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## Internationalization of Higher Education: Obstacles of Undergraduates from a Brazilian Community University to the Realization of International Academic Mobility

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This article seeks to identify obstacles for the realization of Educational Exchange by academics in the Area of Knowledge of Social Sciences, considering, for analysis purposes, research conducted in a Brazilian community university, bringing the results obtained to studies conducted by other researchers. Methodologically, the exploratory-descriptive research had, as a technique for data collection, the application of an online questionnaire, with questions distributed in four sections thus constituted a) profile of the students; b) knowledge on the subject addressed; c) interest in achieving international academic mobility (MAI) and d) factors that would restrict the performance of MAI, totaling 180 respondents. **Results:** After compilation, in the analysis of the data, it was observed that among the restrictive factors the lack of financial resources (or associated factors) predominates, in addition to the mention of the language barrier. The lack of disclosure or lack of knowledge of MAI programs were also pointed out as obstacles. In this sense, the results, about restrictive factors, are close to other studies already conducted. **Conclusion:** In the considerations, in a reflexive tone, a question about the effectiveness of communication strategies between institutions and academics and about virtual academic mobility programs. Furthermore, it is considered that among the restrictive factors there are the existence of emotional factors, such as fear of the unknown.

### KEYWORDS

Educational exchange. Student exchange. Obstacles. Higher education. Social Sciences.

## Internacionalização do Ensino Superior: restrições de graduandos de uma Universidade Comunitária Brasileira à realização de Mobilidade Acadêmica Internacional

### RESUMO

**Objetivo:** Este artigo busca identificar fatores restritivos à realização de Mobilidade Acadêmica Internacional por acadêmicos da Área de Conhecimento de Ciências Sociais, considerando, para fins de análise, pesquisa realizada em uma universidade comunitária brasileira, aproximando os resultados obtidos a estudos realizados por outros pesquisadores. **Metodologia:** A pesquisa de caráter exploratório-descritivo teve, como técnica para coleta de dados, a aplicação de questionário *online*, com perguntas distribuídas em quatro seções assim constituídas a) perfil dos acadêmicos; b) conhecimento sobre o assunto abordado; c) interesse em realizar a mobilidade acadêmica internacional (MAI) e d) fatores que restringiriam a realização de MAI, totalizando 180 respondentes. **Resultados:** Após compilação, na análise dos dados, observou-se que entre os fatores restritivos predomina a falta de recursos financeiros (ou fatores associados), além da menção à barreira linguística. A falta de divulgação ou o desconhecimento de programas de MAI também foram apontados como restritivos. Nesse sentido, os resultados, no que tange a fatores restritivos, aproxima-se ao de outras pesquisas já realizadas. **Conclusão:** Nas considerações, em tom reflexivo, questiona-se sobre a eficácia de estratégias de comunicação entre as instituições e acadêmicos e sobre programas de mobilidade acadêmica virtual. Ainda, considera-se que entre os fatores restritivos há a existência de fatores emocionais, como o medo do desconhecido.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Internacionalização de IES. Mobilidade acadêmica internacional. Fatores restritivos. Educação superior. Ciências Sociais.

## Internacionalización de la Educación Superior: restricciones de los estudiantes de pregrado de una Universidad Comunitaria Brasileña a la realización de la Movilidad Académica Internacional

### RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** Ese artículo busca identificar factores restrictivos a la realización de Movilidad Académica Internacional por académicos del Área de Conocimiento de Ciencias Sociales, considerando, para efectos de análisis, pesquisa realizada en una universidad comunitaria brasileña, con enfoques de los obtenidos a estudios realizados por otros pesquisadores. **Metodología:** La pesquisa de carácter exploratorio-descritivo ha tenido como técnica para recogida de datos, la aplicación de cuestionario *online*, con preguntas distribuídas en cuatro secciones constituídas por a) perfil de los académicos; b) conocimiento sobre los temas tratados; c) interés en realización de movilidad académica internacional (MAI) y d) factores restrictivos a la realización de MAI, totalizando 180 encuestados. **Resultados:** Después de compilación, en los análisis de datos, se observó que entre los factores restrictivos predomina la falta de recursos financieros (o factores asociados), además de la mención de la barrera del idioma. La falta de divulgación o el desconocimiento de los programas de MAI también fueron susodicho como restrictivos. En ese sentido, los resultados, con respecto a los factores restrictivos, se acerca de otros estudios ya realizados. **Conclusión:** En las consideraciones, en tono reflexivo, se cuestiona sobre la efectividad de las estrategias de comunicación entre instituciones y académicos y sobre los programas de movilidad académica virtual. Además, se considera que entre los factores restrictivos se encuentran la existencia de factores emocionales, como el miedo a lo desconocido.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Educación intercultural. Intercambio de estudiantes. Barrera. Enseñanza superior. Ciencias Sociales.

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## Introduction

The desire to know is part of human nature itself and, in this sense, displacements (understood here not only as physical, but also psychic) can be considered as movements for learning.

Institutions of higher education, in this sense, promote spaces for learning and, for this purpose, considering their own principles, guidelines and foundations, also seek, in inter-institutional partnerships, openness so that academics can improve their studies and experience new cultures, considering the internationalization of education as fundamental.

