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Experiences of being university student in times of pandemic: changes, adjustments and shared perspectives*

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Abstract

University education was severely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, so it is important to know students' experiences in this context, considering the changes in their routines, difficulties related to learning processes and mental health. Four conversation circles were held with six students from different undergraduate courses at a public university in the South of Brazil, who were assisted by the Student Assistance Policy. The content of the meetings was submitted to thematic analysis. The results indicated that the changes caused by strategies for coping with the pandemic had a significant impact on the students' mental health, exacerbating difficulties that were already experienced before the pandemic. The adoption of remote learning led to insecurities regarding academic development and the quality of professional preparation. As for the future, students' expectations express both optimism about the resumption of in-person activities, but also apprehension about what the world and the Community will be like in the coming years. As a result, it is understood that higher education institutions should create and provide resources to prevent psychological suffering or its exacerbation, considering that the well-being of students must also be looked after as a crucial factor for ensuring that their paths within the university are as fruitful and positive as possible.

Keywords

Covid-19 – Emergency remote education – Mental health – University students.

* Data availability: the dataset supporting the results of this study is not publicly available due to it being part of a larger research project containing other relevant data to be published in separate articles. Data available at: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1cFW6q6xF7DXyb4qNXh7_R5rRyFnYYe9I?usp=sharing

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Introduction

Entering university can have different meanings in students' lives, being for many of them a dream coming true. However, the idealization about academic life can be frustrated when reality arises, requiring each person to adapt to the new context and to use resources to be able to cope with the stressors that constitute that environment. This often results in difficulties that affect their mental health, which can lead, for instance, to withdrawal of the classes (REIS *et al.*, 2022).

The concern for students' mental health is an issue that has become evident as experiences of suffering among students at various university across the country started to be reported. Regard this, we can mention the Academic Front of Mental Health, created in 2017 and responsible for launching a campaign called "It's not normal", which aimed to denounce situations in the academic context that resulted in psychological suffering. In this important movement, experiences of suffering that should not be normalized were brought to the discussion, such as feeling worn out 24 hours a day or being forced to choose between personal life and studies (REIF, 2018) at the expense of one's own mental health.

Currently, a new element has been added to investigations into mental health at universities: the pandemic declared by the World Health Organization (WHO), due to the new Coronavirus, which spread rapidly across the globe, and resulted in a variety of impacts (FREITAS; NAPIMOGA; DONALISIO, 2020). This public health emergency required governments to determine quarantine, isolation and social distancing, which led to the confinement of people in their homes, as well as travel restrictions or bans, for example (WATHELET *et al.*, 2020).

With these radical measures, some changes were observed in many, if not all areas of life, including the field of Education. To continue activities in Higher Education, it was necessary to resort to the use of Digital Information and Communication Technologies (DIT), challenging teachers to promote service and integration with students in a new way, no longer face-to-face (BRANCO; ADRIANO; ZANATTA, 2020). At first, marked by enthusiasm and the feeling that it was the right thing to do, technology-mediated teaching processes gave way to exhaustion and the loosening of the bonds that support the teaching-learning relationship (MÁXIMO, 2021). This happened because the universities and their teachers were not prepared to deliver quality remote education, resulting in changes to work routines imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, which led to an overload of activities, high stress in developing teaching and learning processes in a virtual environment, and difficulties in setting boundaries for work and rest hours, for example (MATIAS *et al.*, 2023).

With regard to students, issues related to internet access and technological resources posed obstacles to remote teaching and learning processes (ANDRADE; CAVAINAC, 2022; SILVA *et al.*, 2021b). Especially in the case of the Brazilian population, the precariousness of internet access must be considered, as estimates of the situation in 2020, when the pandemic began, indicated that there were more than 4 million Brazilians without internet access, in addition to more than fifty percent of households in rural areas facing the same

condition (ANDES-SN, 2020). In the public network, twenty-six percent of students who were taking online classes did not have internet access (AGÊNCIA SENADO, 2020).

