

Perceptions of Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences' undergraduates about the admission and adaptation process at University

Percepções de graduandos do curso de
Fonoaudiologia sobre o processo de ingresso
e adaptação à Universidade

Percepciones de los estudiantes
de Logopedia sobre el proceso de admisión
y adaptación em la Universidad

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Abstract

The purpose was to verify the perception about the process of admission and adaptation to the University of students of the first semester of the Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences Course in the years 2017 and 2018. For this, a semi-structured questionnaire was prepared with 10 dichotomous questions (yes/no) and 1 open question. Fifty students participated, mostly female (90%), and aged between 18 and 27 years. Of these, 38 (76%) had to leave their parents' homes, 17 (34%) had difficulties entering college, 29 (58%) had problems in the University adaptation process and 49 (98%) and 50 (100%) stated that students and teachers were receptive to their arrival, respectively. 11 (22%) claimed to have witnessed or been a victim of interpersonal violence/bullying and 48 (96%) noted changes in themselves after joining. 40 (90%) stated that the experience at the University was corresponding to the expectations prior to admission, 49 (98%) agreed that it is the University's duty to offer some help and/

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Authors' contributions:

MFA: followed all the stages of data collection and results analysis, as the writing of the article.

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or support during this process to students, while 48 (96%) stated that the educational institution was offering such assistance. As individuals' experiences of this process students highlighted the importance of support from the University (26%), the impact of the change of routine and daily support (16%), the organization of academic and curricular issues (14%) and the initial rituals as a freshman (2%). Students agreed that during the process of entering and adapting to the University there are academic and personal demands that may interfere with their University experience and that the Institution's support is essential to assist them during this period.

Keywords: Adaptation; Professional Formation; Universities; Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences.

Resumo

O objetivo foi verificar a percepção sobre o processo de ingresso e adaptação à Universidade de estudantes do primeiro semestre do Curso de Fonoaudiologia nos anos de 2017 e 2018. Para isso, foi elaborado um questionário semiestruturado com 10 questões dicotômicas (sim/não) e 1 questão aberta. Participaram 50 estudantes, majoritariamente do sexo feminino (90%) e com idade entre 18 e 27 anos. Destes, 38 (76%) tiveram que sair da casa dos pais, 17 (34%) apresentaram dificuldades ao ingressar na faculdade, 29 (58%) apresentaram problemas no processo de adaptação universitária e 49 (98%) e 50 (100%) afirmaram que os alunos e professores foram receptivos à sua chegada, respectivamente. 11 (22%) afirmaram ter presenciado ou sido vítimas de violência interpessoal/bullying e 48 (96%) notaram mudanças em si mesmos após o ingresso. 40 (90%) afirmaram que a experiência na Universidade estava correspondendo às expectativas anteriores ao ingresso, 49 (98%) concordaram que é um dever da Universidade oferecer algum tipo de ajuda e/ou apoio durante este processo, enquanto 48 (96%) afirmaram que a Instituição de ensino estava oferecendo tal auxílio. Como experiências individuais deste processo, os estudantes destacaram a importância do *apoio da Universidade* (26%), o *impacto da mudança de rotina e apoio da família* (16%), a *organização de questões acadêmicas e curriculares* (14%) e *rituais iniciais como calouro*(2%). Os estudantes concordaram que durante o processo de ingresso e adaptação à Universidade estão presentes demandas acadêmicas e pessoais que podem interferir em sua vivência universitária e que o apoio institucional é fundamental para auxiliá-los durante este período.

Palavras chave: Adaptação; Formação Profissional; Universidades; Fonoaudiologia.

