

**MENTAL HEALTH AND DIMENSIONS OF THE ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE OF  
UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AT THE FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF BAHIA, BRAZIL**

***SAÚDE MENTAL E DIMENSÕES DA VIVÊNCIA ACADÊMICA DE ESTUDANTES  
UNIVERSITÁRIOS DA UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DA BAHIA, BRASIL***

***SALUD MENTAL Y DIMENSIONES DE LA EXPERIENCIA ACADÉMICA DE  
ESTUDIANTES UNIVERSITARIOS DE LA UNIVERSIDAD FEDERAL DE BAHIA,  
BRASIL***



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**ABSTRACT:** The academic experience in Psychology, composed of five dimensions, refers to the set of experiences and socio-emotional aspects experienced by students during their career at the University. From this perspective, this quantitative, cross-sectional, exploratory analytical study aimed to carry out a survey and describe the dimensions of the academic experience of undergraduates on the campuses of the Federal University of Bahia in 2021. Data collection consisted of the application of the instruments: Questionnaire Socioeconomic-demographic and the Academic Experiences Questionnaire in its reduced version (QVA-r), with a 5-point Likert scale. As a result, 509 undergraduates participated in this study, 367 (71.2%) female and 142 (27.9%) male, with an average age of 24.06 years (SD=6.56). The results also show, after being subjected to quantitative analyses, that the Career dimension plays an important role for students (M=3.77; SD=0.73).

**KEYWORDS:** University students. University education. Mental health. Universities. Academic experience.

**RESUMO:** *A Vivência Acadêmica em Psicologia, composta por cinco dimensões, refere-se ao conjunto de experiências e aspectos socioemocionais vivenciados pelos estudantes durante a sua trajetória na Universidade. Nessa perspectiva, este estudo quantitativo, de corte transversal, do tipo analítico exploratório, objetivou realizar o levantamento e descrever as dimensões da Vivência Acadêmica de graduandos dos campi da Universidade Federal da Bahia em 2021. A coleta de dados consistiu na aplicação dos instrumentos: Questionário Socioeconômico-demográfico e o Questionário de Vivências Acadêmicas na sua versão reduzida (QVA-r), com escala Likert de 5 pontos. Como resultados, participaram deste estudo 509 graduandos, sendo 367 (71,2%) do gênero feminino e 142 (27,9%) do gênero masculino, com idade média de 24,06 anos (DP=6,56). Os resultados evidenciam ainda, após serem submetidos às análises quantitativas, que a dimensão Carreira exerce um papel importante para os estudantes (M=3,77; DP=0,73).*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Estudantes universitários. Ensino superior. Saúde mental. Universidades. Vivência acadêmica.*

**RESUMEN:** *La experiencia académica en Psicología, compuesta por cinco dimensiones, se refiere al conjunto de experiencias y aspectos socioemocionales que viven los estudiantes durante su carrera en la Universidad. Desde esta perspectiva, este estudio analítico exploratorio, cuantitativo, transversal tuvo como objetivo realizar una encuesta y describir las dimensiones de la experiencia académica de los estudiantes de pregrado en los campus de la Universidad Federal de Bahía en 2021. La recolección de datos consistió en la aplicación del instrumentos: Cuestionario Socioeconómico-demográfico y el Cuestionario de Experiencias Académicas en su versión reducida (QVA-r), con escala Likert de 5 puntos. Como resultado, participaron de este estudio 509 estudiantes universitarios, 367 (71,2%) mujeres y 142 (27,9%) hombres, con una edad promedio de 24,06 años (DE=6,56). Los resultados también muestran, después de haber sido sometidos a análisis cuantitativos, que la dimensión Carrera juega un papel importante para los estudiantes (M=3,77; DE=0,73).*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *Estudiantes universitarios. Enseñanza superior. Salud mental. Universidades. Experiencia académica.*

## Introduction

In recent years, the higher education landscape has undergone several significant transformations around the world, with changes in its structure, content, methodology and forms of access. Some of the main transformations are: expansion of access; entry of minority groups; greater diversification of courses and programs; integration of technology in teaching; active and collaborative learning; focus on employability and internationalization (Diniz; Goergen, 2019).

According to Soares, Poubé and Mello (2009), these transformations mean that universities need to make adjustments to meet new educational demands, and these educational institutions take on a role not only of being concerned with the acquisition and production of knowledge, but also, according to Gomes (2012), of committing to strategies for adapting to new situations and the entry and permanence of new epistemic subjects in this space. Therefore, as technology continues to evolve to meet the demands of society and the needs of students, it is likely that universities will continue to adapt and seek ways to reframe their role in contemporary times (Junior; Trivelli, 2022).

