ISSN: 2230-9926

Available online at http://www.journalijdr.com

IJDR

International Journal of Development Research
Vol. 11, Issue, 09, pp. 50167-50171, September, 2021
https://doi.org/10.37118/ijdr.22806.09.2021

RESEARCH ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

PROFILE OF ACTIVE ADULT STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN A FEDERAL INSTITUTION

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:
Received 28th June, 2021
Received in revised form
19th July, 2021
Accepted 17th August, 2021
Published online 27th September, 2021

Key Words:
Higher Education,
Adults, Education, Strategies.

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ABSTRACT

The admission to Higher Education represents an important stage for the personal, social and professional evolution of the human being. The objective was to evaluate the specificities of the sociodemographic profile of adult students enrolled at the institution. It is about a quantitative, cross-sectional study and questions that include qualitative aspects. The study was carried out with 103 active adults in higher education, belonging to undergraduate courses. The collections of the data occurred through a sociodemographic form. The profile of the interviewees is made up of the majority of males, white, married, aged between 25 and 34 years old, living with their relatives, get 2 to 3 minimum wages and are responsible for all the family income, most do not have children, but live with 2 to 3 people. As far as work is concerned, most participants are employed and study in the night shift. In view of the results found, it is necessary to look at this student group, and to propose the continuity of their studies based on this, seeking strategies to improve permanence and success. With this, it has been suggested more researches with non-traditional students, in order to promote a greater appreciation of this class.

Citation: ***Cíntia B. Goi, Maiara Berlt, Humberto Salamoni, Fernanda D. Siqueira, Carolina R. Pretto, Marcos Benetti, Marlei C. Zanella, Kátrin I. D. Corrêa, Sabrina A. W. Benetti and Eliane R. R. Benetti.*** "Profile of active adult students in higher education in a federal institution*", International Journal of Development Research*, 11, (09), 50167-50171.

INTRODUCTION

The admission to Higher Education (HE) represents an important stage for the personal, social and professional evolution of the human being. Attending higher education is a dream for many Brazilians, as the qualification enables professional achievement and the acquisition of better living conditions (AMBIEL, 2016).

For a long time in Brazil, the access to higher education was a privilege of the upper class, at the time called elite. This audience consisted of traditional students, aged 18 to 24, who used to enroll full-time, sought higher education immediately after finishing high school and were economically dependent on their parents (EGITO and SILVEIRA, 2018 and BAGGI and LOPES, 2011). After the University Reform, Brazil significantly expanded the number of courses and Higher Education Institutions (HEI), resulting in an

increase in the number of enrollments (BAGGI and LOPES, 2011). The authors point out that the University Reform would modernize the HEIs and provide the less favored classes with the opportunity to enter higher education. Thus, HEIs gain a new audience, non-traditional students, who for Kim (2002, p. 74) are the "students aged 25 or over", bringing maturity and experience for developing an important role for the community and family (KASWORM, 2003). Rothes (2009) argues that these non-traditional students went through a transition in their personal lives, related to family, professional and social responsibilities, as they reconcile family, work and studies. They are usually students who have extensive life experience, which should be recognized and valued. For the development of this research, non-traditional students over twenty-five years of age who at some point in their life interrupted the normal course of studies were considered adults. For these reasons, it is important to evaluate the specificities of the sociodemographic profile of this public, in which the intention was to recognize the different types of adults in the institution.

METHODOLOGY

This is about a quantitative study with a cross-sectional design and questions that include qualitative aspects. The study was carried out with 103 active adult students in higher education belonging to undergraduate courses: Technologist in Internet Systems, Technologist in Grain Production, Degree in Chemistry and Degree in Biological Sciences from a Federal Education Institution in Rio Grande do Sul, in Brazil. The research listed as inclusion criteria adult students, active and over twenty-five years old, who voluntarily agreed to participate in the research. Students who had difficulties in understanding were excluded from the questions that made up the data collection instruments. At first, the questionnaire was applied to all students over 25 years old, and had a specific question that differentiated traditional from non-traditional students. From the survey carried out by the National Information System on Professional and Technological Education - SISTEC, in April 2018, a total of 350 students belonging to all undergraduate courses were identified. Of these, 118 were over 25 years old. The research was applied to the population of students who met the established inclusion criteria.

Of the 118 students, 103 agreed to participate in the research, 01 were on maternity leave, 04 did not accept to participate and 10 were no longer attending classes, that is, they had abandoned the course they were enrolled in. Data collection took place in April and May of 2018, after approval of the project by the Research Ethics Committee - ERC No. 84994118.5.0000.5574 - and authorization for the development of the research by the institution studied. To meet the proposed objective, data were collected through a sociodemographic form, in order to characterize the participants in the research. With the application of the sociodemographic form, we sought to characterize the following variables: traditional or non-traditional student, course, semester, year, age, gender, marital status, ethnicity, if they attended high school in which school, resides in the city where studies, with whom they live, family income, contributes to the family income, education of father and mother, position as a child in the family, they live with how many people, children and quantity, if they are working, have scholarships and which shift they study.