In addition to the difficulties already mentioned, the impact of the pandemic on people's mental health, with the development or intensification of psychological distress and mental disorders (NARDI *et al.*, 2020) was also identified in various studies. Teachers and students experienced fear and anxiety, especially due to social isolation, the fear of getting sick, dying, or losing family members (CAMPOS FILHO *et al.*, 2022; GARCIA-JR *et al.*, 2022; MATIAS *et al.*, 2023).

Aware of this risk, researchers proposed investigations in the first months of the pandemic, as observed in research carried out with the Chinese population, conducted by Huang and Zhao (2020). The study showed that the prevalence of depressive and anxiety symptoms was significantly higher in younger people, up to 35 years old. This information highlights the importance of making selections to understand the realities faced by different groups and populations, such as the university community.

Contributing to this issue, a survey study carried out by Gonçalves (2021), in a public higher education institution of Minas Gerais, with the participation of 1,201 undergraduate students, classified forty-one percent of the sample as having very serious levels of anxiety. In addition, more than 400 participants showed results that indicated subjective stress caused by the impact of the pandemic. In a study conducted by Patias *et al.* (2021), it was observed that students who faced the interruption of in-person classes and the lack of adoption of remote education by their universities experienced higher levels of anxiety.

Considering the data presented, this present study was developed with the aim of understanding the experiences of university students following the declaration of a state of emergency due to Covid-19. This includes changes in their routines, difficulties related to the learning processes, and education in the remote learning modality, as well as potential impacts of this new context in mental health.

Methodological approach

This is a qualitative study, which, according to Minayo (2013), aims to address very specific questions, focusing on the realm of meanings, motives, and attitudes. Its development took place online in the months of October and November 2021, and included the participation of undergraduate students from a public institution, located in the central region of Rio Grande do Sul. The participating students experienced a sociocultural context marked by gender, race and class inequalities, since everyone was assisted by the university's Student Assistance Policy, and the focus on this group was based on the assumption that university students in vulnerable situations could benefit from the provision of a care strategy mental health at the current time, because, as observed by Osse and Costa (2011), these students not only experience material needs, but also present demands regarding health care, especially psychological support.

For participant selection, a promotional piece was shared on social media so that those interested in participating in conversation circles could fill out an identification form, allowing the researcher to contact them later. In total, 22 responses were received through the form; however, after contacting all interested individuals, a group of six students from six different courses who agreed to participate voluntarily in the research was formed.

Now, the characterization of the participants: one male and five female students; aged between 21 and 31 years old; enrolled in Architecture and Urban Planning, Speech Therapy, History - Bachelor's Degree, Literature - Portuguese, Dentistry and Psychology courses, from the fourth to the tenth semester; everyone participated of remote academic activities; five worked or did internships, three of which carried out these activities online and the rest in person; only one participant had not yet experienced university life to its fullest (on campus), as she started the course during the pandemic.

For data collection, four weekly online conversation circles were held via the Google Meet platform, where the group was invited to share their perspectives on mental health, their resources for dealing with the challenges of university life, as well as such as their experiences in remote learning. Each meeting lasted approximately one hour, being recorded and later transcribed. In the first meeting, five students participated; in the second round, only two participated and in the third and fourth rounds, three students participated. To read and discuss the material, meetings were held with fellow members and volunteers of the research group. Thematic content analysis was chosen, which Minayo (2014) proposes as interpretative, to discover cores of meaning that compose communications bearing significance in relation the research objectives. In this process, there was a reading of the collected material (pre-analysis); definition of categories based on prominent topics (exploration); condensation of this data into thematic categories for subsequent interpretation and association with the theoretical framework (data processing).

Regarding ethical procedures, the study was authorized by the institution and approved by the Research Ethics Committee, under CAAE 45213921.3.0000.5346. Furthermore, before participating, students had access to the Free and Informed Consent Form, declaring agreement. These and other precautions were taken based on the resolutions of the National Health Council nº 466 of December 2012, and nº 510 of April 2016, which establish important conditions for developing research with human beings.