Thus, cooperation agreements between institutions and an increase in demand for international mobility programs among academics, such as the one registered in 2019, when the Brazilian international education market grew 5.86% (PESQUISA SELO BELTA, 2020), may reflect this internationalization. There were 386,000 Brazilians traveling for exchange, in search of professional specialization, frequencies in undergraduate courses and language improvement (PESQUISA SELO BELTA, 2020). However, in 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic brought reductions in these movements.

However, even with this reduction, not foreseen, undeniable, the international academic mobility deserves special attention for its relevance in the lives of those who make movements/displacements of this nature; - the international cooperation agreements of higher education institutions provide, among the learning, expansion of cultural universe, knowledge.

Thus, the search for the internationalization of Education has promoted, among Higher Education Institutions (HEI), the development of strategies and partnerships to expand their borders, providing their students to participate in international academic mobility programs (IAMP) during their higher education.

However, despite the increase in the number of international collaboration agreements signed and the growing search for programs of this nature, even before the pandemic, there was a small number of students who took advantage of the opportunities offered in International Academic Mobility Programs at their home institutions.

This article aims to identify restrictive factors to the achievement of International Academic Mobility by the academics of the Knowledge Area of Social Sciences, considering, for purposes of analysis, a survey conducted at a Brazilian community college, approximating the results obtained to studies previously conducted by other researchers.

## Internationalization of Education and International Academic Mobility

### *Historical Background of Travels of Knowledge*

Throughout the history of Tourism, it is recorded the movement of man, who goes out in search of something, and this search can contemplate different travel objectives. Human beings travel for religious reasons, for health, to learn, to have fun. In the core of any displacement, regardless of the motivations that can be said or registered, there is the human desire to seek, to meet the unknown, the new.

When considering movements/displacements whose main objective was knowledge, one must consider that they predate Modern Tourism. In this context, Barretto (2000) comments that, in the sixteenth century, there was a period called by some historiographers as 'baroque', a period in which trips to other countries were outstanding made by young people of the noble class with their private tutor. Referring to the same period, Tosqui (2007) describes these trips as follows:

The young sons of the aristocrats left the British Isles and traveled to the European continent to gain knowledge about culture, arts, politics, and rules of social behavior [...]. There were two main circuits: the *Petit Tour*, which corresponded to Paris and southwestern France, and the *Grand Tour*, which covered more regions of France, and then expanded to Rome, Florence, Amsterdam, Madrid, and other political and cultural centers of Europe (TOSQUI, 2007, p. 36).

The essence of travel was the search for knowledge, new experiences and cultures based on the intention that young people return from abroad with international skills to perform professional and social functions with greater autonomy.

Similarly, around the 17th century, trips with an educational purpose emerged. As Lickorish and Jenkins (2000) comment:

The gradual increase in wealth, the extension of the merchant and professional classes, the effects of the Reformation, and the secularization of education stimulated interest in other countries and the acceptance of travel itself as an educational element. (LICKORISH; JENKINS, 2000, p. 21).

In this logic, these trips, which were related to the first teaching perspectives, aimed at the expansion of knowledge and experiences in other countries, even today constitute social practices, and are currently recognized as Exchange Tourism and Academic Tourism.

### *Exchange and Academic Tourism*

Exchange Tourism can be understood as "[...] the realization of a trip abroad with the purpose of knowing the customs, traditions, technologies, and language of a foreign country [...]" (DONÉ; GASTAL, 2012, p. 3). From this perspective, the Exchange Tourism typology is related to intercultural experiences and coexistence, in which the focus is on improving the language and getting to know and living local customs. The interchange student enters a space initially unknown to him/her, considering the experiences that a country can provide. Although there are exceptions, there is the goal of integrating into the local culture, plunging

into a space that belongs to another. These movements require mutual availability for the reception and synthesize not only hospitality but also the multiple learning experiences made possible.

Among the historical antecedents of this type of tourism, there are records that "the first countries to carry out exchange were the United States and Germany [...] aiming, besides the exchange of information and experiences, to promote world peace, due to the impacts of war" (TOMAZZONI; OLIVEIRA, 2013, p. 396). In the exchanges of personal experiences and the openness granted, the possibility of social development and prospects of contributing to world harmony, since there is the opportunity for the emergence of links between people and institutions from different countries.

It is, therefore, always a challenge, since the exchange student is the one who makes himself available for learning, makes himself available to enter a culture other than his own. But, as a foreigner, he provokes the community to welcome him. Relationships can be strained, since challenges of different natures are present in the dynamics of the encounter, dynamics that are not always positive or overcome.

In the welcoming movements, however, it is emphasized that, when there is genuine welcoming, both the exchangers and the locals change and learn - and this movement, characteristic of hospitality, can be considered essential to the culture of peace itself: to recognize oneself in the face of the other, the foreigner. It is a dialectical movement that presupposes alternating roles in the relationship between host and guest; provider and welcomed.