The application of the instrument was applied collectively in the classrooms. In this sense, all students were approached by the researcher and informed about the objective of the research, and those who agreed to participate were instructed to read and sign the Informed Consent Form - TCLE, allowing the application of the data collection instruments. All ethical principles involving research with people were observed, as per Resolution 466 (2012) of the Ministry of Health, with subjects guaranteed anonymity, confidentiality, as well as the right to refuse to participate. Data were stored and organized in an electronic spreadsheet in Excel for Windows (Office, 2013) and electronically analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science - SPSS version 22.0. The assessment of the reliability of the instruments was carried out by analyzing the internal consistency determined by the Alpha Cronbach Coefficient - α. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to calculate relative and absolute frequency.

RESULTS

From the 103 survey participants, 98 respondents were characterized as adults. Chart 1 shows the sociodemographic data, where it can be seen that 53 (54.08%) participants are male. Regarding to age, it was found that 67 (68.37%) participants are between 25 and 34 years old, 20 (20.41%) between 35 and 44 years old and 11 (11.22%) between 45 and 54 years old. As for the ethnicity of respondents, 80 (81.63%) are white, followed by 16 (16.33%) brown and 2 (2.04%) black. As observed in the study, the white color was predominant, a fact that may be related to a local characterization, of German colonization. Regarding the marital status of respondents, 51 (52.04%) are married, 25 (25.51%) are single, 12 (12.24%) are in a stable relationship, 6 (6.12%) are dating and 4 (4.08%) are divorced. From the survey participants, 32 (32.65%) belong to the Grain Technology and Production course, 24 (24.49%) to the Chemistry Degree course, with the same rates as the Internet Systems and Biological Science Degree courses with 21 (21.43%) students each. Among the participants, 31 (31.63%) attend the 1st semester, 23 (23.47%) the 3rd semester, 23 (23.47%) the 5th semester, 16 (16.33%) the 7 1st semester, 3 (3.06%) the 8th semester, 1 (1.02%) the 4th semester and 1 (1.02%) the 6th semester. Chart 2 presents other sociodemographic issues.

Most respondents, 80 (81.63%), attended high school in public schools, 86 (87.76%) live in the same city where they study, and 32 (32.65%) responded that they were first-children. As for the level of education, both father and mother, 6 (5.83%) had no level of education. The survey confirmed the highest rates for incomplete primary education, 56 (57.14%) for fathers and 50 (51.02%) for mothers. Regarding the study shift, 77 (78.57%) attend night classes, as most higher education courses are offered at night. Regarding scholarships and grants, 79 (80.61%) do not receive it, 18 (18.37%) receive a full scholarship and only 1 (1.02%) receive a partial one. These incentives are offered by the Institution in order to assist in the transport, permanence and success of students. However, they consider the availability of such aid to be limited. Chart 3 shows the results related to the employability of the participants, where 68 (69.39%) were employed and the others were not working or were unemployed.

As for family income, it was found that 29 (29.59%) participants receive more than 2 to 3 minimum wages, that is, from R$1,874.00 to R$2,811.00. Regarding to participation in family income, 28 (28.57%) participants are responsible for all their family income, 21 (21.43%) do not have their own income and 17 (17.35%) are responsible for 25% of family income. Regarding the number of people who live with the student, 27 (27.55%) respondents said they live with 1 person and 27 (27.55%) with 3 people, and the majority, 67 (68.37%), reside with their own family (children, spouse). Regarding to the variable children 47 (47.96%) said they did not have children and 24 (24.49%) had 2 children

DISCUSSION

Regarding gender, males had a greater participation in this study. A similar result was found in a study with 723 traditional and non-traditional students, in which the difference in grades at a university in Germany was analyzed. In the study, 22% of the sample consisted of non-traditional students and there was a greater participation of males (BRÄNDLE and LENGFELD, 2016). In turn, the results found diverge from the research by Francoes (2014), who investigated the motivational orientations of 162 non-traditional students enrolled in undergraduate courses in Florida, United States, in which 58% of respondents were female.

