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Management of remaining vacancies from the perspective of administrative management of Federal Institutions of Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Introduction/Objective: The study aims to identify the perception of managers about the challenges and perspectives in relation to the management of remaining vacancies, from the point of view of administrative management of Federal Institutions of Higher Education. **Methodology:** Anchored in a qualitative approach, the research was based on the analysis of the interviews carried out with the managers and technicians of the universities under the scope of this study to understand the policies and procedures adopted by the institutions in relation to the remaining vacancies. **Results:** The results indicate that the managers are unanimous in their desire to offer the remaining vacancies in their entirety to the internal and external community, however, the institutions face some challenges, such as, for example, the current format of “Sisu”, the low demand for candidates to fill the remaining vacancies in interdisciplinary undergraduate and bachelors courses, the excessive supply of initial vacancies for certain courses, the lack of infrastructure in some courses, the bureaucracy and resistance from some collegiate boards and the lack of student policies for the permanence of students. **Conclusion:** It is concluded that managers are looking for different alternatives to achieve efficiency in relation to the supply and the filling of remaining vacancies in their entirety, based on mechanisms and the implementation of legislation. Therefore, depending on the challenges, the offer and the filling of these vacancies become increasingly complex and this fact reinforces the importance of new public policies by the part of “MEC”, “Andifes”, university managers and other social actors.

KEYWORDS

Remaining vacancies. University education. Dropout.

Gestão de vagas remanescentes sob a ótica da gestão administrativa das Instituições Federais de Ensino Superior

RESUMO

Introdução/Objetivo: O estudo tem como objetivo identificar a percepção dos gestores acerca dos desafios e das perspectivas em relação à gestão de vagas remanescentes, sob a ótica da gestão administrativa das Instituições Federais de Ensino Superior. **Metodologia:** Ancorada em uma abordagem de caráter qualitativo, a pesquisa baseou-se na análise das entrevistas realizadas com os gestores e técnicos de universidades em estudo, a fim de compreender as políticas e os procedimentos adotados pelas instituições com relação às vagas remanescentes. **Resultados:** Os resultados apontam que é unânime entre os gestores o desejo da oferta de vagas remanescentes em sua totalidade para a comunidade interna e externa, no entanto, as instituições encontram alguns desafios como, por exemplo, o formato atual do Sisu, a baixa demanda de candidatos para o preenchimento de vagas remanescentes nos cursos de licenciatura e bacharelados interdisciplinares, a oferta excessiva de vagas iniciais para determinados cursos, a falta de infraestrutura em alguns cursos, a burocracia e resistência de alguns colegiados e a escassez de políticas estudantis para a permanência dos alunos. **Conclusão:** Conclui-se que os gestores buscam por alternativas diversas para atingir a eficiência em relação à oferta e ao preenchimento de vagas remanescentes na sua totalidade, a partir de mecanismos e de legislações implementados, portanto, em função dos desafios, o preenchimento e a oferta dessas vagas tornam-se cada vez mais complexos, o que reforça a importância de novas políticas públicas por parte do MEC, da Andifes, dos gestores das universidades e dos demais atores sociais.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Vagas remanescentes. Ensino superior. Evasão.

Gestión de las vacantes remanentes desde la perspectiva de la gestión administrativa de las Instituciones Federales de Educación Superior

RESUMEN

Introducción/Objetivo: El estudio tiene como objetivo identificar la percepción de los gestores sobre los desafíos y perspectivas en relación con la gestión de las vacantes sobrantes, desde la perspectiva de la gestión administrativa de las Instituciones Federales de Educación Superior. **Metodología:** Anclada en un enfoque cualitativo, la investigación se basó en el análisis de las entrevistas realizadas a los directivos y técnicos de las universidades objeto de estudio, con el fin de comprender las políticas y procedimientos adoptados por las instituciones en relación con las vacantes sobrantes. **Resultados:** Los resultados indican que los directivos son unánimes en su deseo de ofrecer las vacantes sobrantes en su totalidad a la comunidad interna y externa, sin embargo, las instituciones enfrentan algunos desafíos, como por ejemplo, el formato actual de Sisu, baja demanda de candidatos para cubrir las vacantes sobrantes en cursos interdisciplinarios de formación docente y licenciatura, oferta excesiva de vacantes iniciales para ciertas carreras, falta de infraestructura en algunas carreras, burocracia y resistencia de algunos cuerpos colegiados, falta de políticas estudiantiles para la permanencia de los estudiantes. **Conclusión:** Se concluye que los directivos están buscando diferentes alternativas para lograr la eficiencia en relación a la oferta y cobertura de las vacantes sobrantes en su totalidad, con base en los mecanismos y la legislación implementada, por lo tanto, a consecuencia de los desafíos, la cobertura y oferta de esas vacantes se vuelven cada vez más complejas, lo que refuerza la importancia de nuevas políticas públicas por parte del MEC, Andifes, gestores universitarios y otros actores sociales.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Vacantes sobrantes. Enseñanza superior. Deserción.

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Introduction

Over the last few decades, the number of remaining vacancies (RVs) has grown significantly in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), which is why some researchers are trying to understand the reasons for this increase, especially in Federal Universities, given the importance of access and the cost of higher education in Brazil.

RVs can be defined as those that arise during the development of a particular course, previously occupied by students, but which are abandoned due to personal or academic complications and thus become available again (Cortelazzo, 2018). Also called 'idle vacancies', they can be made available to new students through processes carried out at Federal Higher Education Institutions (IFES).

According to data from the 2021 Higher Education Census, released by the National Institute for Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP), the rate of RVs filled in that year at federal universities was 20.2%, about only a fifth of the places made available, compared to more than 107,000 places offered to the community. Therefore, based on this data, we can see a worrying reality, since these RVs become a loss for both the federal government and the academic community since thousands of Brazilians crave the opportunity to study for free at a public university, to transform their future and achieve improvements for themselves and for society in general (INEP, 2022).

The emergence of RVs in higher education institutions can be the result of voluntary or involuntary factors. The first factors refer to non-enrolment by students approved in the regular selection processes for undergraduate courses, school dropouts, non-compliance with the maximum completion time by students, as well as the occurrence of transfer processes between institutions, or transfer between courses at the same institution. Involuntary factors include issues related to the student being denied a place, such as disqualification through hetero-identification panels, among other factors.

There is also the possibility of an increase in the number of places on offer at IFES in small municipalities, especially in new undergraduate courses which, because they attract a smaller contingent of students, can also generate unfilled vacancies which are then offered to the external community at another opportunity as RVs.