Generically, these movements of people who seek professional and personal improvement, traveling to another country for a determined period, with the purpose of intercultural exchange are known, therefore, as Exchange Tourism. It should also be noted that among these mobility processes, there is the so-called Academic Tourism, which is characterized as

[...] all stays of less than one year **in higher education institutions outside the country of usual residence**. The main purpose of the stay would be to take courses related to a university career and/or to attend language courses organized by the educational centers. (PAWLOWSKA, 2011, p. 21, our translation/emphasis added)<sup>1</sup>

Academic Tourism, as described, occurs in higher education institutions, with university courses being the main reason for travel. Pawlowska (2011, p.24, our translation)<sup>2</sup> also highlights that "as a result of the promotion of several types of academic mobility programs, there is a progressive growth in the internationalization of university education"

<sup>1</sup> "[...] todas las estancias de duración inferior a un año, realizadas en los centros de educación superior fuera del país de residencia habitual. El objetivo principal de la estancia sería la realización de cursos relacionados con una titulación universitaria y/o la asistencia a cursos de idiomas organizados por dichos centros educativos" (PAWLOWSKA, 2011, p. 21).

<sup>2</sup> "Como consecuencia del fomento de diversos tipos de programas de intercambio se observa un progresivo crecimiento de la internacionalización de la enseñanza universitaria" (PAWLOWSKA, 2011, p. 24).

and thus identifies their relevance and contribution to the progress of internationalization in intercultural education. (PAWLOWSKA, 2011).

For the internationalization of HEIs to occur, partnerships and collaboration agreements between institutions from different countries take place. As Stallivieri (2004) describes, this type of movement had its origins in the Middle Ages:

The international character of universities is present since the Middle Ages with the creation of the first European schools. The formation of these schools, called *universitas*, had teachers and students from different regions and countries, presenting in its constitution, international communities that gathered in pursuit of a common goal: knowledge (STALLIVIERI, 2004, p. 15).

In this sense, it is possible to reiterate that movements aimed at learning and exchanging intercultural experiences are present in the history of mankind. Stallivieri (2004) complements his study on internationalization by approaching the cooperation process as a stimulus for the improvement of teaching and research, since these cooperation agreements make it possible for students to travel abroad in search of knowledge to contribute to the development of countries and the quality of life of people.

As international travel has become easier, governmental programs and institutions created for this purpose have also evolved. In this context, the European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (ERASMUS) stands out as a global reference for its scope and significance related to the international academic mobility of HEIs (SEHNEM, 2018).

It is also noted that some programs are offering virtual academic mobility to students. In this type of program, the academic can participate in subjects that are being offered in institutions in countries other than their country of origin, in a virtual way. An example of this is Collaborative Online International Learning - (COIL), a teaching/learning modality created at The State University of New York (SUNY) by Professor Jon Robin in 2006 with the aim of supporting the growth of online international collaborative learning (UFSC, 2022). COIL also seeks to provide students with intercultural knowledge, without the need for physical travel to other countries, with access to digital information and knowledge technologies being essential in this type of mobility. Experiences like these, already underway, can be enhanced - and were intensified during the time of the pandemic by Covid-19) - becoming an interesting form of academic mobility. However, this area requires further theoretical study and is not within the scope of the reflective work proposed here.

In the case of the internationalization of Brazilian HEIs, Justino (2009) presents that the first International Relations Offices in Brazilian Universities (IROBUs) appear in 1978, as units created to take care exclusively of the cooperation of universities with HEIs abroad, enabling the International Academic Mobility (IAM) that can be characterized as "a period of study, teaching and/or research in a country different from the place of residence of the student, teacher, researcher or academic managers" (BRAGATO, 2015, p. 31). IAM is related to the process of displacement and insertion of participants abroad with a focus on

international education. In addition, it allows participants, after returning to their home country, to take advantage of studies abroad.

In this context, the Brazilian Association of International Education (FAUBAI) was created in 1988 as a landmark of international academic mobility in Brazil, aiming to promote the improvement of exchange and contribute to international cooperation of Brazilian HEI (FAUBAI, 2022). Currently, it has more than 200 associated HEIs that provide access to international education (FAUBAI, 2022).

The support given to IAM through the creation of advisory services, associations, and government programs has encouraged the growth of exchange programs by Brazilians in recent years. Among the main references of IAM's trajectory in Brazil, the Science without Borders Program (CsF), created by the federal government in 2011 and which, according to data made available on the program's official website, it sought, through **exchange and academic mobility**, the expansion, consolidation and internationalization of science and technology. (BRASIL, 2022).

The CsF Program counted, at the time of its creation, with the joint effort of two ministries, the Ministry of Education (MEC) and the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MCTI), through their respective funding institutions - CNPq and Capes - and the Ministry of Higher Education and Technological Education Secretariats, to enable undergraduate and graduate students to intern abroad with the purpose of maintaining contact with competitive educational systems in relation to technology and innovation. (BRASIL, 2022).

However, it has undergone different transformations, such as a reduction in the offer of scholarships and, as of 2017, its scope was restricted to academics in graduate programs. Currently, Capes develops new strategies to enable students' international experiences such as the offer of scholarships for studies abroad, such as the CAPES-Brafitec Programs, exclusive for Engineering students to study in France and Sandwich PhDs.

Considering the existence of exclusive sectors in HEIs to deal with inter-institutional and international matters, as well as the international academic mobility programs of these ARINTs, besides the existing scholarship opportunities in partnerships such as, for example, via the Santander Universities and Brafitec-Capes Programs, the demand for internationalization programs by academics still does not seem to correspond to the existing offer.