That said, for young individuals, considered by the Brazilian Ministry of Health (2021) to be those aged between 18 and 24, and who are the majority of the university student population in Brazil (Semesp, 2023), the transition between adolescence and adulthood has specific psychosocial and cultural characteristics, and the moment of entering higher education is considered to be a crucial situation for defining a career project and beginning university studies (Marinho-Araújo; Almeida, 2016).

Therefore, personal, family, social and cultural characteristics - which can vary according to the cultural and social context in which the individual is inserted - will be interconnected in this process, influencing not only the choice of course, but also the satisfactory or unsatisfactory process of the student's adaptation to the academic experience (Almeida; Pinho, 2008; Soares; Guisande; Almeida, 2007).

Therefore, entering university is a distinct moment in a student's life that can generate opportunities and new learning and psychosocial development experiences (Mazé; Verliac, 2013). On the other hand, these processes of transition and adaptation have been understood as a period that increases the prevalence of mental health problems, such as anxiety, stress and depression, which tend to cause damage to the psychosocial development and quality of life of these young people (Cardoso; Garcia; Schroeder, 2015). In this sense, it should be noted that life at university alters the habits, mental health and quality of life of these individuals

throughout their experiences at this institution, changes that occur with the entire academic community, teachers, staff and students, all of whom, subject to their different specific activities, are influenced by university life (Oliveira, 2017).

Therefore, the studies by Bardagi and Hutz (2009) are relevant in highlighting the dissatisfaction of many students in relation to their academic experience during graduation and the growing phenomenon of dropout. This student dissatisfaction may be a contributing factor to the emergence of mental health problems among university students (Andrade *et al.*, 2016).

In addition, according to Leão, Goto and Ianni (2021, p. 02, our translation), "studies show that the recent Covid-19 pandemic and social distancing have led to an increase in symptoms of psychological distress among university students, with anxiety being the most reported". According to Rodrigues (2022), during the recent health crisis, social isolation and remote teaching activities had a major impact on their lives, with university students' study routine being impaired, an increase in sedentary lifestyles, changes in sleep and eating habits.

Almeida *et al.* (2002) and Granado *et al.* (2005) refer to the set of situations or variables specific to the life context of university students, on which the individual's personal, academic, cognitive and social development depends, guaranteeing the student's experiences and success from their entry to the end of their university course. In using this term, the authors seek to extrapolate the traditional intrapsychic perspective and also include characteristics of university contexts, i.e. factors external to the individual (Andrade *et al.*, 2016).

In addition, Academic Experience includes experiences of academic activities, such as theoretical and practical classes, group work, research projects, internships and extracurricular activities, and encompasses social and emotional aspects, such as interactions with teachers, colleagues and other professionals in the field, and the formation of the student's professional identity (Almeida; Soares; Ferreira, 2001).

The way in which each student experiences this period in the university environment is unique, but various authors include: Almeida; Soares (2003); Granado; Santos; Almeida; Soares; Guisande (2005); Schleich (2006); Coulon (2017) and Rogers (2018) maintain that, in order for university students to integrate, they will need to face multiple and complex tasks and solve the challenges proposed by the Academic Experience in five main domains/dimensions, namely: career, personal, institutional, interpersonal and study (Almeida; Soares; Ferreira, 2002).

Academic Experiences also include personal, interpersonal, institutional and academic issues that influence the student's adaptation and length of stay at university, as well as the

perspectives associated with the institution and the social sphere (Almeida; Feira; Soares, 1999). According to Xavier, Nunes and Santos (2008), all Academic Experiences can generate pleasure or suffering, and this is related to the subject's ability to make sense of the experiences that happen to them.

When addressing the issue of Academic Experience, authors such as Ferreira, Almeida and Soares (2001) explain that the academic environment is established as a context that influences student development. Research has shown that an environment that provides students with academic well-being, characterized by a more trusting context, can be a trigger for student development in higher education, helping them to adapt and succeed academically (Soares; Mourão; Santos; Mello, 2015).

Barros (2002) argues that recognizing the relevance and promoting the quality of Academic Experience in Higher Education is a challenge that involves a shared responsibility, which encompasses both a new curricular philosophy for courses and the organization of universities, as well as the participation of students and their student organizations. So while, on the one hand, aspects relating to the student - their life story, expectations, skills and other characteristics and the quality of the student effort, represented by involvement in their own learning and development - play an important role in integration, on the other hand, the components of the institution, i.e. its community, structure and organizational elements, are also essential and may or may not facilitate this process (Granado, 2004).

