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**ESTRATÉGIAS DE PERMANÊNCIA NO ENSINO SUPERIOR PARA POVOS  
INDÍGENAS EM UMA UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL**

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**STRATEGIES FOR PERMANENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION FOR INDIGENOUS  
PEOPLE IN A FEDERAL UNIVERSITY**

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**ESTRATEGIAS DE PERMANENCIA EN LA EDUCACIÓN SUPERIOR PARA  
PUEBLOS INDÍGENAS EN UNA UNIVERSIDAD FEDERAL**

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**Resumo**

O presente estudo tem como objetivo estudar as estratégias de permanência de estudantes indígenas no ensino superior, em uma universidade federal, localizada no interior do Ceará. O intuito é estudar práticas que vão além do ingresso de indígenas no ensino superior brasileiro, não deixando de ressaltar sua importância principalmente no que se refere a possibilidade de inserção de grupos étnicos em espaços que foram privados historicamente de ter acesso. Trata-se de pesquisa descritiva e exploratória, com abordagem qualitativa, com dados coletados a partir de entrevistas com estudantes indígenas, professores e responsáveis pela gestão de políticas públicas destinadas a permanência desses estudantes na universidade. Os dados foram analisados a partir de conceitos referentes a inclusão e permanência encontrados na literatura em questão. No que concerne aos resultados da pesquisa, observou-se que as demandas destacadas pelos entrevistados vão além de fatores econômicos e também estão relacionadas a questões culturais e sociais.

**Palavras-chave:** Estudantes indígenas. Ensino superior brasileiro. Estratégias de permanência.

**Abstract**

This paper aims to study the strategies of permanence of indigenous students in higher education, at a federal university, located in Ceará countryside. It intends to study practices that go beyond the entry of indigenous people in Brazilian higher education, emphasizing the importance of insertion of ethnic groups in spaces that have historically been deprived of access. It is a descriptive and exploratory research, with a qualitative approach, with data collected from interviews with indigenous students, teachers and those responsible for the management of public policies looking forward to the permanence of these students at the university. The data were analyzed based on concepts related to

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inclusion and permanence found in the literature. The results show that the demands highlighted by the interviewees go beyond economic factors and are also related to cultural and social issues.

**Keywords:** Indigenous students. Brazilian higher education. Permanence strategies.

### Resumen

El presente estudio tiene como objetivo estudiar las estrategias de permanencia de los estudiantes indígenas en la educación superior, en una universidad federal, ubicada en el interior de Ceará. El objetivo es estudiar prácticas que van más allá de la entrada de los pueblos indígenas en la educación superior brasileña, al tiempo que enfatizan su importancia, especialmente con respecto a la posibilidad de inserción de grupos étnicos en espacios que históricamente han sido privados de acceso. Es una investigación descriptiva y exploratoria, con un enfoque cualitativo, con datos de entrevistas con estudiantes indígenas, maestros y los responsables de la gestión de políticas públicas dirigidas a la permanencia de estos estudiantes en la universidad. Los datos se analizaron en base a conceptos relacionados con la inclusión y la permanencia encontrados en la literatura en cuestión. Con respecto a los resultados de la investigación, se observó que las demandas destacadas por los entrevistados van más allá de los factores económicos pues están relacionadas con cuestiones culturales y sociales.

**Palavras-Clave:** Estudiantes indígenas. Educación superior brasileña. Estrategias de permanencia.

### INTRODUCTION

The social development has a fundamental role especially considering practices that improve the local development. The State's function consists in guaranteeing and maintaining the society fundamentals rights, both individual and collective ones.

The State should be the responsible for the creation of public policies, nevertheless it hadn't permitted effectively the guarantee and maintenance of fundamental rights of ethnic groups historically excluded, marginalized and discriminated in Brazilian society (DINIZ, 2010).

It is important to emphasize that the process of social invisibility of the Brazilian indigenous communities initiated with their exclusion. Once they were living in the borders of the society, it leads to conclude that some groups gradually had disappeared. It was a process reinforced by a lack of public policies which neglected their sociocultural and territorial existence. It is still possible to notice these groups

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invisibility. The IBGE census 2010, states that 896.917 Brazilian citizens recognize themselves as indigenous people. It represents 0,47% of the country's total population. It is a large number but they are not noticed by the entire population.