Therefore, it is necessary to reflect on the factors that restrict the process of international academic mobility.

### *Restrictive Factors for the realization of International Academic Mobility (IAM)*

Study trips have historically been opportunities for development, knowledge, and learning for those who somehow venture into this type of experience. Currently, universities

allow, through different programs, more and more students to have access to IAM. However, despite this reality, we observe that the adherence to the programs offered, despite the advances, can still be considered small.

Some researchers have tried to understand the reasons for this behavior. Stallivieri (2009) conducted research to evaluate the relationship between academic, linguistic, and intercultural income and performance to international academic mobility. To this end, he counted on the participation of 69 undergraduate students from a Higher Education Institution, as well as managers and professors. The results indicated that one of the main factors affecting the performance of students to perform international academic mobility is related to the lack of proficiency in foreign languages, since it causes barriers in communication, which, as a rule, compromises the performance of the activities proposed in international programs and their consequent utilization.

According to Braz (2015, p. 29), "[...] the restriction of students' family resources and the lack of programs that provide more fully funded scholarships are limiting factors in the expansion of student education via academic mobility [...]". Thus, the main restrictive factors presented by the author were the limitation of financial resources and the absence of scholarship programs for mobility.

Maranhão, Dutra, and Maranhão (2017) also identified some factors that restrict international academic mobility within the Brazilian Higher Education, based on data from a survey conducted with 42 Administration academics from a Federal Institution of Higher Education in 2017. The researchers pointed out as the two main factors restricting Academic Mobility the financial factor, 38%, followed by the lack of opportunity, with 29% of records. With 6% were the work record, lack of planning, lack of interest, low coefficient<sup>3</sup>. Lack of information, lack of courage and lack of knowledge of the language were mentioned by 3% of the interviewees, respectively. It is worth noting that in the research of Maranhão, Dutra and Maranhão (2017), the reasons why students have never done academic mobility were spontaneously registered by the respondents through open-ended questions on the subject.

In the research results, Maranhão, Dutra and Maranhão (2017) highlighted the low degree of knowledge of the participants about the International Academic Mobility Programs offered in the analyzed institution. To overcome these main factors, the authors suggested the establishment of partnerships that would offer funding programs to academics destined for IAM and the insertion of workshops, lectures, and actions since the beginning of the course on the subject and programs offered.

Seeking to contribute to the understanding of restrictive factors to IAM, in 2020, a study was carried out with academics of the Knowledge Area of Social Sciences of a Brazilian Higher Education Institution, of community character, with the objective of identifying what would be the restrictive factors of that group.

<sup>3</sup> Reason mentioned by students, whose coefficient was so low that there was no further detail on this mention in the survey.



## Methodology

### *Internationalization and International Academic Mobility at UCS*

The Universidade de Caxias do Sul (UCS), field of investigation of this research, is a Brazilian Higher Education Institution, private and communitarian, with direct action in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Southern region of Brazil. Internationalization is considered by UCS an important strategic component to fulfill its institutional mission as a community university focused on the development of the Serra Gaúcha region in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. In this context, as reported Stallivieri (2004), UCS has, since 1996, an Advisory Office of International Relations (ARINT) directly linked to the Office of the Rector, which aims to manage the international cooperation of the university.

Regarding the origins of the internationalization of UCS, according to the historical archive of ARINT, there are records of international partnerships prior to the inauguration of this sector. Among them, there is an international cooperation agreement signed by UCS with the University of Venice in 1981, which also identifies the reception at UCS of an Italian professor in the area of tourism.

Over time, still having as reference the ARINT archive, new cooperations were established by the University to provide opportunities for the academic community to carry out studies and research abroad, in addition to the reception of students and professors from other countries. According to data from UCS (2019a), the university currently has more than 200 partnerships with universities from 28 countries. It is supported in them that this sector operates a Center for International Academic Mobility (CMAI) that develops short-<sup>4</sup> and long-term<sup>5</sup> programs that enable the experience of intercultural education for the university community (UCS, 2019b).

The university also offers support programs (scholarships with national and international partners, support in planning and guidance) to students for the realization of a) IAM during a period that can vary between six months and a year abroad; b) academic missions whose durations vary between 10 and 15 days, both aiming at the expansion of knowledge. In addition, the sector develops the management of actions and projects of International programs. In the publications made by ARINT on its communication channels<sup>6</sup>, scholarships, internships, academic missions and face-to-face and online ARINT events were publicized to present its international programs to UCS' students.

Despite this important structure, the percentage of students participating in international mobility is still low. According to Agnol (2020), UCS had, in 2019, a total of 18,407 undergraduate and graduate scholars. According to the two IAMP edicts released in

<sup>4</sup> UCS Trips of Knowledge Program (from 10 to 15 days).

<sup>5</sup> International Academic Mobility Program (PMAI) (from 180 to 360 days).

<sup>6</sup> Institutional website, Facebook and Instagram.

the same year by ARINT, there were a total of 1,248 vacancies<sup>7</sup> offered to UCS undergraduates, but of these only 149 (11.9%) were filled, as recorded in the CMAI system (UCS, 2019c). It is with the aim of understanding why this number of participants is reduced compared to the vacancies offered in the mobility notices of this institution that we sought to understand the factors restricting the adhesion of undergraduates in the area of Social Sciences of the main campus of the Universidade de Caxias do Sul.