Results and discussion

During the four meetings held, participants presented some notes and comparisons regarding their experiences as university students, considering the context of the pandemic, which was grouped into three topics that exemplify and discuss such experiences: 1) Changes brought by the pandemic and impacts in mental health; 2) Perceptions of remote learning and implications for academic activities; 3) Analysis of the pandemic experience and future expectations. In the excerpts presented, chosen as illustrative to represent and exemplify the discussion, the students will be identified from E1 to E6, with the letter E chosen because in Portuguese it is the initial of "student".

Changes brought by the pandemic and impacts in mental health

After the global pandemic was declared due to the new coronavirus, the institution in question suspended classes, events, practices, internships and other in-person activities, transforming them into remote ones, mediated by technology. Among the consequences, students returned to their hometowns, moving away from in-person activities and socializing with classmates and teachers. But, in addition, they experienced a pause in their professional preparation (COELHO *et al.*, 2020). Needing to adapt to the new routine, university students began to miss what previously characterized academic life, mainly involving experiences and interactions in the university campus environment.

Hunt and Eisenberg (2010) had already drawn attention to the university campus as a potential space, because it is composed of different channels that, to some extent, can have a positive impact on the mental health of people who circulate there. They also emphasized that undergraduate education can represent a unique moment in people's journeys, in the sense that a single space can integrate various activities, both in terms of professional development and in the realm of social experiences. This is precisely what was observed from the participants reports, who were very nostalgic for what was possible to experience on a daily basis in the university's communal areas. In addition to the pause in integration activities across campus, students also faced limitations due to the space where they remained during remote learning. Some returned to their parents' house, others stayed at the University Student House, as was the case of E4, who reported that: "The problem with remote learning is that you are already at home 24 hours a day and we are in a studio apartment, if you can call it a studio here, it's just an environment [...], I have the refrigerator next to me".

At this point, with the precariousness experienced by some academics becoming evident, it is believed that paying attention to aspects of the environment, social functioning and economic dynamics becomes inevitable. It is about taking into account the sociocultural context of students and the social determinants of health and illness processes, as they impact in the people's adaptation or adequacy to care recommendations during the pandemic. As Garrido and Rodrigues (2020) observed, there is a layer of the population that has low income and is in unfavorable social conditions, and is therefore impacted in a particular way by the pandemic. Therefore, it is essential that recommendations, guidelines and prescriptions related to healthcare, including mental health, are developed based on indicators that reflect the Brazilian reality.

Another important point to think about is that, by not taking due care regarding the recommendations that were disseminated about mental health care, there was a risk that some guidelines would be unable to be followed by people who were in a vulnerable situation. In general, the difficulty of repeating in their routines what was considered appropriate according to the discourse of professionals, public figures and even health services, led some participants to go through negative experiences, as E5 reported: "We were left with a lot at home and we ended up seeing the world through social media, and we saw unreal livestreams, we kept comparing ourselves, frustrating ourselves, belittling ourselves."

The question of comparison also arises when looking at some measures taken by teachers during the school year. When sharing her experience in classes, E5 mentioned that some teachers chose to show a scoreboard, which included the names of the students and not just the registration numbers – which would guarantee some protection to the students' identity. E6 contributes to this issue by mentioning that: "I think, sometimes, I felt compared, [...] and, it's difficult to compare something so personal in your life with the other people's life, because I don't live the same reality as others, what others do is not always possible for me." The tendency to compare can be a worrying factor regarding students' mental health levels, as it impacts in their sense of capacity and performance in different areas of life.

The importance of promoting the exchange of experiences about the adaptation and difficulties in the context of the pandemic becomes evident at this point, when considering a participant's report, other participants also felt comfortable demonstrating that they identified with each other and that they had experienced similar difficulties. This can be observed below, in E1's speech:

[...] I felt exactly like that, charged, like, very charged. At the beginning of the pandemic, I felt like there were a lot of people "oh, enjoy this time that you're at home to do that you've always wanted to do or, like, to read books or to do an online course or to watch some livestream", then a lot of people started streaming live yoga, physical exercises [...], then you're at home doing nothing, so why aren't you practicing physical exercises too? Why aren't you practicing English? [...] There came a point that I was like, I can't take livestreams anymore, no more streaming, guys, please, I don't want to watch anything, I just want to stay here staring at the walls, doing nothing.