From this perspective, and considering that it is essential to implement public policies based on evidence and not on common sense (Abrucio, 2019), the main objective of this study is to identify the perception of managers and technical staff about the challenges and perspectives about the management of remaining vacancies, from the perspective of administrative management in public institutions.

Three federal public universities were selected for this study: Universidade Federal de Alfenas (UNIFAL-MG), Universidade Federal de Lavras (UFLA), and Universidade Federal

de Minas Gerais (UFMG). Data and information were collected from the three universities, as well as interviews with managers and technicians, to understand the policies and procedures adopted for RVs. The criteria for choosing the institutions will be detailed in the section describing the methodology.

For ease of understanding, after this introduction, the article is structured into five sections and a conclusion. The first section describes the conceptual framework used to set up the empirical research. The second section describes the methodological approach used to collect and analyze the data. The third section presents the evolution of the number of remaining vacancies offered between eight and eleven years ago. The penultimate section presents and discusses the results of the study. Finally, there are the concluding remarks on the proposal.

The possible causes for the progressive increase in remaining vacancies at public higher education institutions

This section aims to present the references for the research, gather information, and discuss pertinent arguments to help explain the proposed topic.

The main means of access to higher education in the past was the vestibular, a traditional selection process in Brazilian universities, carried out through exams, with a set number of places. However, new forms of admission have been adopted by universities since the 2000s. These include

- For initial entry to higher education: the National High School Exam (Enem); and the Unified Selection System (Sisu).
- For re-entry to higher education: in the case of a student who has been dismissed for some academic reason or the return of graduates in search of a new degree.
- For transfer within the higher education system: transfer between institutions and course transfer.

Concerning the last item, the transfer of undergraduate students, the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDB) states: "[...] Art. 49. Higher education institutions will accept the transfer of regular students to similar courses, in the event of vacancies and through a selection process." (Brasil, 1996a, online). (Brasil, 1996a, online). In this sense, Rodrigues (2006) reinforces that, in the event of vacancies, HEIs must guarantee access to students from internal or external transfers, with the right of access prevailing, which is a subjective public right.

In 2007, the Federal Government set up the Program to Support Restructuring and Expansion Plans for Federal Universities (Reuni), following the issuance of Presidential Decree No. 6.096, of April 24, 2007, recognized as part of a set of actions proposed by the government for the preparation of the so-called 'Education Development Plan' (PDE). Reuni aimed to

provide federal universities with the necessary conditions to expand access to higher education, as well as for students to remain in their respective degree courses (Brasil, 2007).

According to the author Castro (2015), Reuni in the IFES has resulted in numerous benefits for the community, such as an increase in places on degree courses, improvements in the institutions' infrastructure, expansion in the hiring of teachers and technicians, as well as the implementation of higher education in several federal institutes. Although the author highlights the benefits of Reuni, some studies point to controversies about the first consideration. According to Borges and Aquino (2012), an incomprehensible issue that occurred after the implementation of Reuni concerns the non-proportional increase in the number of places on undergraduate courses in line with the existing demand from students since the increase in the number of places only covered a few undergraduate courses.

This process may have contributed, over the last ten years or so, to an increase in the number of vacancies at federal institutions, a chart which, in turn, led to the drafting and approval of resolutions aimed at managing RVs. Given the above aspects, it is also important to highlight the thesis supported by Lugão *et al.* (2010, p.12), according to which:

The expansion of places without inadequate infrastructure can deteriorate teaching, as classrooms tend to become crowded. On the other hand, the wrong choice of courses and this same inadequate infrastructure can lead to an increase in vacant university places.

The new government program to restructure federal universities was accompanied by the implementation of Sisu in 2010, to complement the political actions for selecting undergraduate courses at federal institutions. The system represents an alternative to the traditional entrance exam, since Sisu presents a policy proposal to unify the selection process, in addition to nationalizing it, reducing costs, and making the system more democratic (Nogueira *et al.*, 2017).

Certainly, the implementation of Sisu was highly relevant, as it was responsible for speeding up and improving the entry of countless students to universities. In addition, Sisu promoted democratic access to the selection process at all IFES. On the other hand, as Nogueira *et al.* (2017) point out, this selection system has contributed to an increase in the number of RVs, since it allows the choice of any course, anywhere in the country, requiring only that the candidate achieve a sufficient score in the Enem to obtain a place on an undergraduate course.

Based on these aspects, it has become a reality to select universities that are far from the candidates' hometowns, which has led, in some cases, to difficulties in commuting to and staying at the chosen IFES, due to the high costs or even issues related to emotional need in the face of distancing from family members. As a result of this sometimes immature choice, there are several consequences faced by universities today, such as students dropping out, changing courses, and withdrawing. These are some of the many challenges facing federal higher education institutions, which are trying to minimize the consequences of this phenomenon by seeking better management of RVs.

From this perspective, since the beginning of the 2000s, various studies have sought to understand which factors have contributed to the increase in the number of vacancies at federal public universities. In line with this, Lima and Machado (2014) relate the increase in vacancies to the school dropout factor:

To evaluate the phenomenon of dropout solely from the student's financial perspective is to disregard countless other factors that systematically contribute to the emergence of this problem. Leaving aside factors such as integration between the student and the school community, lack of knowledge about the chosen career, lack of theoretical foundation, learning difficulties, overwork, family conflicts, etc.

The authors confirm that dropout is an urgent problem and that immediate and solid proposals are needed. However, the proposals implemented in the public (or private) sector do not always achieve efficient results (Santos *et al.*, 2021). From a technical point of view, the Ministry of Education (MEC) (Brasil, 1996b, p.15) defines dropout as "[...] the definitive departure of a student from their course of origin without completing it.". Therefore, the concept itself does not portray the phenomenon of 'dropout' in its entirety, as it restricts it to a specific situation, which results in the exclusion of other types of dropout, for example, those caused by student mobility between courses or between different institutions.

Based on this limitation, the MEC appointed the Special Commission for Studies on Dropout in Brazilian Public Universities, set up by ANDIFES/ABRUEM/SESu/MEC (1996), which proposed the types of dropout:

[...]
 - course dropout: when a student drops out of a higher education course in a variety of situations, such as abandonment (no longer enrolled), withdrawal (official), transfer or re-option (change of course), exclusion due to institutional rules;
 - dropout from the institution: when the student leaves the institution in which they are enrolled;
 - system dropout: when the student leaves higher education permanently or temporarily (Brasil, 1996b, p. 16).

According to Gilioli (2016), there are different types of dropout in higher education, namely: *micro-dropout* - which occurs when the student leaves the course of origin but remains at the institution of origin on another course and in the system; *mesodropout* - occurs when the student leaves the course and the institution of origin and transfers to another institution, but remains integrated in the system; *macro-dropout* - occurs when the student leaves the course 'and the institution, in addition to not remaining in the system.