### *Methodological Processes*

In the research, of exploratory nature, aiming to identify the factors that restrict the IAM of the selected group<sup>8</sup>, it was applied, in 2020, an online questionnaire to undergraduates of the Knowledge Area of Social Sciences at the Headquarters Campus of the analyzed institution. The questionnaire had 15 questions about international academic mobility, 13 closed and 2 open, which were distributed into four sections: a) profile of academics; b) knowledge about IAM; c) interest in performing the IAM and d) factors restricting the realization of IAM, when respondents expressed interest.

It is noteworthy that, in this methodological stage, the questions were validated by means of pre-tests. The first pre-test was conducted on August 28, 2019, through the application of the questionnaire, during the face-to-face event "*Studying Tourism in...*", a joint promotion of the Coordination and the Academic Directory of the Bachelor of Tourism Course. At the time, it was possible to apply the questionnaire to 62.7% of the total number of students enrolled in the bachelor's degree in Tourism at UCS. Subsequently, the results of this pilot test were presented and discussed at the 10th SEMINTUR JR<sup>9</sup> (PEREIRA; BREGOLIN, 2019). Based on the contributions of the event participants, the questionnaire was revised and expanded.

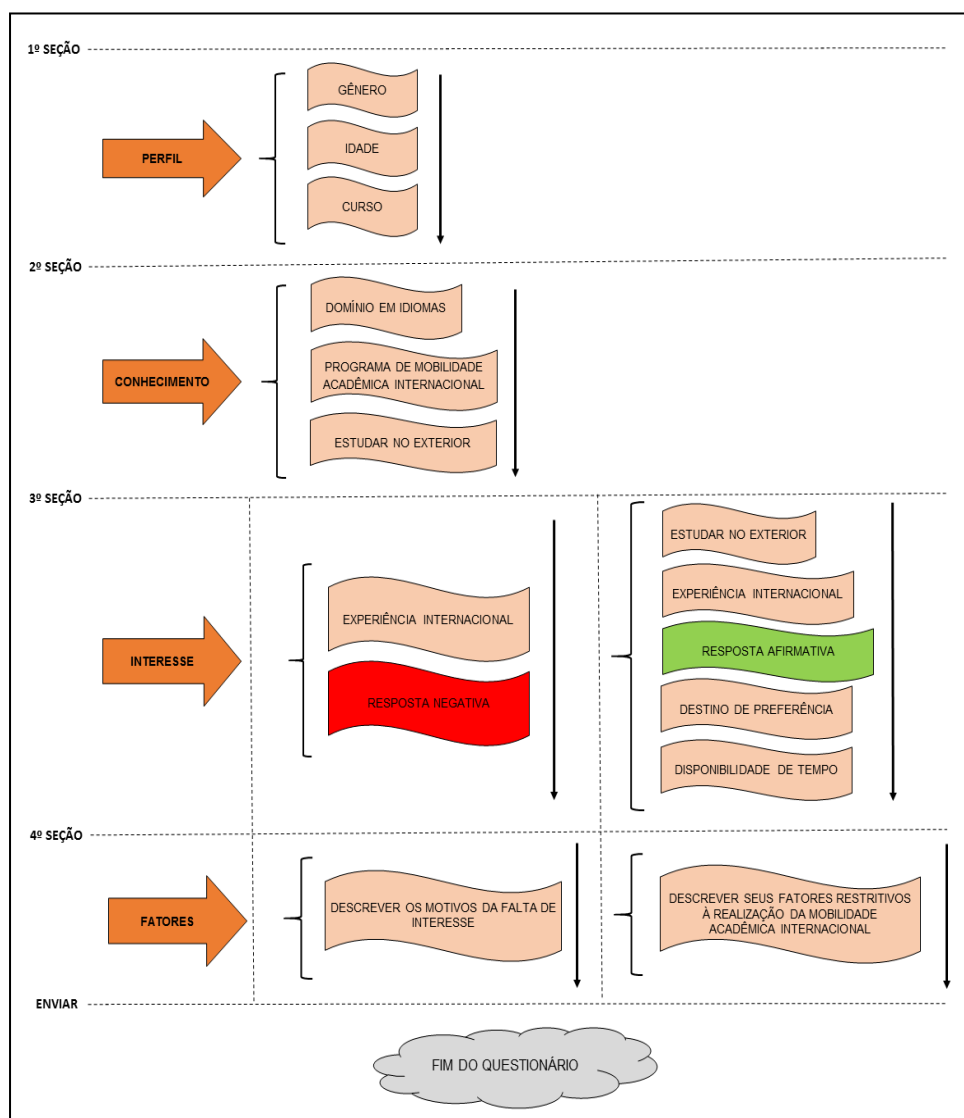
The second pre-test took place in March 2020 and was conducted using the Google Forms tool for a new group of academics. According to Heidemann et al. (2010), one of the greatest benefits of this tool is the possibility of viewing the results, which can be presented through spreadsheets, graphs, and summary of the answers. Once the instrument was validated, we proceeded to its application, whose structure is presented, for clarification purposes, in Figure 1.