Considering the high number of contents observed in the excerpt above, it is observed that since the Covid-19 pandemic reflected the need for changes in the people's daily lives around the world, it became essential to help the population think about the importance of health care. In this way, several attempts were observed to help people maintain satisfactory levels of performance, while developing and maintaining healthy routines (SOUZA; AIRES; SCORSOLINI-COMIN, 2022), which may have contributed to the comparison of lifestyles and adaptation strategies in the new context. Furthermore, the provision of excess content ended up contributing to exhaustion, which began to characterize experiences mediated by technologies (MÁXIMO, 2021).

It is important to understand that such processes are reflections of the development of communication technologies that, inevitably, are establishing new configurations in relation to their users. As Souza, Vizotto and Mello (2021) observed, there is an exposure of the self in a sense of spectacle, and especially during the pandemic the media played a substitutive role in people's lives, taking the place of cultural activities, interactions and social relationships, as well as leisure. Constant access to such content can generate impacts that, although still unknown, will deserve the attention of mental health researchers in the future.

Another pertinent issue, regarding the changes caused by the pandemic in the routine and mental health of the participants, was the non-continuation of some habits

that, for various reasons, were health promoters, such as the practice of physical activities. With the closure of non-essential services and restrictions on the movement of people, some participants reported not maintaining certain behaviors, as can be seen from E1's report:

Before the pandemic I used to go to the gym [...], when the pandemic hit, everything closed down, I stopped going to the gym, and I remained inactive for a year, then, when it reopened [...], I simply became complacent [...] and I'm, like, until now, more than a year and a half later, still inactive.

In this excerpt, it is emphasized not only the difficulty of adapting a practice to the new pandemic scenario, but also of resuming such practice after a certain flexibility, with regard to the movement of people and the population's access to services, which went beyond the scope of health. In this regard, Souza, Aires and Scorsolini-Comin (2022) observe that, currently, there is an ideal of care, while the demands of daily life require greater discipline to carry out self-care activities, demonstrating that, since the beginning of the pandemic, people have had difficulties in maintaining a certain constancy, in keeping certain practices as habits, most likely due to the provisionality of measures adopted in a scenario of instability regarding the future.

Perceptions of remote learning and implications for academic activities

One of the consequences of the pandemic, already mentioned, refers to the changes in academic activities, which moved from the face-to-face to the online environment. This transition occurred abruptly, without teachers and Universities being prepared to offer quality remote education (MATIAS *et al.*, 2023), which impacted different aspects of academic life, involving assessments, for example, as reported E6: "I feel that this move to online has changed the whole way we are being evaluated, at least in my course, and has put a huge burden on the amount of work". Furthermore, the relationship with colleagues and teachers was also affected: "There is no longer any proper contact with colleagues, clarifying doubts with the teacher is being very difficult", as was the format of classes: "[...] and even the classes the teachers teach are different now, so the way they teach the content is making things more difficult for me."

It is essential to think about the suffering that can be experienced by students as a result of this feeling of overload. As observed in the study developed by Patias *et al.* (2021), students who continued their activities through remote learning experienced greater stress. As pointed out by Gundim *et al.* (2021), based on an integrative review on the mental health of university students during the pandemic, among the causes of stress and anxiety are difficulties in adapting to the new learning method, as well as concerns about delays in activities and failure academic routine. Remembering that, according to Calais *et al.* (2007), university life, in itself, is permeated by challenges, and would tend to put people in contact with some stressors, such as doubts, disappointments, new

responsibilities, distance from family, among others. So, the pandemic comes as an element that adds to the already complex context, which is the university, which is made clear in E3's statement: "I think the worst experiences were, are being, during the pandemic".