Resumen

El objetivo fue comprobar la percepción sobre el proceso de ingreso y adaptación a la Universidad de estudiantes de la primera mitad del Curso de Fonoaudiología en los años 2017 y 2018. Para ello, se elaboró un cuestionario semi-estructurado con 10 preguntas dicotómicas (sí/no) y 1 pregunta abierta. Participaron 50 estudiantes, mayoritariamente mujeres (90%) y con edad entre 18 y 27 años. De ellos, 38 (76%) tuvieron que salir de la casa de los padres, 17 (34%) presentaron dificultades al ingresar a la facultad, 29 (58%) presentaron problemas en el proceso de adaptación universitaria y 49 (98%) y 50 (100%) afirmaron que los alumnos y profesores fueron receptivos a su llegada, respectivamente. 11 (22%) afirmaron haber presenciado o sido víctima de violencia interpersonal/bullying y 48 (96%) notaron cambios en sí mismo después de la entrada. 40 (90%) afirmaron que la experiencia en la Universidad estaba respondiendo a las expectativas anteriores al ingreso, 49 (98%) acordaron que es un deber de la Universidad ofrecer algún tipo de ayuda y/o apoyo durante este proceso, mientras que 48 (96%) afirmaron que la Institución Educativa estaba ofreciendo tal ayuda. Como experiencias individuales de este proceso, los estudiantes destacaron la importancia del apoyo de la Universidad (26%), el impacto del cambio de rutina y apoyo de la familia (16%), la organización de cuestiones académicas y curriculares (14%) y rituales iniciales como estudiante de primer año (2%). Los estudiantes acordaron que durante el proceso de ingreso y adaptación a la Universidad están presentes demandas académicas y personales que pueden interferir en su vivencia universitaria y que el apoyo institucional es fundamental para ayudar les durante este período.

Palabras clave: Adaptación; Formación profesional; Universidades; Fonoaudiología.

Introduction

Being admitted to a university is part of a transition process in the life of young people, with potentially negative outcomes in the adjustment to the university and loss during the academic development¹. To adapt to the university, they need to socialize in the new context, performing activities related to it and building relationships with that setting and the people that belong there.

Oftentimes, the students face difficulties in this process since most of them do not have the experience or ability to integrate into a new context². These problems appear to the students as barriers in the teaching/learning process. When they are solved or minimized, the student can adapt better to the university environment and academic training. Hence, they improve their achievements and make their personal, social, and professional development.

The higher education systems tend to have increasingly flexible teaching/learning methods, thus requiring students to be more autonomous and organized. This too is a great challenge to be faced when they finish high school and enroll in a university^{3,4}.

Another important factor to be analyzed is how acquainted the students are with the functioning of a higher education institution, its timetable, facilities, and the units and services it offers. The more unfamiliar the environment is to the student, the greater the risk factor for their adaptation, resulting in uncertainties regarding their future and concerns related to the university setting. Such a situation may lead to difficulties in their interaction and socialization with the other students, which are of great importance for them to consolidate their affective/emotional life and feel they belong in the university and identify themselves with the group of students with whom they will share their daily life⁵.

Besides these factors, the changes due to moving away from the family must be understood as a barrier with which the student must cope. On the one hand, leaving home may mean the person will gain more autonomy, freedom, and independence. On the other hand, though, it demands that the student develop skills related to time management, organization, and problem-solving. These aspects can trigger psychosocial factors, such as anxiety and distress⁶.

A study verified that troubled relationships between students and their peers (professors and other students) can cause a loss in their university admission and adaptation process, as well as in the teaching/learning process⁷. As yet, no publications have been found addressing this process exclusively among Speech-Language-Hearing Science students.

Thus, this study aimed to verify the Speech-Language-Hearing Science students' perception of the university admission and adaptation process.

Material and method

This study was submitted to and approved by the Ethics Committee of the Hospital das Clínicas da Faculdade de Medicina de Ribeirão Preto (HCFMRP-USP) under no. 2.101.876/2017. It is a descriptive exploratory study with a quantitative and qualitative approach.

The context of this research is the Faculdade de Medicina de Ribeirão Preto – Universidade de São Paulo (FMRP-USP) unit, founded in 1952. Of the seven programs that make up the institution, the study approached that of Speech-Language-Hearing Sciences, which was founded in 2003 and has 30 new students a year attending full-time courses.

All the students in the first year of the unit's Speech-Language-Hearing Sciences program in 2017 and 2018 were eligible for this study and were invited to participate. Those who accepted the invitation signed the informed consent form (ICF).

The study's exploratory character led to the development of a semi-structured instrument comprising 10 closed-ended questions – addressing issues and/or situations related to the university admission and adaptation process (leaving their parents' home, being welcomed by professors and senior students, coping with academic and curricular demands, facing bullying/interpersonal violence, and receiving support from the institution) – besides one open-ended question for the students to describe more openly their personal experience regarding this process. A pilot version was administered to a group of students that did not belong to the target audience (N = 10) to verify the average answering time, students' performance, and possible suggestions and/or doubts concerning the instrument.