In this way, it is understood that the Academic Experience and the process of adjusting to the university context is a complex and multidimensional process that involves various factors, both intrapersonal and contextual in nature (Almeida; Casanova, 2019). Consequently, there has been a growing concern to find and develop a social technology to deal with these issues and address the concerns linked to academic experiences (Goldstein, 2018).

With this in mind, and with the hope of contributing to furthering this debate, considering that the transformations related to entry and trajectory in Higher Education are changing more and more rapidly and need to be monitored to ensure the quality of the Academic Experience, this study aimed to survey and describe the dimensions of the Academic Experience of undergraduate university students at the campuses of the Federal University of Bahia, located in the city of Salvador - Bahia, in the year 2021.

## **Method**

### **Characterization of the study**

From a methodological point of view, this is a quantitative, cross-sectional, exploratory analytical study. Therefore, this study was carried out from 17 March 2021 to 31 December 2021, to characterize the population of undergraduate university students, from all courses, shifts and semesters, from the campuses of the Federal University of Bahia, located in Salvador, in terms of socioeconomic, demographic and teaching-learning process aspects, and to gather information and existing relationships between the underlying indicators of the dimensions of Academic Experience among this sample.

UFBA is a Brazilian Federal Higher Education Institution - HEI, of a public nature, linked to the Brazilian Ministry of Education, and currently, the HEI has campuses: the Federação campus, the Ondina campus, the Canela campus, in Salvador; the Anísio Teixeira campus, in Vitória da Conquista, the Camaçari campus, as well as dispersed units (PROPLAN, 2022).

Structured on the tripod of teaching, research and extension, the HEI is a member of the Federal Education System and adheres to the Program to Support Restructuring and Expansion Plans for Federal Universities. In addition, it currently offers 108 undergraduate courses in the face-to-face modality, covering various areas of knowledge geared to the reality of the country and, in particular, the city of Salvador and its region of influence (PROPLAN, 2022).

The respective areas of the undergraduate courses are: Area I - Physical Sciences, Mathematics and Technologies; Area II - Biological and Health Sciences; Area III - Philosophy and Human Sciences; Area IV - Letters; Area V - Arts; Area VI - Interdisciplinary Bachelor's Degree and Area VII - Higher Degree in Technology (PROPLAN, 2022).

Based on the 2019-2020 period, the population of undergraduate students with active and regular enrollment, according to the Dean's Offices for Undergraduate Education and Planning and Budget, as well as the HEI's Selection and Orientation Coordination, was 40,727 students. Therefore, it should be noted that the sample is characterized by convenience since the individuals were easily accessible and available (Marôco; Bispo, 2003; Hill; Hill, 2002). Therefore, the results could not be extrapolated with confidence to the population as the probability of any one element belonging to the sample was not equal to the probability of the other elements (Marôco, 2007).

## **Inclusion criteria**

This study consisted of the following criteria: undergraduate university students, aged 18 or over, male and female, from all semesters, from the morning, afternoon, evening and full-time shifts, with active and regular enrollment considering the 2019-2020 period, in the 108 face-to-face courses offered by this higher education institution.

## **Exclusion criteria**

In this study, the exclusion criteria were undergraduate students located on the Vitória da Conquista and Camaçari campuses, and university students under the age of 18, due to the ethical issues involved in research with minors.

## **Instruments used**

The research process, applied remotely due to the new SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus pandemic, consisted of applying the respective validated and self-administered questionnaires in a virtual environment, following the guidelines contained in the Checklist for Reporting Results of Internet E-Surveys - CHERRIES, SiacWeb and Google Forms: Questionnaire on Socioeconomic-Demographic Data and Teaching-Learning Conditions (Cerchiari, 2004; Dalbosco, 2018) and the Questionnaire on Academic Experience in its reduced version - QVA-r (Almeida; Soares; Ferreira, 2002).

SiacWeb is a service aimed at system managers and undergraduate students with active and regular enrollment at the Federal University of Bahia. This service responds to requests for enrollment, transcripts, course curriculum, performance coefficient, proof of enrollment and course syllabi. With a login and password, students register online each semester and have access to other system resources (STI, 2021).