Topics such as procrastination, lack of organization and low productivity, mentioned by E3 in her report: "Now I feel like I can't control myself to organize things, and this lack of organization, this lack of productivity, this issue of procrastination, then it starts to become a snowball." In fact, these aspects were very present in people's daily lives during the quarantine period that started in 2020. It's just to do a quick Google search to find plenty of information on the topics. At the time this current work was being written, for example, the combination of the words "procrastination" and "pandemic" led to 291 thousand results. The importance given to this issue is justified when the consequences of the difficulty in carrying out mandatory tasks in mental health processes are observed, as was pointed out by Bischoff (2021) in his study, in which it was possible to conclude that higher levels of procrastination are related also to higher levels of psychological inflexibility, stress, anxiety and depression in university students.

Furthermore, thinking especially about remote learning, it is important to understand that, as already emphasized by Aguiar *et al.* (2021), students were required to develop their autonomy, at the same time as it was necessary to work with discipline, planning and organization. Added to this, they found themselves in a period of low socialization and integration with peers, and all of this may be related to the development or exacerbation of mental disorders.

Another aspect that deserves attention, based on the data produced regarding the implications of remote learning on the academic journey, refers to the feeling of not being adequately prepared, so that students could face the stages that were to come, such as classes practices or internships. This can be exemplified by E5's report: "I went to university last week for the first time. And this feeling of not being prepared, and next semester, I will have to assist someone, it gives a feeling of impotence". E5 was studying Dentistry, and considered the lack of in-person practical activities to be very harmful: "I think the university did as much as possible, but it was not enough to fill this hole that remained in our education".

The losses in university education due to the absence or limitations in carrying out practical activities were reported in different studies on remote learning during the pandemic, which identified students' anxieties and concerns about the future, due to not fulfilling the practical workload or carrying out practices in a very limited way (ARAÚJO *et al.*, 2021; SILVA *et al.*, 2021a). Especially in relation to students who were in their final year, they would delay completing the course, as well as lacking the possibility of developing technical skills and abilities to formulate clinical judgment, and establish appropriate conduct in response to people's health needs, compromising critical and political professional preparation (ANDRADE; CAVIGNAC, 2022).

However, there is no intention of stating that such experiences are exclusive reflections of changes in education as a result of the pandemic, because as observed by Andrade *et al.* (2022) in research carried out with 119 Psychology students, it was found an association between psychological distress and characteristic elements of the course, in a context that in-person learning was still possible, before Covid-19. Difficulties

in adapting to the course were quite frequent, being related, for example, to possible dissonances between theory and practice. Furthermore, the emotional demands during the final stages may also be associated with student suffering.

Analysis of the pandemic experience and future expectations

Considering the discussion generated so far, it is important to deepen the reflections, which analyze the experiences lived during the pandemic and the expectations regarding the future of the participants, considering the direction they would be following. One of the students had not yet experienced university in-person, having started the course during the pandemic. At one point, the participant mentioned that: “I was waiting to live this dream until now, you know? [...] I dreamed at night, that I was with my suitcase, walking around the university, it’s like, an obsession”. (E5).

However, this is not a perspective that the entire group shared, as the participants were at different stages of their undergraduate courses, living different experiences, so that some participants were less enthusiastic, such as E6: “To be honest, I don’t feel like going back to classes at all, I’m going to start without motivation, attend online classes all over again, and I hope it works out like this.”

We believe in the relevance of paying attention to the different stages through which the study participants found themselves, as this seemed to make a difference in the way their expectations about the future are being constructed. E1, for example, was finishing her graduation, about to face the challenges inherent to professional practice. Therefore, there are countless uncertainties: “I think maybe I’m feeling a little lost [...], because the semester won’t start for me, but at the same time in some things it will, because [...] I’m going to continue my internship [...], but it’s been weird.”

So far, the unpredictability of what students may encounter to continue their trajectories is evident. In part, this can be understood by the fact that until the research was developed, the end of the pandemic was not expected to happen. Therefore, as Souza, Aires and Scorsolini-Comin (2022) observed, there are still many questions about the real impacts of the pandemic, in the short, medium and long term, just as there are questions about what post-pandemic life will be like.

The analysis of university experiences before the pandemic revealed the presence of tiredness and insecurities, but also magic, stimulation, motivation and joy. At this time, it was beneficial to students’ mental health to be with friends, go to therapy and see people. The harmful aspects to mental health referred to exclusion, excessive work, disorganization, lack of money, lack of time, lack of support and comparison. Regarding the motivation to live university life, in general, it was high.