In line with this classification, the authors Lima and Zago (2018) suggest another type of evasion, called *nano-dropout*. For the authors, this occurs when the student remains on the course and at the institution, but migrates to another shift, teaching modality (face-to-face or distance learning), or qualification (degree or bachelor's degree).

However, although *micro-dropout*, *meso-dropout*, and *nano-dropout* are considered to be forms of dropout, these types of dropout have a less mitigating impact on educational

institutions, given that, in the forms mentioned above, students remain at the institution and only migrate between courses, shifts or modalities. It is generally expected that, with this type of academic mobility, the student will be more motivated to follow the new course and, for this reason, will remain at the institution without dropping out.

On the other hand, De Lima and Zago (2018) believe that meso-evasion would be a benefit for the receiving institution since the student occupies an empty seat at another institution. However, even though meso-evasion favors institutions with vacancies, some institutions are resistant to the process, as Cortelazzo (2018) warns:

[...] The process is met with resistance at the institution because it usually receives students from less popular courses when they enter, which leads to a devaluation of their knowledge. Similarly, the admission process must take into account the similarity and relevance of the curricular activities already carried out and, for the same reason, there is resistance to granting the equivalences necessary to accept the transfer at many HEIs. (Cortelazzo, 2018, p. 859).

Regardless of the type of dropout, this process affects society as a whole, causing academic and economic waste. Thus, evasion can be seen as a form of underutilization of manpower (professors and staff), equipment, and physical space in public higher education institutions.

According to Rosa (2013, p. 180 apud rosa; Santos, 2021), another motivation for students to drop out is the lack of socio-economic conditions to stay at universities far from their hometown, as well as the lack of support from family members. Therefore, limitations in student assistance by the government cause an increase in the curve of remaining vacancies at federal universities. Another factor observed by Sousa (2013) and Rosa and Santos (2021), regarding the idleness of vacancies, refers to the offer of new courses, which do not match the current labor market, in terms of wages and employment, thus reducing the demand and demand for these courses.

According to Rosa and Santos (2021), the factors contributing to the increase in RVs in public institutions are related to entry through Sisu and dropout. The authors believe that these factors are directly interconnected, as shown below:

The purpose of Sisu was to make access to higher education less bureaucratic by holding a single test throughout the country, the Enem. However, what we see is that students face two major problems with this access mechanism. The first is that they enter a course that they are not interested in, simply because they got a grade to get into it. The other is that they can't afford to stay in another city or state and study at a public institution, since the admission mechanism is not directly related to student assistance. (Rosa; Santos, 2021, p. 514).

Another factor that contributes to the increase in remaining or idle places is the dropout rate in degree courses. According to the studies carried out by the Special Commission for Studies on Dropout in Brazilian Public Universities, set up by ANDIFES/ABRUEM/SESu/MEC (1996), there is a tendency for students to drop out of degree courses, mainly because of the job market and the prospects for remuneration, even if the

students have a professional vocation. It is therefore important to point out that over the almost three decades since the studies carried out by the commission, there have been several significant changes in degree courses which may or may not have affected dropout rates.

According to Carvalho *et al.* (2009), some public institutions have some possible difficulties in filling the initial vacancies offered in Sisu, especially in degree courses and multidisciplinary bachelor's degrees, which is why these courses start with vacant places, even though they make numerous calls from the waiting list.

The authors confirm that some universities make fifteen or more calls. This is an uncomfortable situation for the student, who has to keep up with the system for several days, weeks, or even months, and, depending on when they enter, they can face a considerable content deficit, impacting their overall grades and the quality of their academic training. This situation has serious consequences for the student who starts the semester late, often by a few weeks or even months. It is known that the institution itself drags out the process for a few months in an attempt to comply with government regulations, but often the courses with the lowest demand start without all the vacancies being filled.

For Sousa (2013), idleness in public institutions stems from multiple academic causes. Firstly, the author explains that, in many cases, students enter an undergraduate course and, at the same time, sign up for another selection process, which allows them to change courses, leaving a vacant place. This, in turn, is offered in future processes for remaining vacancies.

In addition, the author points out that RVs can be caused by the fact that students are not yet attracted to new courses, often created in small towns, or by a lack of knowledge about certain areas on offer as a result of the expansion process of federal institutions.

In this sense, it can be concluded that there are multiple factors influencing the increase in RVs at HEIs, making it clear that it is important to understand these processes in their complex dimensions. In this way, universities will be able to develop the conditions they need to act consistently to minimize the problems arising from academic evasion, avoid waste, and also to promote better use of idle places and public resources in general.

Policies to minimize the number of vacancies and democratize access to public higher education institutions

This section proposes the presentation of some academic and public policies to mitigate this process of vacancy over the years within federal higher education institutions, which, as already mentioned, generates constant damage for both the government and society.

According to Schirmer and Tauchen (2019), the expansion of public policies in higher education has not been enough to prevent the growing dropout rates at federal universities, countering the relationship between expansion and evasion. The authors, based on data from

the Statistical Synopsis of Higher Education produced by Inep, cite that in 2019 a total of 310,235 students applied for initial places on undergraduate courses at federal universities. However, in the same year, only 135,970 students managed to complete the university cycle. In this sense, Schirmer and Tauchen (2019) point out the distance between access to university and obtaining a degree for many students.

Given this scenario, the authors defend the need for certain actions on the part of public institutions, to promote assistance and permanence policies for students, since many of them depend on financial aid to continue their studies (Schirmer; Tauchen, 2019).

One way of minimizing vacancies in higher education institutions is to provide financial assistance, to ensure that students remain in undergraduate courses until the end of the academic cycle. In this sense, Hourí (2016 apud Schirmer; Tauchen, 2019, p. 329) supports the need for diverse public policies on the part of public higher education institutions to meet the diversity of students in the current scenario.

Based on this reflection, it is of the utmost importance that universities implement policies to accompany and monitor students throughout their academic careers, using administrative artifacts. The importance of undergraduate collegiate bodies in assisting students to adhere to their chosen course should be highlighted. In addition, the institution's role is to provide students with work experience (internships, monitoring, extension, and research projects), so that they are motivated throughout the academic cycle. Furthermore, IFES needs to be able to detect, through institutional evaluations, the possible causes of this increase in school dropouts. Based on this diagnosis, federal public institutions will be able to set targets to minimize this chart, as well as prioritize quality education for students.