Chart 1. Sociodemographic profile of adult students in Higher Education at a Federal/RS Educational Institution. From April to May/2018

Variables	Categories	N	%
Gender	Female	45	45,92%
	Male	53	54,08%
Age	25 to 34 yearsold	67	68,37%
	35 to 44 yearsold	20	20,41%
	45 to 54 yearsold	11	11,22%
Ethnicity	White/Light-Skinned	80	81,63%
	DarkSkinned	16	16,33%
	Black	2	2,04%
Marital Status	Married	51	52,04%
	Divorced	4	4,08%
	Dating	6	6,12%
	Single	25	25,51%
	Commom-Law Marriage	12	12,24%
Course	BiologicalSciencesGraduation	21	21,43%
	ChemestryGraduation	24	24,49%
	Internet Systems	21	21,43%
	Graintechnologyandproduction	32	32,65%
Semester	FirstSemester	31	31,63%
	ThirdSemester	23	23,47%
	Fourthsemester	1	1,02%
	Fifthsemester	23	23,47%
	Sixthsemester	1	1,02%
	Seventhsemester	16	16,33%
	Eighthsemester	3	3,06%

Source: Survey Data, 2018

Chart 2. Sociodemographic profile of adult students in Higher Education at a Federal/RS Educational Institution From April to May/2018

Variables	Categories	N	%
Did you attend High School in a school?	Eja/Proeja/Encceja	8	8,16%
	Private	10	10,20%
	Public	80	81,63%
Mother's education	Complete Elementary School	12	12,24%
	Incomplete Elementary School	50	51,02%
	Complete High School	13	13,27%
	Incomplete High School	6	6,12%
	Complete Higher Education	4	4,08%
	Incomplete Higher Education	2	2,04%
	I don'tknow	2	2,04%
	Complete Post Graduation	3	3,06%
	Unschooled	6	6,12%
Father's education	Complete Elementary School	14	14,29%
	Incomplete Elementary School	56	57,14%
	Complete High School	8	8,16%
	Incomplete High School	3	3,06%
	Complete Higher Education	4	4,08%
	Incomplete Higher Education	2	2,04%
	I don'tknow	3	3,06%
	Complete Post Graduation	2	2,04%
	Unschooled	6	6,12%
What is your position as a child in the family?	Youngest	29	29,59%
	Middle Child	31	31,63%
	Only Child	6	6,12%
	First-Born	32	32,65%
Which shift do you study in?	Morning	21	21,43%
	Night	77	78,57%
Do you have a scholarship?	Integral	18	18,37%
	No type of scholarship	79	80,61%
	Partial	1	1,02%
Do youlive in thecity where you study?	No	12	12,24%
	Yes	86	87,76%

Source: Survey Data, 2018

A study by the OECD (2017) states that the participation of women in higher education has increased in recent years, resulting in a gender diversification in the choice of courses. Regarding the marital status of respondents, the results of this survey are in line with the study by Francoes (2014), where 31% of participants were married, 26% divorced and 12% single. This is a characteristic of the non-traditional student, who has a vast life experience, going through several paths, bringing in his bag knowledge that he obtained in an informal, formal

and non-formal way. As for the ethnicity of respondents, the white was predominant, going according to the results of the research by Cotton et al. (2017), involving eight non-traditional students from a UK university.

traditional students at a university in Australia. Of these, 25.6% were considered non-traditional and depended on government financial assistance to carry out their studies.

Chart 3. Socioeconomic profile of adult students in Higher Education at a Federal/RS Educational Institution from April to May/2018

Variables	Categories	N	%
Are you working currently?	Yes	68	69,39%
	No	30	30,61%
Family Income	Upto1 minimum wage	4	4,08%
	More than 1 to 2 minimum wages	27	27,55%
	More than10 to 20 minimum wages	2	2,04%
	More than 2 to 3 minimum wages	29	29,59%
	More than20 minimum wages	1	1,02%
	More than 3 to 5 minimum wages	28	28,57%
	More than 5 to 10 minimum wages	6	6,12%
	No income	1	1,02%
Participation in the Family Income	I don't have my own income;	21	21,43%
	Responsilble for approximately 25% of the Family income;	17	17,35%
	Responsilble for approximately 50% of the Family income;		
	Responsilble for approximately 75% of the Family income;	15	15,31%
	Responsilble for all the Family income;		
	I have income that I distribute for personal things, but do not contribute to the Family income.	6	6,12%
		28	28,57%
		11	11,22%
Howmany Pople live with you?	1 person	27	27,55%
	2 people	22	22,45%
	3 people	27	27,55%
	4 people	12	12,24%
	5 people	5	5,10%
	8 people	1	1,02%
	Living alove	4	4,08%
Do you live with?	Own Family (husband/wife, children)	67	68,37%
	Parents	19	19,39%
	Alone	7	7,14%
	Didn'tanswer	5	5,10%
Do you have children?	No	47	47,96%
Ifso, how many?	Yes, 1 child	22	22,45%
	Yes, 2 children	24	24.49%
	Yes, 3 children	5	5,10%

Source: Survey Data, 2018

The authors investigated student retention, in which seven of the participants were white and only one was black. In this sense, it is pointed out that the city where the educational institution under study is located is of German colonization, justifying the highest percentage of white color. It is noticed that, even with the offer of access by quotas, the adhesion by browns and blacks is low. With regard to age, Francoes (2014) obtained divergent results, where 31% of the participants were aged between 25 and 34 years old, 34% between 35 and 44 years old, 25% between 45 and 54 years old and 10% over 55 years old. The research in question shows that adults enter higher education institutions younger; however, Francoes (2014) found that the population is a little older. In turn, data presented by the OECD (2017) show that the age group of students who acquire the highest amounts of higher education diplomas ranges from 25 to 34 years old.