During the pandemic, however, new insights could be added. Regarding the experience of being a university student, some adjectives were listed: stagnant, disorganized, demotivating, frustrating, hectic, at the same time as it may have been calm and full of expectation. The positive factors for mental health underwent some changes compared to the previous moment, with emphasis on establishing a routine, family, pets,

watching films and series, doing therapy and having money. On the other hand, the factors harmful to mental health referred to insecurities, demands, conflicts, in addition to, again, the lack of money, lack of support, lack of time and comparison. Furthermore, during the pandemic participants felt little or no motivation.

Finally, regarding the post-pandemic expectations, which is still an unknown scenario, the group believes that academic life can be organized, motivating, sensational, pleasurable, with stability, support, human contact and adventure. It is expected that celebrations, physical health, hobbies, studies, nature, friends and therapy are present aspects, as they can be beneficial for mental health, while possibly harmful issues are also visualized, such as politics, social networks, misunderstanding, and again, lack of money, lack of support, lack of time and comparison. Furthermore, the motivation to live the university period increases again.

In the last conversation circle of the study, participants had the opportunity to share how they felt about the analysis of the pandemic experience and their expectations for the future, which is exemplified by E2's report: "I felt a slight discomfort, no discomfort as something very bad, but having to think about what it was like, how it is being. It's that mix of sensations, and also thinking about the future is a bit dubious."

It is clear, when observing the statement highlighted above, that, no matter what moment the student experiences, in any case the pandemic impacted their academic path. A study that speaks to this was carried out by Maia and Dias (2020), with Portuguese university students. When making a comparison between the pre-pandemic period between 2018 and 2019, and the pandemic period, in 2020, they observed that there was a significant increase in levels of stress, anxiety and depression during the pandemic.

Other study corroborates the notes made so far, bringing to light the greatest psychological suffering experienced by people. As already mentioned, the work of Araújo and collaborators (2021) allowed us to observe that the experiences of being a university student during the pandemic negatively impacted the mental health of students, who felt anxious, uncertain and powerless. As for future perspectives, students considered it important to reorganize their goals and look for ways to respond to professional concerns. In this sense, it is believed that it is essential to promote monitoring and support strategies for students in crisis situations, so that they can deal with anxiety, facing in a healthier way the obstacles they find along their paths.

Regarding this scenario of doubts, a study by Seco Ferreira *et al.* (2020) allowed us to establish the important role of uncertainty in people's mental health levels. The difficulty in dealing with such uncertainty during the pandemic was directly associated with psychological distress, including stress, anxiety and depression. Therefore, it is also assumed that more optimistic experiences can be protective of students' mental health, considering that this allows the construction of positive and, therefore, motivating expectations. This counterpart can be seen in E3's report, which differs from those previously presented: "Actually, I'm quite optimistic about the future, because it seems like I have the feeling that when I return everything will get better, I'll be able to concentrate more, get back to who I was."

However, it is noteworthy that reflections on this uncertain future were not limited to individual concerns. The participants' perspective also focused, at different moments in the research, on social issues, understanding that they are not isolated and independent from external factors that move the world.

E6's statement presents this more comprehensive perspective:

I try to think that everything will be fine, that I'll be able to make an effort, but thinking about the collective, there are so many questions nowadays, right? We know, politics, health, there are so much going on, conflicts. This gave me a certain despair, thinking about this things, thinking about what will happen to the world from now on

In short, when working with future perspectives regarding academic life, a predominance of insecurities and uncertainties was observed, considering the moment in which the research was carried out. Furthermore, it was noticeable that the pandemic had an impact on the experiences of being a university student, when comparing the period that preceded it and the moment that was characterized by the arrival of Covid-19. Previously, life on campus was more stimulating yet tiring, while life during remote learning was characterized as frustrating and more negative.

Final considerations

The pandemic that the world faced from the beginning of 2020 brought several changes to people's lives, challenging different institutions to adapt to the "new normal", that is, restrictions on movement and social interaction. With regard to universities, there was a need for classes and other activities to undergo transformations, so that access to education remained a guarantee, at the same time that all health care measures were taken, which resulted, among other things, in the adoption of remote education strategies, taking students to a new reality of online learning.

