not intend to continue, all were female, from the Dentistry (n = 2) and Psychology (n = 1) courses, aged 17, 19 and 29. One is in paid employment and two are not.

Among all the students, 42.7% (n = 85) do not have any paid work and 57.3% (n = 114) have some kind of work concurrently with their studies.

Ages ranged from 17 to 52, with an average of 20.6 years (+-4.8). There was a predominance of students aged between 18 and 20, 71.9% (n = 143), of whom 38.2% (n = 76) were 18 years old. The percentage of students aged over 21 was 26.1% (n = 56) and under 18 was 2% (n = 4).

The research by Almeida, Soares and Ferreira (2002) showed that the instrument has good internal validity, predictive validity and reliability. As far as reliability is concerned, especially the internal consistency coefficient of the items, the values have been considered good, as could also be seen in this research, which obtained a total Cronbach's alpha value of 0.911.

In Brazil, the instrument showed evidence of validity regarding the internal structure of the items, with Cronbach's alpha between 0.71 and 0.91 and for the instrument of 0.88 (Granado *et al.*, 2005).

In order to assess student adaptation on the campus, the same five dimensions of the QVA-r were used as references for calculating and interpreting the average values.

TABLE 2: ANALYSIS OF THE AVERAGE OF THE 5 DIMENSIONS OF THE QVA-R ACCORDING TO GENDER.

Dimensions/Variable	Staff	Interpersonal	Careers	Study	Institutional
Gender					
Female	3.10	3.42	4.10	3.44	3.74
Male	2.76	3.59	3.93	3.51	3.77
Non-binary	3.66	3.0	4.25	3.40	3.54

Source: Authors, based on data collected

Table 2 shows the average results of the dimensions of the QVA-r according to gender, where we can see that only one of them, Personal (M = 2.76), was lower. With this, it is possible to gauge the lower adaptation rate of male university students, which is the dimension that will talk about how the students feel physically and psychologically.

Male university students showed better adaptation in the Career and Interpersonal dimensions. The results are in line with the literature by Schleich (2006), who found that males perform better in the career dimension, and Anjos and Aguilar-da-Silva (2017), in which male students had higher averages than females in the interpersonal dimension.

For women, the smallest dimension was personal. Cunha and Carrillo (2005) found that women are more likely to develop signs of anxiety and depression and experience greater psychological distress than male students. They have higher levels of psychological, physical and emotional well-being, as well as a better adaptive factor. This can be explained by the difficulties students have in personal adaptation, due to the extensive expectations this group tends to have in relation to the academic, social and personal dimensions. The lack of resources and personal problem-solving strategies associated with the high expectations of university life may promote greater personal threat, psychological distress and disillusionment for students during their first year of higher education (Anjos; Aguilar-da-Silva, 2017).

Non-binary university students, on the other hand, showed the highest adaptation in the Personal and Career dimensions and the lowest in the Interpersonal, Study and Institutional dimensions. Brazão and Dias (2021) point out that often the actors within the university scenario are not aware of the term non-binary, making social interaction, development in studies and satisfaction with the institution difficult.

Table 3 shows the average for each of the dimensions in order to understand how these variables relate to each course.

TABLE 3: EVALUATION OF THE DIMENSIONS OF THE QVA-R ACCORDING TO THE COURSE VARIABLE

Variables/ Categories	Dimensions				
	Staff	Interpersonal	Careers	Study	Institutional
Course					
1. Administration	3.23	3.45	3.41	3.02	3.84
2. Law	2.82	3.16	4.08	3.77	3.68
3. Nursing	2.78	3.52	4.09	3.73	3.80
4. Pharmacy	2.95	3.00	3.66	3.33	3.32
5. Physiotherapy	3.06	3.68	4.21	3.55	4.00
6. Medicine	2.44	3.68	4.15	3.40	3.70
7. Veterinary Medicine	3.20	3.34	4.05	3.40	3.72
8. Nutrition	3.16	3.41	4.02	3.33	3.98
9. Dentistry	3.12	3.56	4.05	3.51	3.73
10. Psychology	2.91	3.46	4.07	3.42	3.70
11. Information Systems	2.31	3.43	3.96	3.60	3.77

Source: Authors, based on data collected

The Administration and Veterinary Medicine courses stood out, showing good adaptation rates in all dimensions. We also found that Physiotherapy and Medicine students showed significantly greater adaptation than all the other courses in the Career and Institutional dimensions. This data may show satisfaction not with the choice, but with the expectations that are to come and haven't actually happened. This dimension may be associated with the social valorization of health courses, especially medicine.

On the other hand, Pharmacy students showed lower levels of global adaptation in the Interpersonal and Institutional dimensions compared to the other courses, and the Information Systems and Medicine courses showed the worst levels of adaptation compared to the other courses in the Personal dimension.

The data found among medical students is at odds with the results found in the study by Anjos and Aguilar-da-Silva (2017), in which students showed greater personal adaptation. This indicates that the students in this study have less physical and psychological well-being, emotional balance, affective stability, optimism, and more difficulty in making decisions and self-confidence.