At first, the university student had to go to the Higher Education Institution's website and then, by logging in with their Individual Taxpayer Registration (CPF) number and the password provided by the University in the academic portal section of the SiacWeb platform, they found a notice inviting them to take part in the research and asking them to accept the Informed Consent Form, which - after being read in full and confirming consent - the participant received a copy of via email.

The Socioeconomic-Demographic and Teaching-Learning Conditions Questionnaire (QSD) is an instrument for recording and characterizing the population, as well as assessing the conditions of the teaching-learning process. This instrument aims to obtain information on personal and professional issues, out-of-class activities, institutional, social, economic and demographic aspects of the students, such as: gender, age group, marital status, origin, type of home, family income, commuting time and paid work, and some characteristics of the teaching-learning process: year of entry to university, course, term, grade and choice of course (Cerchiari, 2004).

The Questionnaire of Academic Experiences in its reduced version (QVA-r) is a self-reporting instrument filled in by the participants without the help of the researcher and was developed to assess the students' experiences from the moment they entered university (Araújo *et al.*, 2013).

The QVA-r consists of a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from: 1. nothing to do with me, totally disagree, never happens; 2. little to do with me, very much disagree, rarely happens; 3. sometimes agree with me and sometimes not, sometimes happens, sometimes not; 4. a lot to do with me, very much agree, often happens; 5. everything to do with me, totally agree, always happens. In view of this, the score obtained on the scale can vary between 55 and 275 points and the averages range from 1.00 (one) to 5.00 (five), with the lowest value being associated with the least integration and the highest value with the greatest integration into the Academic Experience (Almeida; Soares; Ferreira, 2002).

In a validation study carried out in Brazil, the psychometric qualities of the reduced version of the QVA were satisfactory. The values for internal consistency were adequate, with Cronbach's alphas for the dimensions ranging from 0.71 to 0.91 and for the overall scale 0.88. Furthermore, the instrument adapted in Brazil consisted of 55 items (Granado *et al.*, 2005). In its reduced version, the Academic Experience Questionnaire also has five dimensions relating to areas of academic adaptation: Personal (14 items), Interpersonal (12 items), Career (12 items), Study (9 items) and Institutional (8 items) (Almeida *et al.*, 1999; Cunha; Carrilho, 2005; Granado *et al.*, 2005; Guerreiro-Casanova; Polydoro, 2010; Porto; Soares, 2017). Table 1 below describes the respective dimensions.



**Chart 1** - Description of the dimensions of the reduced version of the Academic Experience Questionnaire (QVA-r)

<b>Personal Dimension</b>
It refers to physical and psychological well-being; it addresses aspects such as emotional balance, affective stability, optimism, decision-making and self-confidence.
<b>Interpersonal Dimension</b>
It refers to relationships with colleagues and relationship skills in more intimate situations; it includes establishing friendships, seeking help.
<b>Career Dimension</b>
It refers to feelings related to the course attended and career prospects; it includes satisfaction with the course and perception of competences for the course.
<b>Study Dimension</b>
It refers to study habits and time management; it includes study routines, time planning, the use of learning resources, test preparation.
<b>Institutional Dimension</b>
It 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 infrastructures.

Source: ALMEIDA, L. S.; SOARES, A. P. C.; FERREIRA, J. A. Questionário de vivências acadêmicas (QVA-r): Avaliação do ajustamento dos estudantes universitários. *Avaliação Psicológica*, Coimbra, v. 1, n. 2, p. 81-93, 2002. Devised by the author (2023).

## Data analysis

Initially, after the end of the collection period, the data was typed, organized and coded using the Microsoft Excel® 2019 program, which also checked for duplicate responses and/or excluded responses that did not meet the survey's inclusion criteria. After this, the data was compiled in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software, version 20.0, for the Windows operating system and the analyses were carried out in the same program.

Descriptive statistical analysis was then carried out on the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of undergraduate students and the university's infrastructure, interpersonal relations and teaching-learning process. In addition, through exploratory analysis, central tendency measures (mean, median and mode) and dispersion measures (standard deviation) were estimated for the quantitative variables, and absolute and relative frequencies were calculated for the qualitative variables.

This study of undergraduates took as reference values the total mean of the questionnaire, the mean of the dimensions, the median and the standard deviation presented to identify the level of academic experience of the undergraduates. It should be remembered that the averages range from 1.00 (one) to 5.00 (five), with the lowest value being associated with the least integration and the highest value with the greatest integration into Academic Experience. The necessary assumptions were tested and met, such as multicollinearity,

uniqueness, homogeneity of variances, data normality and linearity (Tabachnick; Fidell, 2001; Haukoos; Lewis, 2005).