Developed in this context, the current study aimed to present and discuss the experiences of being a university student during the Covid-19 pandemic, especially reflecting the reality of a group of students who went through the change from in-person education to remote learning. From the conversation circles held online, it was possible to observe several interesting points. One aspect that gained prominence, initially, was the departure from activities that used to take place on the university campus, which participants considered important for promoting integration between different people, and for expanding understanding of what academic life is, promoting not only professional preparation, as well as social experiences.

Another issue associated with the pandemic context referred to the tendency for students to compare themselves with other people, based on access to social media, for example. When observing other realities, in a decontextualized way, they felt uncomfortable and frustrated, because they were not following the same routine or because they did not perform the same. At this point, it is worth to emphasize the change in habits that, until then, brought benefits to the participants' health, such as the practice of physical

activities. Thus, a demand was generated because they felt the need to do the same and produce as much as before or as much as other people. But, in addition, there was a demand for not feeling well, and the pandemic caused impacts on the levels of well-being and mental health of the general population.

As for remote teaching, it was observed that students felt overwhelmed, understanding that there was an increase in the number of tasks and work proposed by teachers, that is, an important change occurred in assessment processes during the pandemic. This was accompanied by situations that reflected low performance, difficulty in organization and procrastination, which also contributed to the worsening of psychological suffering, including causing students to encounter increased stress, anxiety and even a worsening of mood.

Regarding the experiences of being a student before, during and after the pandemic, considering their perspectives and motivations in general, students considered themselves more motivated to experience university before the pandemic, when more environmental factors were present in their daily lives to promote well-being, such as coexistence and integration with other people. During the pandemic, when they felt isolated and faced with the impossibility of continuing the activities that were part of university life, the feeling of frustration and demotivation seemed to predominate.

In general, it was possible to observe that during the meetings the processes of identification, differentiation, listening and support occurred in the face of reports, which demonstrates the importance of using collective strategies to welcome and monitor students throughout their academic career. Therefore, the importance of thinking about the creation of spaces for exchange between students as a mental health care strategy is emphasized, as it is observed that educational institutions should create and offer resources that prevent psychological suffering or its worsening, given that the health of academics must also be looked at carefully, being a fundamental factor, so that their trajectories within the university are as fruitful and positive as possible. And, in this sense, the need to launch discussions about the role of the university stands out, understanding that as pointed out by Osse and Costa (2011), entry into higher education does not necessarily mean stability, as this new stage can involve doubts, worries and anxiety. However, the pandemic seems to have exacerbated these difficulties, especially because although technologies can bring gains to professional training, they do not replace face-to-face activities, which are fundamental for students' interaction with teachers, their peers and participants of practical training activities (CAMPOS FILHO, 2022). In this sense, it is understood that remote education, important for the adoption of health measures to combat the pandemic, inevitably ended up promoting the loosening of the bonds that support the teaching-learning relationship and, thus, also highlighted its limitations (MÁXIMO, 2021). The recognition of such limitations of remote education is important in a scenario of concern about the commodification of teaching, to the detriment of human interactions, critical professional training and the political organization of the working class (ANDRADE; CAVAGNAC, 2022).

Regarding the limitations of the study, the main highlight is the impossibility of carrying out activities in person with students, as it is believed that this way the bonding and establishment of a support network between everyone would be more powerful.

Furthermore, depending on material resources such as computers and cell phones, as well as access to a reasonable internet connection, may have been an obstacle at certain times, when, for example, a participant or even the researcher was unable to listen or speak, due to instability in the network.

Finally, it is suggested that research be carried out that further investigates the impacts of the pandemic on the trajectories of university students, in addition to studies that, in some way, propose to accompany students on their return to the university campus. Thus, it would be possible to verify readaptation to academic life after the period of quarantine and distancing, observing possible difficulties, as well as proposing strategies that can contribute to minimizing damage and promoting well-being for the best development of these students' potential.

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