According to De Lima and Zago (2018), one way to mitigate this idleness curve is to carry out internal transfers at higher education institutions during the semester. For the authors, internal relocation, i.e. internal transfer, is just a form of mobility characterized by the migration of students from one course to another at the same institution, since the whole process takes place within an IFES.

Another possible initiative is to fill RVs throughout the course. In this scenario, students who find themselves without the motivation, or even the financial resources, to continue a course would transfer to the same courses, but at another institution. It should be noted, however, that this type of evasion, previously classified as mesoevasion, would bring benefits to the receiving IFES, but would harm the donor institution.

According to Cortelazzo (2018), this opening of competitions to fill remaining vacancies for students who wish to take another higher education course, such as students who have dropped out or are enrolled in courses at other higher education universities, would be beneficial both for students at private institutions, by reducing the cost of tuition, and for students who are enrolled at public institutions far from their homes, since filling a remaining

vacancy at a public institution could contribute to the process of continuing their studies, thus avoiding future dropouts on the part of students.

According to Cortelazzo (2018), the selection process for occupying RVs at IFES is not standardized but diversified based on the resolutions and rules adopted by the universities offering them. The author clarifies that the offer of RVs by federal public institutions can be considered a positive factor for universities, since this transition between courses and the filling of existing vacancies can avoid a greater commitment to resources from the government, in addition to providing students with an opportunity to complete their undergraduate degree at a Federal Public Higher Education Institution.

According to Rosa and Santos (2021), it is necessary to reflect on the challenge of generating a cultural change on the part of young people in basic education, especially in the public sector, so that students can build an academic cycle in quality higher education, ensuring their right to education, as provided for in the 1988 Constitution. However, for this to become possible, it is necessary for young people not to make their academic choices based on their Enem score, but on their own interest and professional aptitude, which depends directly on changing the mentality of the current Brazilian entrance exam population.

With this in mind, Andifes held the Andifes Seminar on Efficiency and Quality in the Occupation of Student Vacancies at Federal Universities on March 16, 2016 (ANDIFES, 2016). From the discussion of the theme by the event organizers and participants, alternatives were identified that could contribute to the implementation of current actions and policies to combat student dropout and retention, to fill RVs in undergraduate courses.

Representing Andifes' College of Undergraduate Pro-Rectors (COGRAD), Professor Mello (2016, p. 19) reported in his presentation on the challenges of filling RVs in undergraduate courses at IFES:

1. Improving Sisu - only one option per course?
2. Anticipation of the Enem results and the first call for enrollment.
3. Inep/Andifes/Cograd cooperation agreement to map dropout rates at IFES (course, campus, institution, IFES, IPES, IES).
4. Student Assistance Policy.
5. How to accommodate new students who join by filling remaining/empty places? Laboratories, new teachers, classrooms.
6. Focus on vacancies for professor training. Extra challenge.
7. Filling vacancies for dropouts - preventing dropouts.
8. What would be acceptable dropout and retention rates?

It is very clear that the official representatives of the federal universities are very concerned about the issue of the remaining vacancies, and are proposing solutions, considering that they have an impact on society, public institutions, and the government itself. There is a clear need to take up this issue as soon as possible because it is still possible to reverse the

situation. In this scenario, universities have a great social responsibility in terms of management, especially in terms of avoiding financial, social, and community damage, caused by flawed, bureaucratic, and time-consuming processes.

Cortelazzo (2018) corroborates this, arguing that there is a need for a more effective national policy to fill the remaining vacancies at IFES, which could generate a greater number of higher education professionals to work in the job market, as well as reducing the number of vacancies and optimizing public spending.

Finally, based on the reflections made with the support of the research and studies cited above, the relevance of the need to promote a debate in the multiple spheres of society on the management of RVs in IFES is confirmed, to avoid financial loss and the increase in the idleness curve in public institutions.

Methodology

This study is a descriptive, bibliographical, and exploratory qualitative study, that aims to identify the perception of managers and technical staff about the challenges and perspectives about the management of remaining vacancies from the perspective of administrative management in higher education institutions.

Due to the difficulty in analyzing all the higher education institutions, we opted for intentional sampling methods. The first selection criterion was that the institution was located in the state of Minas Gerais, which would reduce the costs of the research, making it a method of convenience. This was followed by intentional sampling by judgment, in which the selection criteria are based on the subjective judgment and specialized knowledge of the researchers. Three federal public institutions in the state of Minas Gerais were selected: Universidade Federal de Alfenas (UNIFAL-MG), Universidade Federal de Lavras (UFLA) and Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG). These institutions were chosen for the research because they have similar and different characteristics in the process of offering RVs for undergraduate courses. It should be noted that the selection of the sample by non-probabilistic methods can generate bias, which limits the ability to generalize the results. However, they are mainly useful in exploratory research, as is the case in this study (Cooper; Schindler, 2011).

In addition, it is important to note that all the notices regarding the availability of remaining vacancies from 2010 to 2021 at the three universities selected were analyzed, which generated a large amount of information to be examined and made it difficult to extend the studies beyond the IFES in the state of Minas Gerais.

To define and characterize the research object, a literature review was first carried out. Searches were carried out in the repositories of some platforms, such as Google Scholar, Scielo, Spell (Scientific Periodicals Electronic Library), Periódicos Capes, and other digital databases.

Next, the data inherent in the offer of remaining vacancies, made available through the public notices of the selected Minas Gerais universities for the following: internal transfer (reoption) or internal relocation, external transfer and obtaining a new degree, in the period from 2010 to 2021, were evaluated.

Finally, through semi-structured interviews with managers and technicians at each university, we sought to understand the policies and procedures adopted by the institutions in relation to the remaining vacancies. Therefore, the research sample included seven participants from the Rectorate and Academic Bodies Director levels, with pro-rectors, former pro-rectors, directors of academic bodies, coordinators, and former coordinators being interviewed. Initially, three managers from each institution were invited, but only the representatives from UNIFAL-MG and UFMG confirmed their full participation in the research, while UFLA contributed just one representative. To guarantee confidentiality and anonymity, the description is given as Manager I, II, III, IV, V, VI, and VII, in the order in which the interviews were conducted. The material collected totaled 4 hours, 30 minutes, and 15 seconds of recording and 209 transcribed pages.

After being transcribed, the interviewees' accounts were analyzed using the content analysis technique. According to Bardin (2009), this technique seeks to analyze the information collected during the research based on thematic analysis, to group the themes related to the theoretical framework.

Considering the conceptual scheme proposed, the categorization process in this research emerged from the thematic axis: Management of remaining vacancies from the point of view of administrative management in the IFES, followed by the category: Challenges and perspectives in the administrative management of RVs. From there, the categories themselves were broken down. During the process, which involved constant comings and goings, both in the material collected and in the theory (Franco, 2008), there was a need to break down subcategories to better grasp the general objective.