### **Ethical aspects**

This research was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee of the Institute of Psychology of the Federal University of Bahia (CEP-IPS-UFBA), and was approved under the registration number of the Certificate of Submission for Ethical Appraisal (CAEE): 42414621.5.0000.5686 and opinion number: 4.553.711. All participants filled in the Informed Consent Form and received a copy of it via e-mail. Data collection for this study only began after the CEP-IPS-UFBA had given its assent.

### **Results**

The socio-economic and demographic profile of the undergraduate students investigated in this study shows a predominance of female students (72.1%), with 42.0% self-declaring themselves as brown, and an average age of 24.06 years (minimum of 18 and maximum of 62 years; SD = 6.566). It should be noted that 96.1% of the participants indicated that they were not disabled and/or had a special condition. As for marital status, 469 participants (92.1%) said they were single and 40 (7.9%) were married. In addition, 87.6% said they lived with their family, 7.7% lived alone and 4.7% lived with friends. In addition, 65.0% indicated that they lived in the city of Salvador, in Bahia, and 35.0% in the Metropolitan Region of Salvador.

As a result, 65.6% said they did not work concurrently with their studies, while 57.2% reported a total monthly income of less than 1 minimum wage. Table 1 below shows the respective frequencies of the socio-economic and demographic aspects of undergraduate university students acquired through the Socio-economic-Demographic Data and Teaching-Learning Conditions Questionnaire.

**Table 1** – Descriptive analysis of the characterization of socioeconomic and demographic aspects of undergraduate students at the campuses of the Federal University of Bahia located in the city of Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, in 2021

VARIABLE	N (509)	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Feminine	367	72.1
Masculine	142	27.9
<b>Age group</b>		

Youth (18 to 24 years)	346	68.0
Adult (25 to 59 years)	161	31.6
Senior (> 60 years)	02	0.4
<b>Cor/Raça *</b>		
Brown	214	42.0
Black	148	29.1
White	138	27.1
Indigenous	03	0.6
Yellow	06	1.2
<b>Current marital status</b>		
Single	469	92.1
Married	40	7.9
<b>Current Location</b>		
Salvador	331	65.0
Metropolitan Region of Salvador	178	35.0
<b>Disabled Person/Special Condition</b>		
Yes	20	3.9
No	489	96.1
<b>In paid employment</b>		
Yes	175	34.4
No	334	65.6
<b>Total Monthly Income***</b>		
Less than 1 minimum wage	291	57.2
From 1 to 3 minimum wages	130	25.5
From 3 to 5 Minimum Wages	47	9.2
Above 5 Minimum Wages	41	8.1
<b>Who you live with</b>		
With family	446	87.6
Alone	39	7.7
With friends	24	4.7

Notes: \*The classification system of color/race structured into five categories (white, black, brown, yellow and indigenous) used by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) in its household surveys for the racial identification of people, which is replicated in the Union's administrative records. \*\* The value of the minimum wage for 2021 was taken as R\$1,100, made official by Provisional Measure (MP) No. 1,091/2021 and signed by the Presidency of the Republic. Source: Prepared by the author of the study based on applied research (2023).

Table 2 shows that, in terms of the university's infrastructure, interpersonal relations and the teaching-learning process, it can be seen that, among the courses, students belonging to the Biological and Health Sciences areas stood out with a significant participation of 42.0% in this survey. In addition, 22.4% of the students reported having joined the university in 2020, 30.6% are in their first semester and 36.7% indicated that the shift of their course corresponds to the morning.

In terms of access to university, 97.8% took part in the National High School Exam (Enem), through the Unified Selection System (Sisu), with 52.7% opting for broad competition as a category of entry to higher education, 25.0% for racial quotas for self-declared black, brown, quilombola or indigenous people and 22.4% for social quotas aimed at people with a

gross per capita family income of 1.5 minimum wages or less and who have fully attended high school in public schools. In addition, 68.4% declared that they were the first members of their family to attend university.

Table 2 also shows that 47.5% of undergraduate students perceive their experience at UFBA as good. However, the vast majority (95.1%) say that the HEI is an environment that aggravates psychological pressure and 56.6% do not consider the higher education institution to be a welcoming environment.

In addition to interpersonal factors (25.0%), undergraduate students also pointed to internal issues relating to academic life that hinder a healthy training process and have an impact on academic performance, such as reconciling a double shift (24.2%), the schedule of assessment activities (22.8%) and the difficulty of adapting to the HEI (21.0%).