It is observed that most respondents attend the institution in the night shift, information that is in line with the research by Almeida et al. (2016). The researchers sought to understand the barriers to learning and academic evolution of non-traditional higher education students, in which most evening courses were also offered. The search for night courses is due to the needs of the students, as most of them need to work during the day to support themselves and their families. Incentives, such as scholarships and grants offered by the institution, are of paramount importance for the permanence and success of students. However, sometimes, their availability is limited, not allowing to contemplate all who need it. Chung et al. (2017) compared the levels of resilience between 422 traditional and non-

The level of education of parents is a concern, because despite it is low, it still has rates without any level of education. Results from the OECD (2017) showed that 17% of Brazilian adults did not reach primary education, a rate considered high, as most OECD partner countries had only 5% of adults in the same conditions. Regarding incomplete primary education, the results are in line with the study by Brändle (2016), which analyzed 892 students from a German university. Of these, 189 were non-traditional students, from non-academic families, professionally qualified. In this sense, the OECD (2017) showed that educated families of adults aged 30 to 59 years have greater opportunities to complete higher education, where the level of education of parents becomes a stronger predictor when compared to the age or gender of an individual. Employability is an important factor for the development and livelihood of individuals. In this study, it was evidenced that a little more than half of the participants were in permanent jobs, while the others were out of work or unemployed. This result is in line with the research by Hunter-Johnson (2017) that explored the barriers and possible strategies of 100 non-traditional adult learners in the Bahamas, where 74% of respondents are employed full-time, 7% in part-time and 19% unemployed. In OECD participating countries (2017), 84% of adults with higher education are employed. Thus, one can see the importance of the level of education in relation to a position in the labor market. Concerning the family income, it was found that 29 (29.59%) participants determined more than 2 to 3 rewards, that is, from R$ 1,874.00 to R$ 2,811.00 at the time of the study. In the research by Almeida et al. (2016) the economic level of the

interviewees was found, between 1,500 and 2,000 € of family income, where 55% of the families had an income of less than 1,000 € a month. Brändle (2016) pointed out that non-traditional students, because they are employed, had a more satisfactory economic situation than their traditional peers. The OECD (2017) reported that, in Mexico, adults who do not take to secondary school obtain on average 39% less than those who have completed this mode of study, for both full-time and part-time work. In Brazil, the salary difference of an individual in the absence of secondary education reaches 30%. In turn, those who have higher education earn twice as much as those who complete high school. The potential for increased wage gains from higher education can be an incentive for people to seek higher qualifications (OECD, 2017). With regard to the participation in the family income, 28 (28.57%) participants are responsible for all their family income, 21 (21.43%) do not have their own income and 17 (17.35%) are responsible for 25% of the family income. The responsibility for family income is also a characteristic of the non-traditional adult, who generally reconciles work, home, family and studies. Regarding to the variable children and the quantitative, 47 (47.96%) said they did not have children and 24 (24.49%) had 2 children. Study by Algodão et al. (2017) meets results, with 8 non-traditional students, in which it explored the retention of students at the university in the United Kingdom. The same evidenced that 4 (50%) participants did not have children, and 3 (37.5%) had children aged between 3 and 20 years. Such results diverge from the study by Chung et al. (2017), in which non-traditional students claimed to have a greater number of children. It can be said that each non-traditional student is unique, and takes with them vast knowledge. They are people with different cultures and customs, who have family and social responsibilities.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This research allowed us to assess the profile of 98 active adult students belonging to higher education courses at the Educational Institution studied. The profile of the interviewees is made up of the majority of males, white, married, aged between 25 and 34 years old, who live with their families, receive 2 to 3 minimum wages and are responsible for the entire family income. It is interesting to point out that most do not have children, but live with 2-3 people. With regard to work, most participants are employed and study in the night shift.

It is noticed that non-traditional students represent a significant group within the educational institution, and present a trajectory of many economic, social and political transformations. In this sense, it is necessary to recognize that adults are being educated, who need to reconcile many tasks with studying, who may be in vulnerable financial conditions or with personal/family problems, who have spent a long time without studying and bring a very large bag of life experience. In view of the results found, it is necessary to look at this student group, propose to this audience the continuity of their studies and, based on that, seek strategies to improve permanence and success. Thus, further research with non-traditional students is suggested, with the aim of promoting greater appreciation for this class.

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