Chart 1 below shows the main subcategories that emerged from the thematic analysis of the research data. In turn, each subcategory was presented in correlation with a specific objective.

Chart 1. Categories and subcategories of analysis

Thematic axis	Categories	Sub-categories	Objective
Management of remaining vacancies from the point of view of administrative management in higher education institutions	<p>Institutional challenges in the administrative management of remaining vacancies</p> <p>Prospects and improvements in the administrative management of remaining vacancies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limitations of student policies; • Low demand from applicants in relation to the supply of remaining places for Bachelor's and Interdisciplinary Bachelor's courses; • Excessive supply of initial places for certain courses; • Difficulties in offering the full number of places. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dropout control; • Implement student policies for permanence; • Promoting cultural change with the choice of degree courses; • Offering new types of vacancies; • The importance of offering RVs to the community and the IFES. 	To identify the perception of the managers and technicians responsible for the challenges and perspectives faced in the management of remaining vacancies from the point of view of administrative management in Federal Public Institutions.

Source: prepared by the author.

Next, a search was carried out on each university's website to find out the profiles of the public federal higher education institutions selected for the study. The following were taken into account: the number of undergraduate courses, the number of students, and the types of vacancies offered by each institution. Chart 2 shows the profile of each university in terms of the number of courses, the number of students, and the types of vacancies offered.

Chart 2. Profile of Federal Higher Education Institutions

Universities	Administrative Structure	No. Graduate courses	N° Graduate students	Types of RV offer
Universidade Federal de Alfenas (UNIFAL-MG)	Four administrative units: - Headquarters and Santa Clara Educational Unit (Alfenas) - Advanced campuses in the cities of Poços de Caldas and Varginha	38 graduate courses	5.765	External Transfer; Obtaining a New Degree or Second Degree; Internal Relocation between Courses; Re-entry; Re-enrollment; Use of the waiting list; Specific Programs; Internal Relocation between Shifts.
Universidade Federal de Lavras (UFLA)	1 (one) headquarters in Lavras and 9 academic units	29 graduate courses	11.500	Higher Education Transfer (External Transfer and Internal Change of Course) (HET); Obtaining a New Degree (OND);
Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG)	3 (three) University campuses: Pampulha and Saúde in Belo Horizonte and one campus in Montes Claro	91 graduate courses	33.956	Transfer; Obtaining a New Degree; Course Reopening; Continuing Studies; Rematriculation

Source: prepared by the author.

The purpose of the information presented is to provide a better understanding of the academic structure of the universities under study, as well as to provide information on the types of courses offered by each institution, since the study focused on just three similar types of courses, according to the data collected on the offer of remaining places, which were made available through the notices issued by the selected universities in Minas Gerais.

Finally, it should be noted that after a vast search on the scientific platforms Google Scholar, Scielo, Spell, and Periódicos Capes, among others, little was found similar to the initial research proposal. Given this, there are limitations and challenges in carrying out this research, due to the scarcity of scientific literature.

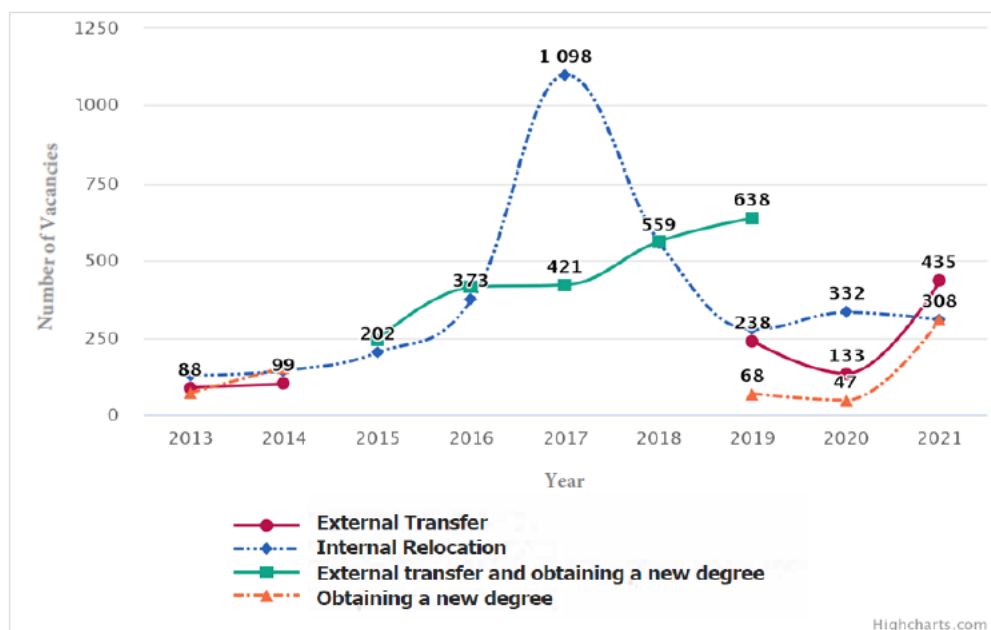
Evolution of the number of remaining vacancies (RVS) at the Federal Higher Education Institutions analyzed from 2010 to 2021

This section will present the data collected during the field research process. In this context, the notices of vacancies available on the websites of the institutions under study provided us with an understanding of their numerical evolution. The time frame covers eight to eleven years of offers. In addition, the analysis of the evolution of the number of RVs offered was based on the modalities common to the three institutions (internal transfer or re-option, external transfer, and obtaining a new degree, in the period of eight to eleven years).

Graph 1, referring to the Universidade Federal de Alfenas (UNIFAL-MG), shows that the number of RVs offered had an upward curve until 2016. From the following year, there is a drop in offers for subsequent years, stabilizing until 2019. Then, from 2020 onwards, there is a gradual increase in the supply of vacant places.

It should also be noted that in 2013 and 2014, vacancies were offered in three different ways, but as of 2015, vacancies for external transfer and obtaining a new degree were offered together in a single call for applications. As of 2019, the university will once again offer RVs in separate modalities. It is important to note that, in addition to these three modalities under study, UNIFAL-MG offers vacancies for five other modalities described in the previous chapter (Universidade Federal de Alfenas, 2013; 2016; 2019).