In addition, more than half of the students (68.0%) say that the university lacks a support network and student assistance for students facing some kind of emotional and/or psychological difficulty.

As can be seen in Table 2, most undergraduates (94.5%) believe that the assessment schedule can cause generalized manifestations of malaise and bodily discomfort, such as: nausea, headache, tremors, vertigo, arrhythmia and cold sweats.

**Table 2** - Descriptive analysis of infrastructure conditions, interpersonal relationships and teaching-learning conditions of undergraduate university students at the campuses of the Federal University of Bahia located in the city of Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, in 2021

VARIABLE	N (509)	%
<b>Course</b>		
Area I - Physical Sciences, Mathematics and Technologies	79	15.5
Area II - Biological and Health Sciences	214	42.0
Area III - Philosophy and Human Sciences	124	24.4
Area IV - Letters	18	3.5
Area V - Arts	13	2.6
Area VI - Interdisciplinary Bachelor's Degree	60	11.8
Area VII - Higher Degree in Technology	01	0.2
<b>Year of entry</b>		
Before 2015	27	5.3
2015	19	3.7
2016	32	6.3
2017	54	10.6
2018	75	14.7
2019	95	18.7
2020	114	22.4
2021	93	18.3
<b>Current semester</b>		
1º semester	156	30.6

2° semester	64	12.6
3° semester	72	14.1
4° semester	43	8.4
5° semester	48	9.4
6° semester	28	5.5
7° semester	36	7.1
8° semester	21	4.1
9° semester	17	3.3
10° semester	24	4.7
<b>Shift</b>		
Morning	187	36.7
Afternoon	63	12.4
Night	78	15.3
Integral	181	35.6
<b>University as the first choice</b>		
Yes	444	87.2
No	65	12.8
<b>Course as first choice</b>		
Yes	299	58.7
No	210	41.3
<b>First time in higher education</b>		
Yes	368	72.3
No	141	27.7
<b>Current condition</b>		
Study only	351	69.0
Studies and works	158	31.0
<b>Has a family member attended higher education?</b>		
Yes	161	31.6
No	348	68.4
<b>Commuting time from home to university</b>		
Less than 15 minutes	76	14.9
15-30 minutes	101	19.8
31-45 minutes	100	19.6
46-60 minutes	121	23.8
More than 60 minutes	111	21.8
<b>You chose the course because</b>		
Being the desired one	389	76.4
Lack of alternative	50	9.8
Influence from friends, family and/or acquaintances	32	6.3
Remuneration and prestige	38	7.5
<b>Access to the University</b>		
ENEM - SISU	498	97.8
External transfer	08	1.6
Special Student	03	0.6
<b>University admission category</b>		
Racial quotas	127	25.0
Social Quotas	114	22.4
Broad Competition	268	52.7
<b>Perception of the university experience</b>		
Great	76	14.9
Good	242	47.5
Regular	154	30.3
Bad	28	5.5

Awful	09	1.8
<b>Difficulties faced at university</b>		
Too many course subjects	69	13.6
Schedule of Evaluation Activities	116	22.8
Reconciling double shifts	123	24.2
Methodology and Teacher Relations	94	18.5
Difficulty adapting to the institution	107	21.0
<b>Predictors of suffering at university</b>		
Evaluation Activities	122	24.0
Course Conclusion Work	44	8.6
Daily commute between home and university	38	7.5
Double shift	98	19.3
Interpersonal demands	127	25.0
Physical Structure of the University	17	3.3
Administrative bureaucracy	21	4.1
Seminar Assessment Activity	42	8.3
<b>University is a pressurizing environment</b>		
Yes	484	95.1
No	25	4.9
<b>Personal issues can interfere with performance</b>		
Yes	509	100.0
No	0,0	0.0
<b>University support in the face of adversity</b>		
Yes	163	32.0
No	346	68.0
<b>Malaise and Evaluation Schedule</b>		
Yes	481	94.5
No	28	5.5
<b>Finds the university a welcoming environment</b>		
Yes	221	43.4
No	288	56.6

Source: Prepared by the author of the study based on applied research (2023).

Regarding the QVA-r, the data was analyzed in its dimensions (Personal, Interpersonal, Career, Institutional and Study). The number of questions in each dimension, as well as their means, medians, modes and standard deviation, are described in Table 3. Through the quantitative analysis, considering the mean and standard deviation of the scores for the five dimensions of the QVA-r, Table 3 shows that all the dimensions had scores higher than the mean score, i.e. mean values above 3.00 (three). It should be remembered that the averages range from 1.00 (one) to 5.00 (five), with the lowest value being associated with the least integration and the highest value with the greatest integration into the Academic Experience.