In the Brazilian universities, there are still few indigenous students, despite the fact that it has been intensifying in the late years. Bergamaschi, Doebber e Brito (2018) emphasize that the indigenous groups admission in higher education is due to the creation of specific courses such as Programa de Licenciatura Intercultural Indígena (Prolind). The aim of this course is to graduate indigenous students in a differentiated teacher's level considering their specificities. The authors also argued the Law 12.711/2012, known as the Quotas Law which establishes the attendance of indigenous students through the inter cultural degree courses or through the reserved and supplementary positions.

In one hand, these practices are not totally efficient, considering the search for higher education taken by indigenous students. On the other hand, they have a central function to demonstrate the insertion of ethnic groups ever present before, in places such as the Brazilian public universities.

Besides the importance of access policies, it is also necessary to reinforce the permanence ones. They are the actions that will permit indigenous people to continue in the educational environment.

In this way, this paper intends to study the strategies of permanence of indigenous students in higher education at a federal university, located in Ceará countryside.

There is a lack of scientific production whose main goal is the study of indigenous people in Brazilian higher education, more specifically subjects related to institutional entrance policies which may guarantee their permanence in the scholar environment. The university chosen for this study refers to the authors' proximity to the

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institution. In addition to this, the place has recently joined the indigenous people access policies and it already presents a great number of indigenous students from different communities spread in the State of Ceará.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The first step of this investigation consisted in reading academic papers related to the admission and permanence of indigenous students in the Brazilian higher education system. The keywords used were: “Affirmative actions for indigenous people”, “Admission of indigenous people in higher education”, “Indigenous people in university” and “Permanence of indigenous people in the Brazilian higher education system”. The focus was to select academic papers which studied the Brazilian university experiences in the implementation and execution of those policies, emphasizing the importance of the admission and permanence in these places. The selection considered also papers that reinforced the difficulties in maintaining these individuals in the scholar environment.

In addition, this study might be considered descriptive and exploratory, since it uses scholar materials available in different sources about this subject: books, scientific papers from distinguished journals and statistics tables, reports, official documents, laws, letters, films, photographs, paintings, tapestry, companies reports, television programs, etc (FONSECA, 2002, p. 32). They were the basis to build the theoretical references. The indigenous students of a federal university located in the state of Ceará in Brazil attended this research by answering questions related to the theme. Gil (2008, p. 28) states that the greatest objective of a descriptive and

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exploratory research is to describe the characteristics or phenomenon or to establish a relationship in variables of a given population.

There is a qualitative approach in this paper; therefore it can be noted in the analysis of the data collected in the interviewing process with indigenous students, university professors and institutional responsible for the management of public policies. The qualitative research does not care about the numerical representation; however, the focus is in the understanding and getting to know a social group, an organization (GERHARDT; SILVEIRA, 2009, p. 31).

The technique used in the interviews didn't consider any structure so that it could be broadened whenever necessary. Even though the interviewer didn't elaborate specific questions in advance, he or she could go in depth in some previous points, in the most convenient manner. Júnior and Júnior (2011, p.240) reinforce that “the informal interview is the least structured possible and it can be just distinguished by a conversation due to the fact that the goal is the data collection.

Therefore, the subject taken in the interviews focused in the following topics:

- The indigenous relationship with the university;
- The main difficulties faced;
- The indigenous people permanence in higher education.

The indigenous students were considered the principal group for the interviews, nevertheless, university professors and institutional representatives were also heard.

The sample of the students to be interviewed were chosen considering two members of each indigenous community as these communities can be similar and different at the same time. It was also consulted the students which represents the indigenous movement in the university.

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The interviews were all in-person and they were held in the university mentioned during four months: from February, 2018 to May, 2019. The scheduling of the meetings were supported by some digital platforms.

It is important to mention the difficulties found in the data collection. The total number of indigenous students attending the programs wasn't available. There was also a lack of information in the proceeding of these students and in which courses they belong to within the university. The admission of indigenous students is fairly recent; consequently, the sectors are organizing the quantitative data related to those students. So, a newly report entitled as Relatório de Estudantes Autodeclarados Indígenas (2019) was produced by the academic sector. It contains data that facilitated this study.

## **EDUCATIONAL PUBLIC POLICIES FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE**

According to Secchi (2013), the concept of public policies consists in defining a guideline to face a problem which affects the collectivity. Souza (2007) simplifies the definition stating that it is a field of knowledge which puts the government in action and/or analyses its actions and proposes changes in the course of them. Therefore, the Public Administration, in its collective problem solving, assumes the mission of reducing social inequalities.

The educational process and its knowledge production influences directly the society's quality of life from the basic to higher levels of education. Even though there is an increase in educational investment in the last years in Brazil, there is still a delay when compared to other countries. The knowledge, the capacity of processing

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and selecting information, the positive attitude towards life and creativity constitute the basis for outstanding economies (MELLO, 1991).