Table 4 shows the analysis of the dimensions of the QVA-r according to distance from university. No significant differences were found between the averages. This shows that the distance between home and university does not interfere with the academic adaptation of the students analyzed in this study.

TABLE 4: EVALUATION OF THE DIMENSIONS OF THE QVA-R ACCORDING TO THE DISTANCE FROM COLLEGE VARIABLE

Categories	Dimensions				
	Staff	Interpersonal	Careers	Study	Institutional
Distance					
Up to 15km	2.98	3.46	4.10	3.41	3.76
Up to 30km	2.89	3.54	3.96	3.61	3.85
Up to 45km	3.18	3.36	3.99	3.38	3.61
More than 60km	3.02	3.50	4.05	3.49	3.73

Source: Authors, based on data collected

Table 5 shows the *Spearman* correlation analysis between the five dimensions.

TABLE 5: *SPEARMAN* CORRELATION ANALYSIS BETWEEN THE 5 DIMENSIONS.

Variable	(*p) Statistics	Variable				
		Staff	Interpersonal	Careers	Study	Institutional
Staff	Coefficient correlations	1				
Interpersonal	Coefficient correlations	-0.19**	1			
Careers	Coefficient correlations	-0.24**	0.37**	1		
Study	Coefficient correlations	-0.34**	0.39**	0.43**	1	
Institutional	Coefficient correlations	-0.22**	0.34**	0.38**	0.40**	1

** $p \leq 0.05$

Source: Authors, based on data collected

The highest positive correlations were between the Career and Study dimensions (p-value <0.0001 and r = 0.43). We can understand that learning resources seem to be associated with students' career expectations. The Career dimension will deal with the newcomer's adaptation to the professional choice, management and quality of studies (Soares; Poubel; Mello, 2009). These results are in line with the literature, such as the study by Milanezi *et al.* (2023) where the highest positive correlations were considered to be of moderate magnitude between the Career and Study dimensions (p-value <0.0001 and r = 0.54). Another noteworthy correlation is between the Institutional and Study dimensions (p-value <0.0001 and r = 0.40). This shows that learning resources seem to be linked to university students' career prospects. Appreciation for the college and knowledge of the infrastructure seem to be related to better use of resources, better time management and study habits.

When evaluating the adaptation of students entering first-year courses, the direct influence of academic experiences on their suitability for the course can be seen. In the study by Anjos and Aguilar-da-Silva (2017), it was observed that the career

dimension had the highest incidence rate, thus highlighting a positive relationship between professional choice and the conduct of studies.

On the other hand, the personal and study dimensions had an average below that found by Anjos and Aguilar-da-Silva (2017), demonstrating a possible interference in physical and psychological well-being and organization with studies.

In the interpersonal dimension, which refers to social relationships, the two studies obtained similar results. In the Institution dimension, the participants in our study obtained higher averages than those found in a previous study by Anjos and Aguilar-da-Silva (2017) and Milanezi *et al.* (2023).

It is understood that this study contributes to the investigation of academic experiences from the first period, with the aim of prioritizing the mental and social health of students who are in the process of adaptation, so that the University can develop means of intervention to adapt to the course, increase performance and reduce dropout (Matta; Lebrão; Heleno, 2017).

7 CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to evaluate the impact of an innovative curriculum and the factors that interfere positively and negatively with student adaptation. To this end, the Questionnaire of Academic Experiences - short version (QVA-r) was applied to students at a university center in the interior of the state of Espírito Santo.

With the application, it was possible to confirm the accuracy of the instrument in the different dimensions it covers, highlighting that the values achieved were close to the reference studies.

Students from Business Administration and Veterinary Medicine showed good adaptation rates in all dimensions. It is also worth noting that Medicine and Physical Therapy students had the highest adaptation index in the Career and Institutional dimension. On the other hand, the course that showed the lowest adaptation index was Pharmacy, which stood out negatively in the Interpersonal and Institutional dimensions. The Medicine and Information System courses had the worst scores compared to the other courses in the Personal dimension.

Male students had the best adaptations in the Career and Institutional dimensions, and the lowest overall adaptation in the Personal dimension. The female gender also stood out in the Career and Institutional dimensions and had the lowest score in the Personal dimension. In the Non-Binary gender, the highest scores were in

the Career and Personal dimensions, and the lowest level of adaptation was in the Interpersonal dimension.

It is possible to state that learning resources contribute to students' psychological well-being, and feelings and appreciation for college seem to be linked to students' expectations.

The adaptation in relation to the Career and Institutional dimensions stands out, but positive results are confirmed with the implementation of the innovative curriculum that provides project-based learning, integration of subjects, internships and practical experiences, encouraging students to create skills and a vision of the job market, as well as interest and satisfaction in participating in practical experiences in the institutional environment.

In this context, more research is needed on Academic Experiences using the QVA-r instrument, correlating it with other possible variables, in order to identify predictors and results of adaptation within the university context.

In the future, a longitudinal study, with the questionnaire being reapplied to students throughout the course, would be a positive source of study for understanding adaptations throughout training.

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