However, an analysis of the dimensions of the QVA-r with the highest and lowest scores shows that the dimension with the highest average score was the Career dimension ( $M = 3.77$ ;  $SD = 0.733$ ), which refers to feelings related to the course attended and career prospects; it also includes satisfaction with the course and the perception of competences for the course.

Followed by the Institutional dimension ( $M = 3.50$ ;  $SD = 0.484$ ), which refers to appreciation of the HEI attended; it includes feelings related to the institution, the desire to stay or change institutions, knowledge and appreciation of the infrastructure. In this sense, the results of the analysis of the data collected show that both dimensions (Career and Institutional) are very present in the academic experiences of undergraduate students.

However, the Interpersonal dimension, which concerns relationships with classmates; relationship skills in more intimate situations; establishing friendships and seeking help, showed the lowest index ( $M = 3.09$ ;  $SD = 0.637$ ).

After performing descriptive statistics on the subjects' scores, as shown in Table 3, it was found that the participants rated their academic experience slightly above average, with the average total score being ( $M = 3.40$ ;  $SD = 0.250$ ).

**Table 3** - Descriptive statistical analysis of the average and standard deviation of the 5 (five) dimensions of the reduced version of the Academic Experience Questionnaire (QVA-r)

QVA-r DIMENSIONS						
	Personal	Interpersonal	Career	Study	Institutional	Total
Total Items	14	12	12	09	08	55
Mean	3.35	3.09	3.77	3.33	3.50	3.40
Median	3.50	3.17	3.92	3.44	3.63	3.53
Mode	4.00	3.00	4.00	3.00	4.00	4.00
Standard Deviation	0.763	0.637	0.733	0.702	0.484	0.250

Source: Prepared by the author of the study based on applied research (2023).

## Discussion

Entering university marks a crucial period in the lives of individuals, a period characterized by various challenges, such as productivism, competitiveness, the difficulty of reconciling the double shift and the overload of activities, which transcend the personal, interpersonal, family and institutional spheres (Leão; Ianni; Goto, 2019).

In this study, 25.0% of undergraduate students said that interpersonal demands hindered a healthy education process and 100.0% said that personal issues had an impact on academic performance. In addition, 21.0% said they had some difficulty adapting to the context of the higher education institution.

Therefore, these results corroborate the complexity of these challenges, highlighting the importance of careful analysis by academic authorities and institutional services to ensure an

effective welcome and support for university students, in line with the observations of Almeida and Cruz (2010).

Therefore, the Academic Experience, which begins when students enter university, is a multifaceted period of adaptation, requiring students to transition to a new educational model based on autonomy in the construction of knowledge and professional formation, as discussed by Coulon (2017) and Soares *et al.* (2015). This autonomy, although essential, is intrinsically linked to students' experiences, which, according to Almeida and Cruz (2010) and Magalhães (2013), are influenced by the teaching method.

Therefore, the results of this study indicate that the positive perception of the academic experience, shown by 47.5% of the participants, reflects a significant level of integration into the HEI context. This suggests a solid interest and motivation in academic choices, in line with the observations of Fiorotti *et al.* (2010) and Lima *et al.* (2006) on the importance of these aspects in the transition from secondary to higher education.

By exploring the predominant age group of 18 to 24 years among undergraduate university students, the research reveals findings that are in line with previous studies (Semesp, 2023; Andifes, 2019; Mognon; Santos, 2013) and points to the influence of this age group on the Personal and Academic dimensions, as indicated by Porta-Nova (2009).

However, the results found in this study defy some expectations, revealing lower means in the Personal ( $M=3.35$ ,  $SD=0.763$ ) and Study ( $M=3.33$ ,  $SD=0.702$ ) dimensions for this age group, suggesting important nuances in the academic experience.

Consequently, the highest means were found for the Career dimension ( $M=3.77$ ,  $SD=0.733$ ) and the Institutional dimension ( $M=3.50$ ,  $SD=0.484$ ). These results are corroborated by those of Almeida and Cruz (2010), who found greater effectiveness for the Career dimension in the corresponding age group of 18 to 25 years. In the studies by Schleich, Polydoro and Santos (2006), and Santos and Suehiro (2007), the Career dimension also scored the highest. Furthermore, in this study, 76.4% of university students indicated that they had chosen the course because it matched their vocational desires and motivations.