In order to decrease the inequalities, the compensatory policies may permit some social groups to access public and private spaces. This can be the guarantee of equal opportunities and treatment. In addition, these policies, such as quotas, enable the inclusion of marginalized groups over the history. Lima (2007) states that indigenous people demand their spots in higher education to acquire new knowledge so that they can attend places where it is possible to think against the hegemonic system.

The Brazilian indigenous communities had been included in the governmental agenda of public policies on account of the indigenous movement struggle. The movement strives to guarantee the fundamental rights considering socio environmental and humanities matters.

The importance of the existing affirmative actions for the admission of indigenous groups in higher education has to be reinforced. Once they didn't exist, these people would have to attend the traditional process of selection taken by the public universities. They would have to attend the Sistema de Seleção Unificada (Sisu) or the specific selection systems adopted by each university. Therefore, the universities wouldn't present a significant number of indigenous students in their board of students as their insertion has been always neglected. Estácio (2015) highlights that the affirmative actions are a set of actions and orientations which may protect the minorities not only from the discrimination taken but also from the discrimination rooted in society. Estácio (2015, p.10) reinforces that:

Such actions shall not be exclusively welfare policies, but also they should be thought as State policies with the objective of guaranteeing and strengthening the African descendants, the disabled, indigenous and *quilombola* students academic path. It reinforces the idea that the implementation of a quotas system has to be aligned to permanence programs and projects in higher

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education. This is not all about just guaranteeing a spot, moreover it is necessary to give them conditions to go through the entire course with great material and symbolic permanence (ESTÁCIO, 2015, p.10).

Although part of the society criticizes greatly the compensatory policies, it is important to emphasize that it can be justified by the material equality. It means that some groups should be treated uneven due to the fact that they are in uneven conditions in the proportion of their inequalities.

There is an article in the Federal Law which guarantees the access to education without restrictions, even if there are groups with different practices. Ferri and Bagnato (2018, p.25) state the need to create strategies that will lead to the fulfillment of the constitutional aspects of the law, as it is related to human rights. Education is considered an essential need.

The affirmative actions are considered an advance in the education gaps for the admission of indigenous people in higher education, however, as Santos (2009) expresses, they have to cross the main goal. It must consider other actions or policies that permit their permanence. Estácio (2015) also emphasizes that the affirmative actions are not only spots reservation for marginalized groups, but also the inclusion of other policies that will make it possible to redistribute compensatory policies.

In this way, it is necessary to understand the concept and the basic conditions to guarantee the permanence of indigenous students in higher education. Estácio (2015) states that the idea of permanence has a conception of time, that is chronological and another one that is symbolic which permits the dialogue existence, the exchange of experiences and the transformation of all and of each one. The concept of permanence goes beyond the sense of extension in time in a way that individuals may create an integration with space and with other people within it.



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The permanence of indigenous students in higher education is related to many factors which directly or indirectly affect the relationship within the academic environment. Santos (2009) divides these factors into two groups: one that refers to material matters and the other to symbolic ones. The first group considers that students need financial resources to feed themselves, to come and go, to buy materials etc. The other group refers to pedagogical support and self-esteem enhancement, what is known as symbolic permanence.

The socioeconomic vulnerability faced by the indigenous communities doesn't let the students have the basic conditions to keep themselves at the university. There are lots of expenditures. In addition to this, there is their scholar schedule and the lack of employment which results in a situation where they can not apply for a job to support these expenditures. On the other hand, when they find a job position, they give up university total environment, neglecting their symbolic permanence (SANTOS, 2009, p.73). Therefore, to continue the studies, these students count on university assistance, considering their permanence.

An example of university assistance is the Plano Nacional de Assistência Estudantil (Pnaes), established by the decree nº 7.234, of July 19, 2010. It supports the permanence of low income students which attend the graduation courses in federal institutions in higher education. The plan aims to offer equal opportunities in order to improve the academic performance and to reduce repetition and evasion of students. Bergamaschi, Doebber e Brito (2018) report that even if Pnaes does not directly refers in its document the assistance to indigenous students, the plan has its importance because of its possibility of creating strategies that will maintain the students in these institutions.

Another official support for indigenous and *quilombolas* students in socioeconomic vulnerability situation is the Programa Bolsa Permanência. According

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to the Education Ministry, the program is a public policy focused on the concession of financial support. It may contribute to the permanence and the achievement of the diploma. The students can also attend scholarships related to research, teaching, extension and internships available at the university.