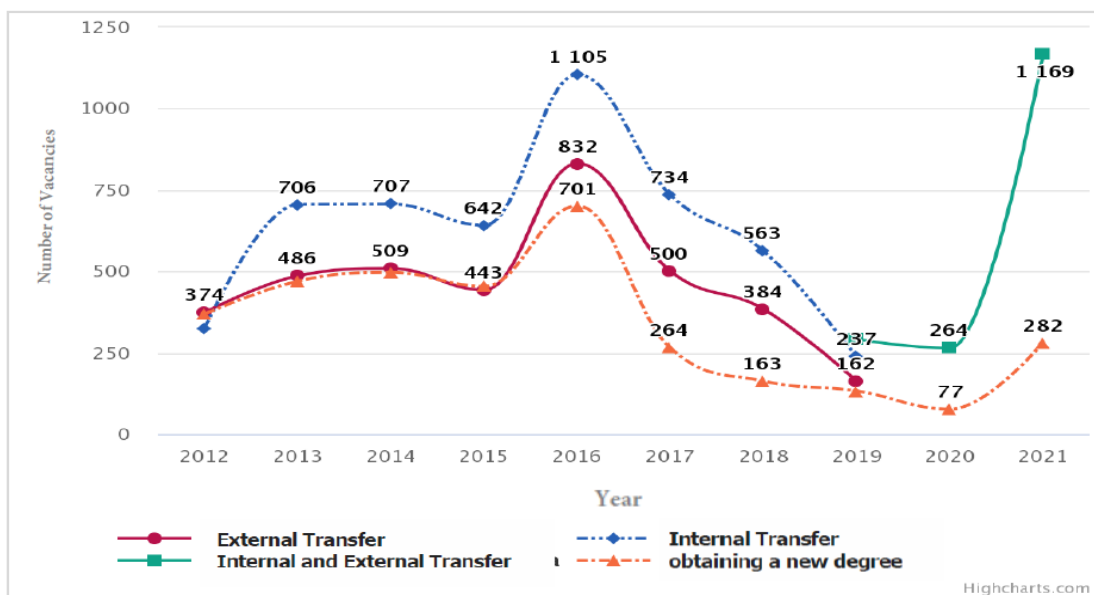
In summary, by analyzing Graph 1, it is possible to see that UNIFAL-MG, in the period from 2016 to 2017 and 2020, showed a significant increase in the offer of RVs. This growth may be the result of new admissions policies or the awareness of the university's higher education bodies, which have implemented resolutions to meet the academic community's pent-up demand. In 2017, there was a significant increase in the number of vacancies, mainly in the form of internal transfers, which suggests that there was a specific need that year to accommodate students who wanted to change courses within the institution. As of 2019, UNIFAL-MG is offering a larger number of places in the new degree and transfer categories, indicating a possible change in the university's internal policies, to democratize access or meet a growing demand from the community.

Graph 1. Evolution in the number of offers of remaining vacancies - UNIFAL-MG

Source: prepared by the author, based on data from DIPS (2023).

Graph 2, referring to UFLA, shows that there was a significant increase in internal transfers between 2012 and 2013. This increase was probably due to internal policies to meet the needs of students who needed or wanted to change to another course within the institution itself. In 2016, there was a significant increase in the number of places on offer in all the modalities under study. This was possibly due to changes in educational policies or a new management strategy at the university. However, from 2017 onwards, the number of places gradually decreased, a fact that can be explained by some factors, including better analysis of the initial offer of places on graduate courses, lack of physical space to receive transfer students, greater control by the colleges and higher bodies. However, from 2020 onwards, the supply is increasing again.

It is worth noting that, in 2019, UFLA changed the calls for applications for RVs, holding only one call for applications for both internal and external transfers, and this process was renamed course transfer (Universidade Federal de Lavras, 2018; 2019).

Graph 2. Evolution in the number of offers of remaining vacancies - UFLA

Source: prepared by the author, based on data from COPS-UFLA (2023a; 2023b).

Graph 3, referring to UFMG, shows that between 2010 and 2013, the number of remaining vacancies at the institution increased, indicating a policy of expanding opportunities for the academic community. However, in 2014 there was a significant drop. This was due to the reformulation of CEPE Resolution no. 07/2013, of November 5, 2013, according to article 3 (Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, 2013).

However, it can be seen that the effect of Article 3 of the aforementioned resolution harmed the number of vacancies on offer, as in 2013 there were 1,040 vacancies on offer, while in 2014 there were 151 vacancies on offer. According to documentary research, in the following year, the institution rectified what had happened in 2014, revoking CEPE Resolution 07/2013 of November 5, 2013. Therefore, as of September 23, 2014, UFMG implemented Resolution No. 13/2014, which amends Article 3 (Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, 2014).

From 2015 onwards, the number of places on offer followed an upward trend, as shown in Graph 3. However, in 2019 there was a sharp increase in the number of RVs on offer, and this is due to the implementation of the new Resolution no. 14/2018, of October 9, which modifies the calculation of vacancies. In the period from 2020 to 2021, a new reduction in the supply of places begins, a fact proven by the supply of places in this period (Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, 2018), probably caused by the impact of the pandemic.

In summary, the data suggests that fluctuations in the supply of RVs at UFMG were influenced by changes in the university's policies and regulations over the period analyzed. It is important to note that these changes may have had a significant impact on students'

accessibility to places, either positively or negatively, depending on the specific circumstances of each year.

Graph 3. Evolution in the number of offers for remaining vacancies - UFMG



Source: prepared by the author, based on data from COPEVE (2023) and DRCA (2023).

After analyzing Graphs 1, 2, and 3, it was found that the number of RVs offered at the three institutions varies according to each institution's calculation, with no constancy. At UNIFAL-MG, the greatest variation in the number of RVs on offer occurred in 2017, in the form of internal relocation. At UFLA, this offer was higher in 2016, in all three modalities, and, in 2021, in the internal and external transfer modalities. And at UFMG, the variation in supply occurred in 2013 and 2019. It can thus be seen that the variation in the number of places on offer at both UNIFAL-MG and UFMG is linked, respectively, to administrative adjustments and the implementation of new resolutions.

Furthermore, in all three institutions, it was observed that the internal reallocation or reoption modality has the highest number of vacancies on offer. This suggests that the institutions tend to guarantee the needs of students who want to change courses within the institution, thus avoiding macro-dropouts. It is important to note that internal transfer does not solve the problem of RVs, as this modality is characterized by students moving from one course to another at the same institution, which is a micro-dropout. Thus, the change of course by the student continues to generate vacancies in graduate courses.

Finally, it is important to note that factors related to university policies, such as changes in government policies for higher education, socio-economic events in the region, and other elements, may have influenced the trends observed in the data analyzed in Graphs 1, 2 and 3.

Challenges and new perspectives for the management of remaining vacancies among IFES from the point of view of federal university managers

This section aims to present the analysis and discussion of some of the data and information obtained in the interviews with the managers of federal higher education institutions.