<sup>7</sup> Each of the PMAI calls published in 2019 offered 8 openings for each of the 78 UCS Undergraduate courses, according to the availability of the partner Universities to receive the scholars (UCS, 2019d; UCS, 2019f).

<sup>8</sup> The choice of this group is due to the proximity of one of the researchers to the Knowledge Area and, therefore, with easy access to the means of communication with these academics.

<sup>9</sup> Seminar on Tourism Research in MERCOSUR of the Post-Graduate Program in Tourism and Hospitality of the Universidade de Caxias do Sul - UCS.

Figure 1. Structure of the online questionnaire



Source: Pereira (2020).

The application of the validated questionnaire occurred from April 6th to June 6th, 2020, and the collection took place in three ways: through disclosure, via e-mail, made by the coordinators of the courses (102 respondents); via WhatsApp groups of the Academic Directories of the courses (40 respondents) and via Facebook and Instagram groups maintained by the Academic Directories of the courses, totaling at the end of the third stage 180 respondents. Students were informed that their answers would be confidential and that only one participation per student would be authorized, as controlled by the data collection platform itself. The data collected was also constantly monitored during the collection period, thus ensuring the functionality of the tool during the period.

Regarding the closed questions, it was possible, after organizing the answers, to identify the profile of the academics, their knowledge of a language other than their native language, and about academic mobility programs and the desire to participate in one.

Regarding the open questions, the answers were initially organized by word clouds. The word cloud technique, "[...] groups words and organizes them graphically according to their frequency" (CAMARGO; JUSTO, 2013, p. 6), that is, the most frequent incidences with the interviewees are recorded by the largest size of the word in the cloud.

To prepare the word clouds, the online tool "wordclouds.com" was used, as it facilitates the organization of the results obtained with a view to their synthesis. The discourse analysis was allied to the word cloud, which "[...] seeks, then, to explain the reasons why this enunciative mode imposed itself, at that moment, and what effects of meaning they produced" (MARINHO, 2007, p. 176). In this perspective, the contexts of production, the enunciative scenes can contribute to the understanding, especially, of the factors indicated as restrictive by the analyzed scholars.

## Results and Discussion

From data collection and analysis, in relation to the profile of respondents, the desire to perform IAM, knowledge of languages and IAM programs, the group of participants was characterized by being predominantly female (70.6% of respondents). Regarding the age range, there is more equality, as 30% of them are between 18 and 21 years old; 26.7% are between 22 and 24 years old, and 21.7% are between 23 and 29 years old. The remaining 21.6% are diluted among the other age groups.

According to a survey by the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP, 2019), the public most interested in going on a study trip is in the 18-29 age group. And, in fact, the group of respondents (here considering their totality) also expressed interest in academic mobility programs (78.3%). There is, therefore, a potential group in the focus of the research institution willing to carry out IAM. The register is for the number of respondents (again considering the totality of them who expressed interest in academic mobility programs) who revealed not knowing the International Relations Office of the institution, as well as unaware of the programs offered by the institution (59.4%).

Of the totality of respondents, 95.6% have not yet participated in IAM programs offered by the institution and 70% of the academics revealed not knowing students who have participated in programs offered by the institution.

Regarding the moment when the respondents were in their courses, it was found that 39.4% of them were at the end of the Undergraduate course, 38.9% in the middle, while 21.7% were at the beginning. Again, it is observed the existence of a potential public, considering the academics in the beginning and middle of their courses (60.6%), for the IAM.

Regarding language knowledge, according to the data collected, English predominated (84%), followed by Spanish (72%) and Italian (29%). German and French appeared to a lesser extent (7% and 4% respectively). Regarding the level of knowledge of languages, most of the participants identified themselves in the Basic level of knowledge: Spanish (56%), English (40%) and Italian (22%). In the Intermediate level, English prevailed (23%), followed by

Spanish (10%) and Italian (5%). It was also observed that English has participations in the advanced and fluent levels (13% and 8% respectively). In the other languages referenced in the analysis, the percentages were exceptionally low. Based on the academics' answers, it can be observed that most of them have some linguistic knowledge of another language, but they themselves refer to this knowledge as basic. The languages most referred to were English and Spanish (which, coincidentally, are those offered in the basic education network). Few students consider themselves fluent in a second language.