In quantitative terms, the simple occurrence frequency of these categories was obtained, as well

as that of the answers to the closed-ended (yes/no) questions. In qualitative terms, the content analysis was used as a strategy to analyze the answers to the open-ended question. The content analysis helps identifying the recurrent themes or patterns in the different groups. It is a set of communication analysis techniques that uses systematic and objective procedures of message content description to obtain indicators that enable inferences to be made regarding the knowledge about the conditions in which these messages were produced/received⁸.

The answers reporting their personal experience regarding the university admission and adaptation process, obtained from this research's

open-ended question, were analyzed and distributed into the following categories: support from the university; changes in routine and importance of the family; academic and curricular issues; and lastly, initiation rituals.

Results

A total of 50 students participated in the study – 45 (90%) females and five (10%) males. Of these students, seven (14%) were under 18 years old, 32 (64%) were 18 to 20 years old, five (10%) were 21 to 22 years old, two (4%) were 23 to 24 years old, and four (8%) were over 24 years old (Table 1).

Table 1. Characterization of the participants

SEX	N	%
Females	45	90
Males	5	10
TOTAL	50	100
AGE	N	%
<18	7	14
18 to 20	5	64
21 to 22	2	10
23 to 24	4	4
>24	4	8
TOTAL	50	100

Concerning the questionnaire administered to the students, 38 (76%) had to leave their parents' house, 17 (34%) faced difficulties when they started college, and 29 (58%) presented problems in the university adaptation process. Respectively, 49 (98%) and 50 (100%) stated that other students and professors welcomed them. Also, 11 (22%) stated that they had witnessed or suffered bullying/interpersonal violence; 48 (96%) noticed they had changed after they started studying there; 40 (90%) said their experience in the university met their expectations; 49 (98%) agreed that it is the university's duty to provide the students with some sort of

help and/or support during this process, whereas 48 (96%) stated that the academic institution to which they belonged were offering such help (Table 2).

In the questionnaire's open-ended question, the students were asked to report aspects related to their personal experience in the university admission and adaptation process. The reports presented by the students were divided into categories, namely: support from the university (26%), changes in routine and importance of the family (16%), academic and curricular issues (14%), and initiation rituals (2%), as shown in Chart 1.



Table 2. Answers obtained in the closed-ended questions

QUESTION	N	%
Did you have to leave your home/move from your hometown?	38	76
Did you face difficulties when you arrived at the university?	17	34
Did you face difficulties in the adaptation process?	29	58
Did the other students welcome you?	49	98
Did the professors welcome you?	50	100
Have you witnessed or suffered bullying/interpersonal violence?	11	22
Have you noticed changes in yourself after you arrived?	48	96
Has the university experience lived up to your expectations?	40	90
Is it the university's duty to offer help and/or support during this process?	49	98
Does your university offer help and/or support in this process?	48	96

Chart 1. Categories obtained in the open-ended question

<p>Support from the university</p> <p><i>"Now, after getting help in the mentoring programs, it has become easier."</i></p> <p><i>"During my adaptation, the psychologist gave me great support."</i></p> <p><i>"It has been exponentially better than what I expected. Since the day I enrolled, I was really welcomed. The professors proved to be extremely receptive and welcoming."</i></p> <p><i>"It was an easy-going process, especially with the support given by the university, senior students, and classmates."</i></p> <p><i>"Everyone was receptive and supportive, offering help, answering questions, especially in mentoring."</i></p> <p><i>"In the admission process, I had some difficulty; but with the help from other students, friends, and professionals I managed to adapt well."</i></p> <p><i>"The university introduced the students for us to get acquainted with each other and get familiar with the places where we will work in the future."</i></p>	26%
<p>Changes in the routine and importance of the family</p> <p><i>"In the beginning, the admission process was complicated because I'm from another town. But the other students helped me a lot and made my adaptation easier."</i></p> <p><i>"Since I'm away from my family, it was psychologically difficult. Currently, I'm still getting adapted, but the college has been great and has been making it easier for me."</i></p> <p><i>"Since I'm from here, I have my family close to me, giving me support."</i></p> <p><i>"Adapting to a new town and a new routine is complicated, but it's a matter of getting used to it."</i></p> <p><i>"The adaptation was difficult because I had to leave my hometown and live away from my family."</i></p>	16%
<p>Academic and curricular issues</p> <p><i>"In the beginning, it was difficult because of all the activities we were expected to do, and all the dimensions the university encompasses, in content, events, and outreach."</i></p> <p><i>"I only had some hard time adapting to the courses."</i></p> <p><i>"Getting frustrated with the grades even having studied."</i></p> <p><i>"In the beginning, it was difficult to find time to study and everything else, but now I'm getting used to it."</i></p> <p><i>"The courses are complex and more difficult for those who have finished high school so many years ago."</i></p>	14%