However, it should be noted that the mean score and high index in the Career dimension found in this study may not mean satisfaction with the choice based on realistic perceptions, but rather a positive expectation of what is to come, but which has not yet been actually experienced (Dalbosco, 2018; Polydoro, 2000). It is therefore understandable that satisfaction with the choice of course declines over time, as the limitations of the course and the profession become apparent and frustrations can arise (Veras, 2018).



Furthermore, the discussion on the Interpersonal dimension ( $M=3.09$ ;  $SD=0.637$ ) takes on special relevance given the recent context of the Covid-19 pandemic. The challenges associated with emergency remote teaching, isolation and social distancing and changes in the academic routine have had a negative impact on interpersonal relationships, reflected in the lower averages obtained (Carvalho *et al.*, 2021; Dantas; Cassorla, 2020).

Such abrupt changes in routine have resulted in mental health problems, including stress, anxiety, depressive symptoms, insomnia, denial, anger and fear (Lai *et al.*, 2019; Teixeira *et al.*, 2020). This dynamic is in line with studies highlighting the adverse psychological effects of the pandemic and the emergency remote teaching model on university students (Crepaldi *et al.*, 2020; Mata *et al.*, 2020).

The analysis of the lack of face-to-face contact and its implications for dedication to studies highlights the complexity of the changes brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic (Palú *et al.*, 2020). According to the survey "Resposta Educacional à Pandemia de Covid-19 no Brasil" (Educational Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic in Brazil), carried out by the Anísio Teixeira National Institute of Educational Studies and Research, in 2020, 82.6% of students believe that the lack of face-to-face contact with friends affects their studies and learning. In addition, university students' dedication to studying has halved since the transition to remote learning due to the new SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus pandemic.

In this sense, based on the results of the QVA-r, and according to Graner and Ramos-Cerqueira (2019), university students experience biological, psychological and social changes and encounter stressful aspects during their academic life. Wendlandt and Rochlen (2008) state that academic life is a difficult period for most university students, generating a complex combination of feelings.

In addition, Cerchiari *et al.* (2005) also highlight the concern that should be had with the adaptive process of students in university life, since problems and difficulties in this process favor the presentation of common mental disorders during the academic period.

Therefore, considering the challenges faced by students, the implications of these results point to the urgency of institutional initiatives aimed at welcoming and promoting an academic environment that favors healthy and collective experiences. As such, this study reinforces the importance of an integrated approach, covering not only academic aspects, but also the emotional and social support needed to face the challenges inherent in university life.

## **Final considerations**

Based on the above discussions, the purpose of this work was to survey and describe the dimensions of the Academic Experience of undergraduate students at the campuses of the Federal University of Bahia, located in the city of Salvador - Bahia, in 2021, to provide scientific and social feedback through the contribution and impact of this work on the understanding of the process of academic experiences and the subsequent creation of adaptation and reception strategies in the university context.

In addition, the results as a whole led to the knowledge that the participants in the sample have a positive perception of the academic experience, perceiving themselves as integrated into the context of Higher Education and showing motivation for their choice.

Although this study obtained a sample within the established parameters, it has significant limitations due to the nature of the convenience sampling used. Other limiting factors include the specific period of the higher education institution's semester during the Emergency Remote Teaching that occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic, the exclusion of campuses in different municipalities in the state of Bahia and the necessary conditions, such as access to computers, the internet and software incompatibilities.

Despite these limitations, the study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the process of adaptation and academic experience of students in Higher Education. It is recommended that further studies be carried out to expand the research, exploring different databases and conducting additional empirical studies. Consolidating the relationships between the dimensions of Academic Experience in university students at federal higher education institutions requires further research and careful theoretical and methodological groundwork, given the interdisciplinary nature of the subject.

Finally, it is suggested that the debate with the student body be broadened in official institutions, university associations and among government bodies. Promoting dialogue aims to foster a more inclusive and collectively built university environment, with less hierarchical and more fluid relationships. It is important to focus on conduct and structural changes so that the Higher Education Institution, in collaboration with the students, adapts to the rules in a harmonious way, resulting in benefits for both parties.

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### ***CRediT Author Statement***

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**Availability of data and material:** The data and materials used in the work are available for online access through the Open Science Framework (OSF Home) repository, at the following link: [https://osf.io/qudvj/?view\\_only=44e3b3bf2493422495a16bd6bee5ef87](https://osf.io/qudvj/?view_only=44e3b3bf2493422495a16bd6bee5ef87).

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