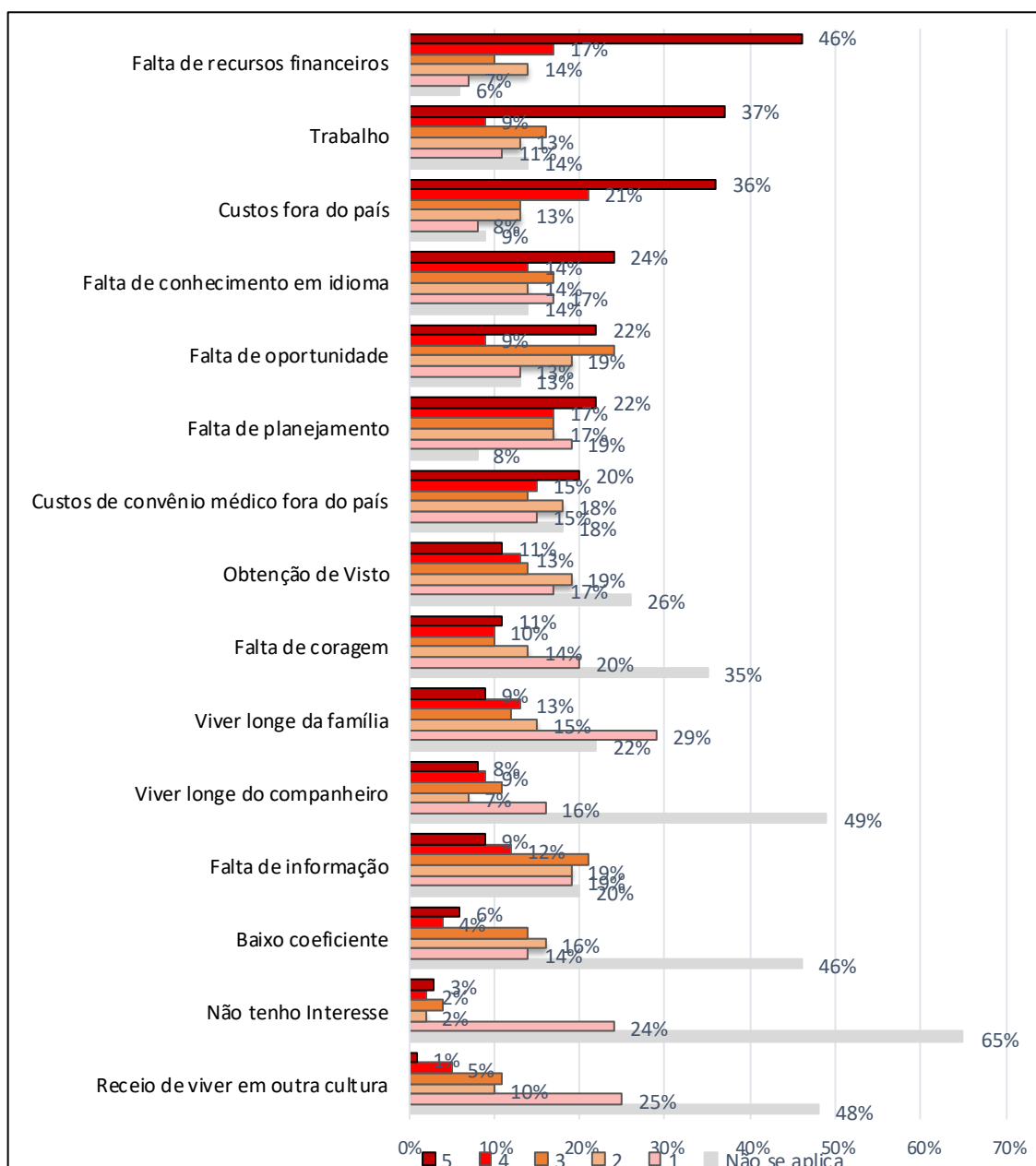
If there is interest in IAM among undergraduates, if there are IAM programs being offered by the institution, why are there still so few students traveling and participating in these programs?

### *Factors restricting the realization of IAM at UCS and relations with previous studies*

As previously presented in the constitution of the profile of the academic respondents, of the 180 students, 141 expressed interest or desire to participate in some International Academic Mobility program made available by the institution. Based on restrictive factors already pointed out by the research of Maranhão, Dutra and Maranhão (2017), the students were asked to identify, from a scale of 0 to 5, the degree of importance of these factors in terms of being restrictive to their own IAM, where, on the linear scale defined, 0 corresponded to 'not applicable', 1 to 'minor importance' and 5 to 'major importance'. The open-ended question asked if there were any other factors that could be considered restrictive to IAM.

The results, expressed in graph 1, consider the classification made by the academics, from the scale given.

Graph 1. Reasons that prevent UCS undergraduates from taking the IAM



Source: Pereira (2020).

According to the data presented in Graph 1, the five main restrictive factors mentioned by UCS undergraduates on importance scale 5 were: lack of financial resources (46%), work (37%), cost outside the country (36%), lack of language skills (24%), and lack of opportunity (22%).

The lack of financial resources appeared prominently as a limiting factor both in the survey of UCS undergraduates (2020) and in the survey of Maranhão, Dutra, and Maranhão (2017). Although the socioeconomic profile of the participants was not elaborated, many students need to bear the costs of their undergraduate education, even considering the existence of distributed full or partial scholarships. The reality of working concomitantly with the higher education training period of these subjects also explains the second restrictive

factor pointed out: work. They are students who work, or workers who study? (and in this pun the importance given to study and work respectively is also changed and alternated). It is possible to understand why the lack of resources and the impossibility of leaving work to spend some time abroad end up appearing among the main restrictive factors.

In the research of Maranhão, Dutra, and Maranhão (2017), the second factor listed was the lack of opportunity, with 29% of the records. For UCS academics, this factor was also significant, registering a percentage of 22% of respondents who rated it on scale 05, i.e., as 'very important'. The costs outside the country were pointed out by 36% of respondents, while in the research of Maranhão, Dutra and Maranhão (2017) this factor was mentioned by 40% of undergraduates.