The first major challenge for the administrative management of remaining vacancies is student evasion in higher education courses. As Santos *et al.* (2022) point out, dropout is a multidimensional issue and immediate and effective proposals are needed to mitigate it. Also contributing to this discussion, Lugão *et al.* (2010) argue that the democratization of access to higher education needs to be accompanied by adequate infrastructure at universities. The authors also point out that the increase in initial places on graduate courses must take into account the predictability of the professional field, using more studies on the job market to support the optimized implementation of new course proposals, avoiding, as far as possible, the early abandonment of students and, consequently, promoting an increase in remaining places in public higher education institutions.

From this perspective, we highlight the testimony of a manager who relates the existence of RVs to dropouts, regardless of university expansion programs. According to Manager VI, "[...] as soon as there is an expansion program for higher education or a unified system for more students to enter, there is a risk of dropouts, which is why it is important to offer RVs to cover dropouts".

According to De Lima and Zago (2018), this change of course within the same institution is a micro-dropout. As mentioned in the theoretical framework section by the author Gilioli (2016), micro-dropout and nano-dropout are forms of dropout that have less impact on higher education institutions. Manager I reports his perception of the student's choice of course, as well as confirming the increase in the number of dropouts in the first years of Sisú:

In the first annual edition, I didn't score enough for my desired course, but I did score enough for a second option. So I would enter the second option in the first semester, and in the second semester, my score would be enough. From then on, I would drop out of one course and take up one of the places on the other course. But that changed a lot. In those years, from the first semester to the second, we lost, let's say, 10 to 15% of our students from one semester to the next, a very significant loss. And what we noticed was that, by entering through Sisú, given the ease of a single exam, applied annually, the candidate could apply for places at any partner institution. What's more, the dropout rate has increased. I see reports of this not only here at the institution, but at various universities. 2014 and 2015 were disastrous years (Manager I).

Also in this sense, Manager IV corroborates the discussion concerning the fact that students from the metropolis opt for a place at a university in the interior due to their Enem score, but remain on the waiting list at other universities or wait for other vacancies closer to their city of origin. This migration between universities leaves a trail of vacant places, generating a cascade effect. In addition, Manager IV talks about micro-dropout, stating that some students enter a course and end up migrating to the course they want, but this migration by students ends up generating empty places and thus deprives other candidates with an interest in attending that course of opportunities.

In the same line of argument, Mello (2016), in his presentation 'The challenges of remaining and vacant places on IFES graduate courses', points to 'improving Sisu - a single option per course' as the first item.

For other authors, micro-dropouts can be considered a less mitigating form of evasion in federal higher education institutions. Manager VII contributes by reporting that "[...] this type of evasion can have an impact, but it minimizes school evasion in the sense that they don't leave the institution, so they remain our students". However, micro-dropouts create a vacancy on the course the student dropped out of.

It can be seen that the testimonies presented corroborate the discussion by Rosa and Santos (2021), who defend the idea that the increase in RVs and dropouts is related to candidates taking unwanted courses, according to the current Sisu format, as well as the lack of financial income on the part of students, which makes it impossible for them to stay in educational institutions far from their city of residence. This makes it necessary to expand student policies so that students can stay in other states.

In line with this, Schirmer and Tauchen (2019) point out the importance of student assistance and permanence policies, as well as institutional pedagogical support, so that students can bridge the gap between access and graduation.

Manager I attests that the student assistance and pedagogical policies, in addition to creating mechanisms for students to enter the university context, help students to take responsibility for their choices, factors that can make a fundamental contribution to minimizing school dropouts.

From this perspective, Manager V explains that many students suffer when they move away from their families, boyfriends, or cities, which is why the university has set up a program to welcome freshmen so that they can receive psychological support.

According to Schirmer and Tauchen (2019), universities need to have policies in place to monitor and follow up on students. Manager II discusses the issue, stressing the "[...] importance of monitoring students, in the sense that they need to be able to complete the course and, therefore, the need for a welcome, a leveling so that the student has a better foundation to continue in the graduate course and not drop out.".

Other challenges highlighted by administrators refer to the low demand for candidates for degree courses and interdisciplinary bachelor's degrees, and the excessive supply of initial places for certain courses. Studies carried out by the Special Commission for Studies on Dropout in Brazilian Public Universities (ANDIFES, 1996) point to the case of bachelor's degrees, demonstrating that there is a high tendency for dropout in these courses, mainly due to the job market and pay prospects, which is also a determining reason for the low demand for applicants about the supply of remaining places (Brasil, 1996b).

Similarly, they corroborate Carvalho *et al.* (2009), who point out that the IFES currently finds it very difficult to fill all their initial vacancies, which increases the idleness curve at universities. In this sense, manager III points out:

There may be some courses that have a lot of places left, and the number of initial places is too high for that course. Reduce the number of places on those courses that are in low demand, transferring them to another course that has a higher demand for places... Many courses have a lot of places left over because there is little demand for them and the number of initial places is high. And because demand is low, the student's performance in the selection process is lower. As a result, there are a lot of drop-outs, generating a lot of remaining places. Therefore, the initial places are not appropriate for that course. (MANAGER III).

Manager VI's account of the nominal standardization and simplification of competitions to fill remaining vacancies at IFES corroborates Cortelazzo (2018). The author points out that the process presented at the IFES is diverse, depending on the rules adopted by the universities, in addition to excessive bureaucracy on the part of some institutions.

Finally, the managers reported difficulties in filling the remaining vacancies in their entirety, sometimes due to a lack of infrastructure, corroborating Cortelazzo's (2018) thoughts on the importance of offering vacancies to the community.

On this issue, the managers report the difficulties faced in making places available on certain courses.

Yes, the university has made changes to the regulations to try to offer more places. And the Board of Directors negotiates with the coordinators to try to fine-tune them [the changes], but there's a difficulty with some courses in terms of offering that vacancy that's been left vacant, due to overcrowding, and that we already have some subjects in some laboratories. So we're in a tug-of-war with the Coordinator. Then another vacancy opens up... But it doesn't fit in my lab, which only holds 20, and the class is already full. And then we fine-tune it. (Manager IV).

[...] the question of greater awareness of the need to fill vacancies, awareness on the part of the course coordinators themselves, of believing even more. Look, we need to fill these vacancies, you know? As much as we put it in the coordinators' hands if they say "No, I don't want to offer them" and the coordinators' decision is sovereign, I'll put it to the collegiate body. (Manager VI).