The financial difficult is not the only question. There are other gaps such as the feeling of an outsider. When they are in the academic environment, they are taken apart of their families so, if they do not have a initial socialization, they may be isolated. The adaptation process will be compromised.

The indigenous students presence in higher education is recent but it has been intensified due to the state policies insertion. However, this is still an elitist environment. Santos (2012) expresses that the Brazilian higher education, tended to be for the fortunate ones within the years, resulting in exclusion of some social groups.

Santos (2009) makes it evident that a society establishes its way to classify individuals and the main characteristics necessary for them to take part in each social group considered. It results in the exclusion, discrimination and it isolates those who couldn't get socialized within the given environment and its members, blocking their symbolic permanence (ESTÁCIO, 2015, p.10).

Santos (2009) also suggests the decrease of asymmetries to revert the situation. It has to be considered the higher education going countryside, once the qualified education has been mainly present in the capital cities in Brazil.

The next step is to assume the attribution of including the indigenous students in the university daily life in order to create an academic atmosphere more plural and democratic. Bergamaschi, Doebber and Brito (2018, p.34) reinforce that the permanence of indigenous students in the universities is a great challenge for these institutions. It is difficult to observe the dialogue and an open attitude towards the

knowledge of these people. The first step to take is the effective and affective listening of indigenous knowledge to go into the academic multiculturalism.

Paladino (2013) expresses that the university must follow indigenous students in a qualified manner in pedagogical, cultural and political matters. This is what will guarantee their permanence.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

According to the data available in the university academic sector, there are 88 indigenous students registered in the undergraduate programs. Those students are spread through the following courses: Public Administration, Agronomy, Anthropology, Biological Sciences, Nursing, Energy Engineering, History, Humanities, Language and Literature (Portuguese), Pedagogy, Chemistry, International Relations and Sociology.

**Table 1** – Distribution of indigenous students through the undergraduate programs

Undergraduate program	Number of students registered	%
Humanities	16	18,2
Agronomy	15	17,0
Pedagogy	13	14,8
Public Administration	10	11,4
History	7	8,0
Language and Literature	6	6,8
Biological Sciences	5	5,7
Anthropology	4	4,5
Nursing	4	4,5
Chemistry	3	3,4

Sociology	3	3,4
Energy Engineering	1	1,1
International Relations	1	1,1
<b>Total</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Elaborated by the authors (2019)

It is important to highlight that these students attended the university through traditional admission processes, known as Sistema de Seleção Unificada (Sisu) and the Sistema de Seleção Utilizando os Resultados do Enem (SiSURE). Besides these processes, there were also specific internal selection programs offered by some courses when there were available spots.

This fact reinforces the need of a specific policy as discussed by Estácio (2015), due to the fact that if all the positions were completed within these processes, Sisu and SiSURE, there wouldn't last spots for the indigenous groups as it was considered in specific processes mentioned before. Lima (2007) also emphasizes the inclusion of subjects taken by the indigenous movement.

**Table 2** - Status of the indigenous students in between 2011.2 and 2019.1 semesters

Situation	Number of students	%
Active	88	77,2
Canceled	13	11,4
Interrupted	1	0,9
Concluded	12	10,5
<b>Total</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Elaborated by the authors (2019)

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In regard to the indigenous students evasion, the data show that in between 2011.2 and 2019.1 semesters, fourteen students abandoned the courses (Table 2). This basic finding is relevant, considering the total number of students registered previously. If these students had not given up the undergraduate programs, there would be more graduated students taking part of the labor society.

This delivers significant findings in order to claim for the existence of specific sectors in the university which can follow the students throughout the course and to understand the reasons why any student abandons it. Moreover, the demands presented influence not only the indigenous permanence in higher education but also in the period these students take to conclude the entire graduation. It is to say that even if the students keep on studying, they will demand more time in the institution.

When discussing the permanence of these fellows in the university, it was observed that despite the fact that most of the students come from different indigenous communities, their demands are quite common.

All the interviewed students informed that they need the university's financial aid to continue the studies. When they get any resource, it is to pay expenses related to housing, feed and transport. This result now provides evidences for what Santos (2009) describes. The material factors such as to feed, to come and go and expenditures with materials are a part of the maintenance of the students in the university.

The indigenous students in socioeconomic vulnerability can apply for financial resources offered in the university, the Programa de Assistência Estudantil. They can also apply for the Programa Bolsa Permanência. Nevertheless, the students interviewed emphasized the difficult to access such policies. They argue that there is a huge demand of documents that make the process slow-paced and unattractive.