Language also emerges as a restrictive barrier. Contrary to the results expressed by Braz (2015) and Maranhão, Dutra and Maranhão (2017), the academics at the Universidade de Caxias do Sul point to the lack of greater knowledge of the language as a hindrance to international academic mobility. In fact, language is a bridge for reception. When it is missing, the subject, who is already in a different environment and immersed in a culture different from his own, feels more than a foreigner, he feels like a stranger. Because of this lack, the subject may feel weakened and, therefore, insecure to enter a cultural and linguistic space that is different or even adverse to his or her own. In other words, in the perception of the group of respondents, linguistic knowledge (at a basic level) may be a factor that restricts mobility. In this sense, the investigative findings of this research reiterate the previous studies of Stallivieri (2009) who already highlighted that the lack of mastery of other languages was one of the main factors that hindered academics in performing intercultural teaching because of the lack of foreign language proficiency. And it seems that this impediment still remains present, even with a time lapse of 10 years.

Maranhão, Dutra and Maranhão (2017) also highlighted in their study the low level of knowledge of the participants about the International Academic Mobility Programs offered at the analyzed institution, a reason for restriction that was also highlighted in the UCS research. The lack of incentive by the university, the lack of dissemination of the sector and pregnancy were restrictive reasons found exclusively in the UCS survey.

Thus, it can be seen that there is a mismatch in communication established between the academics and the International sector of the Institution, since campaigns are periodically developed to publicize the IAM programs of UCS, but a high percentage of respondents still mentioned the lack of knowledge of such opportunities, on the other hand, they did not describe whether they also sought to know them.

Besides the factors identified by the UCS undergraduates based on studies already conducted on the subject, 14 participants also described other restrictive reasons, among which we highlight the lack of opportunity, lack of information, knowledge of languages, living far from the family and the lack of dissemination of the mobility sector (Figure 2).

In the spontaneous generation, some new restrictive factors were pointed out (pregnancy and lack of publicity and incentive), however, it was observed the reiteration of factors listed in other surveys, such as financial and idiomatic issues and being away from the family, as illustrated in figure 2.

**Figure 2:** Frequency of Restrictive Factors to the realization of MAI cited



Source: Elaborated on the WordClouds.com platform (2020).

The word cloud allows us to identify that most of the restrictive factors listed by the participants were also the same listed by other researchers, and the lack of financial resources, opportunities and dissemination were the most referenced. The main reasons mentioned by students in this stage of the research about the restrictive factors to IAM were: *"Lack of incentive by the university, even more in small courses"; "[...] what really hinders the most is the lack of information about International Mobility, how it works, where I read more about it, [...]"; "[...] I don't get any contact with any information about the Mobility program"; "[...] Lack of much incentive by the university!"*

After analyzing the data described with those already mentioned in the first stage of the research, it was identified the need to include three new restrictive factors: lack of incentive by the university, lack of dissemination of the sector, and pregnancy.

## Conclusion

Restrictive factors to the realization of International Academic Mobility seem to orbit, primarily, in the sphere of economics: high costs to study abroad (considering here also the exchange rate variation) and lack of financial resources were the most listed factors both in the study of Maranhão, Dutra and Maranhão (2017), and in that of Pereira (2020). It is undeniable that this barrier can actually be restrictive to mobility, although it can be pointed out the existence of scholarships and differentiated financing alternatives for university students. This leads us to reflections that require further study, but which are registered: is the financial issue the biggest restrictive barrier to IAM?

The respondent group, both in the research of Braz (2015), Maranhão, Dutra and Maranhão (2017) and Pereira (2020), point to the lack of knowledge of academic mobility programs offered by their respective institutions. But it is necessary to reflect on the reasons for this lack of knowledge: do they not seek information because they believe that there will be no resources available for IAM? Are there communication gaps between the academics



and the ARINTs? Are the students unaware of the existence of scholarships exclusively for IAM?

These are pertinent questions, especially when it is known that higher education institutions - and the one in the study as well - have different international cooperation agreements. In other words, there is an offer for international academic mobility and there may also be scholarships for academic mobility. However, despite these questions, studies aimed at developing strategies and actions to improve the communication established between higher education institutions (and their ARINTs) and academics should not be ruled out.

Another factor to be highlighted concerns the language barrier. Although it did not appear among the top five reasons for not joining mobility programs, it persists. For IAM programs, a certain knowledge of the language is often required (some institutions even apply proficiency tests). Language is a bridge for the intercultural encounter, for the welcoming of the foreigner who enters another country, another space. In this sense, it is an element that can bring different people together. This is not about thinking that a person needs, to take part in IAM programs, to have a "command" of the language. It is about reflecting on how much a language can be a bridge or a barrier for the realization of IAM programs.

There are several restrictive factors pointed out in different researches, and those associated with financial issues are the most referenced. In this sense, besides the programs available, besides scholarships, one must consider, among other alternatives, the emergence of virtual academic mobility programs such as the Collaborative Online International Learning - (COIL) (which were not the object of the present reflections) but emerge as possibilities of providing intercultural experiences.

The results of the research provide broadening horizons for future studies on International Academic Mobility, among them those related to the strategic performance of the IAMP and the search for other restrictive factors that may be linked not to external factors, but to the fear of the unknown. Furthermore, and considering the current pandemic scenario, the need to reflect academically on virtual mobility and international experiences at home arises.

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