That decision is sovereign. I think we have to get to the point where we say: "Guys, what we have is an institutional problem, and it needs to be resolved". So, one day

this decision won't be sovereign, otherwise, for example, the Dentistry course will always be able to say "no". This semester "no", the next semester also "no", next semester also "no", and another semester also "no", so what? (Manager VI).

Along these lines, the managers reaffirm the importance of effective actions to avoid an increase in the number of remaining vacancies at the IFES. The propositions reported by the managers are in line with the discussion proposed at the ANDIFES Seminar Efficiency and Quality in the Occupation of Student Vacancies in Federal Universities (ANDIFES, 2016), proposing policies to combat evasion and make better use of vacancies in graduate courses.

Manager VII explains how important it is for the institution that the student is aware of the internal procedures, to avoid problems with initial enrollment since failure to do so is considered by the institution to be a remaining vacancy for the future.

Still in this line of argument, Manager V corroborates that it is necessary to implement new student policies, as well as an assistance service for the whole of the most vulnerable student community, such as in the case of mothers and disabled students, who need transportation to go to university, among others. The manager considers it important to meet these needs to prevent these students from dropping out, leaving a trail of vacant places.

Another issue that the managers consider to be extremely important in reducing the number of vacancies at IFES is the cultural change in students' choice of courses. Researchers Souza, Sá, and Castro (2019) agree with this assessment, in the sense that most schools today are not concerned with students' vocations. The researchers point to the need to require psychological support and vocational tests in schools to help students choose their courses. In this way, the managers' comments corroborate Rosa and Santos' (2021) statements about the challenge of promoting a cultural change on the part of young people about their academic choices in higher education.

Furthermore, the managers mentioned the need to open up new modalities or transfer remaining vacancies to other courses, corroborating the researcher Cortelazzo (2018), who points out the importance of opening competitions to fill RVs.

In addition, the managers highlight the importance of the remaining vacancies for society and point to improvements in the administrative process, which is in line with the thinking of Rosa and Santos (2021), that public higher education institutions should take advantage of their infrastructure and human capacity to continue training students who will contribute to science, technology and innovation for the development of the country. The managers endorse the importance of offering remaining vacancies. Manager I corroborates the issue by reporting that "[...] making the remaining vacancies available is a duty of the university, in addition to the fact that an exercise should be carried out from time to time to see if the vacancies offered per course are consistent with the demand from society at that time."

Manager IV contributes to the discussion as follows:

The motivation is always not to leave the chair empty. This should be the main motivation. It doesn't make sense for us to have the investment and conditions to receive the student and have the seat empty, does it? (MANAGER IV).

And there's a chair there that could do with someone because the light is on, the professor is teaching..., but we have this issue. So if we have an empty seat, it doesn't make sense. And it doesn't make sense, because once the seat is empty, someone just has to come and sit down. Because this Enem score thing we're already overcoming a bit, almost everyone. (Manager IV).

The managers point out the importance of implementing new policies to help students stay in school, as well as emphasizing the need to maintain student assistance, especially for the vulnerable community, through transportation, housing, and other aid. The managers corroborate that it is of fundamental importance to offer psychological and pedagogical support for the process of training students in graduate courses. The need to create new ways of offering RVs is also highlighted by the managers, thus making it possible to offer more places to the community. Finally, they propose a selection process for RVs that is computerized, simple, and less bureaucratic throughout the academic year.

In summary, from the discussions held throughout this article, it can be seen that managers encounter numerous institutional challenges in the administrative management of remaining vacancies, one of which is the correlation between the increase in vacancies and evasion, regardless of university expansion programs. Even so, although expansion has increased access to universities, it has also contributed to the increase in remaining places, due to the current SISU format, especially as many candidates have started to choose their course not out of a legitimate interest in doing so, but based on the possibilities allowed by their ENEM score. This untimely choice, in turn, promotes migration between courses and universities, increasing the number of vacancies.

Other challenges encountered by managers when faced with not being able to offer the full number of places were: the lack of student policies to keep students in other states; the lack of infrastructure in physical spaces and laboratories to accommodate the high demand from students looking for courses in the health area; the difficulties in negotiating the allocation of places with the course collegiate bodies; the lack of standardization of the nomenclature relating to the equivalent types of offer between universities; the lack of interest from applicants about degree courses and interdisciplinary bachelor's degrees. In this context, it is also necessary to reflect on the number of initial places offered by these courses and to study new curricula and offers, in line with current market demand. Consequently, the creation of new places must meet the expectations of the community in general. After all, there is no point in having places on courses that are not attractive or that do not have the infrastructure to cater to their students - which can even lead to the misuse of public education resources.

Therefore, the reports presented confirm the theoretical findings about the existence of challenges to be overcome by administrative management, but there are also perspectives,

ideas, and alternatives envisioned by managers for the creation of new modalities and means of offering RVs that meet the expectations of the academic community.

Final considerations

It can be concluded that university managers are looking for various attempts and alternatives to achieve efficiency in terms of offering and filling remaining vacancies in their entirety, based on the mechanisms and legislation implemented. However, for several reasons mentioned throughout the study, the challenges to achieving effective management about filling these vacancies are becoming increasingly complex, which reinforces the importance of carrying out further field research to improve the provision of RVs for the community. Institutions need to review their limitations in relation to the excessive supply of places on some courses with low demand and the lack of remaining places on courses with high demand. They also need to consider whether the number of initial places on some courses meets the needs of the community or whether it would be better to transfer them to other courses. Universities also need to review their bureaucracy when it comes to offering places and combat the public service's resistance to limiting the number of places offered by some colleges. It is important to point out that the transparency of the numbers made available for RVs by public education institutions is a positive factor, so it is necessary to implement measures to ensure that these vacancies are filled effectively, avoiding the waste of public resources. In addition, the value of degree courses for the community must be restored, through extension actions and government programs

Given the above, there is an urgent need for new public policies on the part of the Ministry of Education, Andifes, university managers, and other competent social actors, to promote and guarantee improvements in the results relating to the filling of RVs. This could accelerate the pace towards democratizing access to higher education, as Brazil is a country with many young people who want to study at a public, free, and quality university. According to one of the Managers IV interviewed, "[...] it's not possible to have a light on, a chart, a professor and an empty chair [...]" because we have a country with many young people who would like to occupy a chair at university.

Finally, to fill in some of the gaps in the research, it is recommended that new studies be carried out that address the relevance of the impact of political factors and other elements that directly interfere in the management of remaining vacancies by Federal Higher Education Institutions (IFES). These factors include quota and affirmative action policies, the IFES expansion process, the implementation of support programs for the restructuring of federal universities, student aid and permanence programs, labor market dynamics, the emergence of new areas of study, social demands, budgetary investments in higher education by the federal government and the expansion of distance learning.

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