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Some students report that it may take at least six months to start receiving any financial resource.

It is worth discussing that the delay in accessing the programs is the main reason for the students not to keep on the studies. They give clear stress that the first months in the university environment are the most difficult, because they don't have any income, considering their family financial fragility. It means that without the financial aid, they are not able to please their basic needs. The students also made it evident the difficult in finding a job opportunity where they could conciliate with studies. It performs well considering what Santos (2009) suggests that the students may not enjoy the plain life at the university in order to work. This choice has consequences and it will be noticed later on in their performance in life.

From this standpoint, in order to satisfy basic needs, the indigenous students create alternative practices to attend their demands. They can be exemplified by the aid came from other students and teachers to support them in housing and feeding.

These appears to be the case of creating a previous registration of these coming students before the beginning of the program. It could accelerate their inclusion in the financial programs when they would do their enrollment in the course. Currently, the students can apply for the financial benefit just when the term starts and they should wait for a public notice issue. The interviewed students enhance that the public notice opening does not match the entrance period, especially the public notice related to Programa Bolsa Permanência.

The distance between the indigenous community and the university is also seen as a factor that influences the permanence. They are taken apart of their families and they have to face a new routine. Santos (2009) remembers that these are the

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symbolic aspects. In other words, it is necessary that the scholar environment would be attractive to the indigenous students.

Most of the students can't go back home everyday, so they need to live near the university or in the neighborhood around. They chose some municipalities that are not so close to the university because there are cheaper housing rental prices. The implication of these findings strengthens that there should exist other policies to contemplate what Santos (2009) infers about practices to reduce inequalities.

Not only the indigenous students, but most of the students go back home on holidays or weekends. The students that are able to come and go to their places everyday, report tiredness, lack of security and high expenditures in the transport. Just the students living very close to the university can come and go to their houses everyday.

In relation to the educational performance within the institution, the students reported difficulties in carrying on the activities, due to the little familiarity with the subjects studied in the courses. They emphasize that the teachers do not adopt a distinct model of teaching which may consider their differences. Moreover, there are few subjects that count on the presence of a student monitor to help with the activities. They have to study by themselves, and it results in the non comprehension of the topics seen during the classes.

The lack of a pedagogical supervision may contribute to the non permanence of these students, once they face difficulties in following up the model incorporated by the universities and may get uninterested anymore. It differs from the model attended in the basic schooling. In this sense, Paladino (2013) expresses the need of monitoring the students in a qualified way in pedagogical, cultural and political aspects, in order to let them continue in higher education.

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In addition to the pedagogical support, there should be a discussion about new teaching practices for ethnic groups involving the teachers. The idea is to come to better results in the learning process of indigenous students.

To stress these findings, its worth agreeing with the existence of specific pedagogical support programs for indigenous students for their academic support and they must be implemented with the purpose of diminishing inequalities in learning. The interviewed students referred to a support that goes beyond the classroom, looking for their difficulties and limitations.

Another issue that may lead to the abandon of the course is their feeling of non taking part of the scholar environment. They justify that despite the existence of groups within the university that care about their socialization, the first months are still a challenge and they feel homesick.

This feeling of not belonging to the academic environment is explained by Santos (2012) as an exclusion that has historically taken when the Brazilian higher education focused its policy in the more favored groups. As a solution, Estácio (2015) suggests the inequalities of power should be decreased or preferably eliminated.

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

This study aimed to understand which are the main factors related to the indigenous students permanence in Brazilian higher education through the indigenous people perspectives. The analysis considered the students attending a public federal university in Ceará countryside.

The compensatory policies have an important role as they insert ethnic groups that were historically taken apart from any process. In the Brazilian higher education case, if there were no access policies, the indigenous communities would



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not be able to enter these institutions. This article shows that without the specific policies for indigenous students, most of them could not be at the university.

Although the access policies prominence and its results, the conclusion is the non sufficiency of these policies to guarantee effectively the indigenous students permanence. It means that it is not enough to create entrance policies, but it is also necessary other policies that will permit the permanence and the conclusion of the entire studies in a qualified manner.

The recent presence of indigenous students in higher education and the university focus has an important role in promoting a qualified education supported by teaching, research and extension. The main challenge, considering many, is to insert ethnic groups with distinct demands and characteristics. The university must search for permanence policies that will look on their specificities.

The factors that may determine their permanence can be highlighted as financial, cultural, local and social ones. In general, if the students do not attend a permanence support, they would leave the university.

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