Discussion

The characterization variables show that the students participating in the representative sample were mostly females, aged 18 to 27 years. The debate on age and gender of those who are admitted to higher education institutions is greatly important to follow up on the chronological evolution of the students in their transition to the university setting and the political issues related to the welcoming, inclusion, and gender equality.

Since the dawn of modern society, access to formal education has been fundamental in the struggle for women's policies and rights, as well as their presence in higher education^{9,10}. In the educational field, the 20th century brought to women unprecedented opportunities, such as schooling for young girls and the possibility of having a regulated professional activity. Women's advances in higher education have been significant. Nonetheless, the educational system was still based on differentiating females from males, and often opposing one to the other. Until then, the women's curricula were different and their admission to universities was made difficult^{11,12}.

Nowadays, studies point out that the presence of women is much stronger in humanities, social, and biological programs, in professional fields that involve the provision of care and well-being¹¹. The literature has also indicated that currently the academic population is mostly made up of women, from different social backgrounds¹².

Concerning the analysis of the students' expectations as they arrived at the university, according to their gender, the literature identifies that women have higher expectations regarding their adaptation to the university setting – e.g., the interpersonal relationships to be developed with other students and the professors, the inclusion in the university studying environments, and their academic performance. Most of the university women envisage that academic training will allow them to have the profession they aim for as they acquire theoretical and technical knowledge for the field in which they desire to work^{11,12}.

As for the discussion about the students' age when they start university – in the present study's sample, they were mostly 18 to 20 years old (64%) –, the literature points out that younger first-year students have expectations related to both their professional and personal development. They aim

to acquire skills that will add cultural character to their profile in the job market¹⁴. The literature points out also that there is an ever-present concern about the level of academic demands at university, to which they were not accustomed in high school, besides the additional requirements to the academic training¹⁵⁻¹⁶.

When asked about personal changes after arriving at the university, 96% of the students interviewed reported they had noticed changes in themselves as a result of the new context they were experiencing; also, for most of these students (80%), the university experience had been living up to their expectations. When investigating whether the university newcomers found it difficult to adapt, in an effort to understand how they deal with it, a study observed in its phenomenological design that most of the first-year students that had been interviewed did not report dissatisfaction or great adaptation difficulties¹⁷.

As for the support given by the institution during the students' admission and adaptation process, the present research verified that 58% had difficulties in the university adaptation process. It was the opinion of 98% of the sample that the university has the duty of offering help and/or support to the students throughout the process, whereas 94% reported that the university was offering the necessary help and/or support during their admission and adaptation process. Some studies¹⁷⁻¹⁹ point out that, regarding the institutional involvement in the students' admission and adaptation process, positive experiences were found in terms of the expectation of counting on the university's support.

The students highlighted as a strategy, in “support from the university”, the importance of the discussion groups and mentoring programs. These involved issues such as introducing the institution to get acquainted with it, the best places in the university for the various activities to be made on campus, psychological support from professionals, professors, and other students, with emphasis on positive aspects of their welcoming reception.

It was noticed, from the room given for the students to speak, that despite the initial academic and personal struggles common to the process of becoming a university student, they managed to overcome them mostly due to the support given by the institution through these resources. The results found agree with the previous literature, which points out how the professors' receptivity



and encouragement are important in the students' academic adaptation process, besides the student support programs specifically for this purpose¹⁸⁻²⁰.

In this institution, from the first week all first-year students are invited to participate in the mentoring program, which is when more experienced people (professors, supervisors, and senior students) give close attention to the newcomers, guiding and instructing them in the university life, based on their own experience, knowledge, and behavior. They meet from time to time, outside the obligatory timetable, to approach personal, educational, and professional issues with presentations, discussions, and debates^{22,23}.

Regarding the "changes in routine and importance of the family", the reports indicated difficulties common to the beginning of an undergraduate program. For instance, they mentioned being away from their families and hometowns, having to adapt not only to life in the university but also outside it, with the challenges of living in a new town or living by themselves. The students reported that the adaptation was made easier with help from the other students and, most of all, from relatives. Similar pieces of research have revealed that the students' experiences in their first year in undergraduate programs determine, on a large scale, their academic success. In this aspect, attention is called to the "relationship with the family" and "study methods" subscales. Also, the greatest difficulties or least positive perceptions of the academic adaptation process are experienced by the females^{1,6}.

In the "academic and curricular issues", the students emphasized great changes regarding the intensity of the studies in comparison with what they were used to, before they arrived at the university. The students' opinion is that there are too many activities and courses to fit into a short studying time, which hinders their academic performance and results in grades below the expected. Moreover, nervousness – caused by having to make presentations, and being exposed to and speaking in public – was also presented as an issue. Despite the difficulties pointed out, some participants proved to be adjusting well to the new study routine. A study aimed to establish relationships between self-efficacy in academic behaviors and academic experiences of undergraduate students from various Chilean universities. It was conducted with Psychology, Engineering, and Pedagogy students from Chilean universities, and verified a direct rela-

tionship between the academic self-efficacy levels and academic experience levels. With a quantitative, correlational, cross-sectional focus, the author analyzed a sample of 405 students, mostly women (51%), aged 18 to 29 years, from four southern Chilean universities. The assessment was linked to the institution and the program, inferring that the students face specific difficulties regarding their adjustment to curricular and institutional issues²⁴.

The literature presents some initiation rituals with first-year university students, such as participating in parties and/or events, wearing certain accessories and/or objects, and participating in hazing^{25,26}. In the "initiation rituals as a first-year student", a report given as an answer to the questionnaire was analyzed. Wearing an orange bandana is conventionally regarded as a means to identify this institution's Speech-Language-Hearing Sciences first-year students, a common practice in the university in other programs as well during the first semester of classes. The statement in question referred to initial difficulties to use the accessory, particularly with the demands from senior students for the first-year ones to wear it all the time they were on campus and in everyday off-campus activities, besides the negative consequences for those who did not follow such conduct

For the authors of the present research, the university must efficiently promote the development of academic and personal skills through curricular and extracurricular activities that prepare the students for an active professional and personal life. In this context, the university must have as their goal their students' success, besides the results obtained in formal curricular subjects. Hence, they can focus their attention on a more comprehensive perspective, in order to help the students to understand themselves and properly fit in the environments where they will work throughout their professional life.

Final considerations

Based on the perceptions of the Speech-Language-Hearing Sciences students, it was observed that the university admission and adaptation process can have negative consequences that deserve attention. Among these, attention is called to leaving the parents' house and being away from the family, the changes in routine, relationship dif-



facilities, and academic and/or curricular demands of the institution.

As a strategy, they also agreed that the university's support is essential in this process, with discussion groups and mentoring programs and/or student follow-up, involving not only the first-year students but also the professors and senior students.

In the Speech-Language-Hearing Sciences, specifically, no publications were found addressing this theme. Studies as this one help understand the university admission and adaptation process, enabling strategies to be developed and actions to be taken to deal with the consequences that might result from these experiences. Moreover, they provide a local diagnosis of the reality experienced by these students.

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APPENDIX 1

**Questionnaire on university admission and adaptation
(ALPES, FRANCISCO, and WOLF, 2017)**

We ask you, please, to answer the following questions, which are divided into two parts:

PART 1 – IDENTIFICATION

Sex:

Male Female

Age:

Under 18 18- 20 20- 22 22-24 Over 25

PARTE 2 – INGRESSO E ADAPTAÇÃO À UNIVERSIDADE

QUESTION	YES	NO
Did you have to leave home to go to university?		
Did you face difficulties when you arrived at the university?		
Did you face difficulties in the university adaptation process?		
Were the students from your program receptive when you arrived?		
Were the university professors and employees receptive when you arrived?		
Have you suffered or witnessed any situation of interpersonal violence ("bullying") or harassment in the university?		
After arriving at the university, have you noticed any changes in yourself?		
Have your experiences in the university lived up to your expectations?		
Is it the university's duty to offer help and/or support to the students during the admission and adaptation process?		
Has your university offered the necessary help and/or support during the admission and adaptation process?		

Describe your personal experience regarding the university admission and adaptation process":

