

REASONS FOR ENTERING THE *STRICTO SENSU* POSTGRADUATE COURSE – A SURVEY WITH STUDENTS FROM A PUBLIC HEI

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ABSTRACT

In the world managed by labor relations, choosing to take a course after completing graduation envisions possible perspectives in professional terms. Based on Historical-Cultural Psychology, the research presented here aimed to know the reasons reported by *stricto sensu* graduate students at the Federal University of Uberlândia (UFU) for entering the course. It is a quali-quantitative study, which involved the application of an online questionnaire, through the *SurveyMonkey Platform*, answered by 374 students from 36 master's and doctoral programs. Data analysis was carried out using the *Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS)* and content analysis and allowed the organization of responses into four axes of analysis: a) Academic career; b) Professional qualification for insertion in the labor market and salary increase; c) Deepening knowledge / Research, d) Personal issues / Lack of options. The learning and development processes need to be understood and mediated by pedagogical actions intentionally designed and aimed at this public at the university. In addition, the reason that generates meaning for pursuing a master's or doctorate needs to be linked to the social meaning of postgraduate studies in an expanded way, aiming at training and human emancipation.

Keywords: students; graduate studies; historical-cultural psychology; reason

Motivos para el ingreso en el posgrado *stricto sensu* – una investigación con estudiantes de una IES pública

RESUMEN

En el mundo dirigido por las relaciones de trabajo, la elección por realizar un curso tras la conclusión de la graduación vislumbra posibles perspectivas en términos profesionales. Fundamentada en la Psicología Histórico-cultural, la investigación aquí presentada tuvo como objetivo conocer los motivos relatados por estudiantes de posgrado *stricto sensu* de la Universidad Federal de Uberlândia (UFU) para el ingreso en el curso. De carácter cuali-cuanti, el estudio abarcó aplicación de cuestionario *on-line*, por la Plataforma *SurveyMonkey*, contestado por 374 estudiantes de 36 programas de maestría y doctorado. El análisis de datos se realizó por intermedio del *Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS)* y del análisis de contenido y propició la organización de las respuestas en cuatro ejes de análisis: a) Carrera académica; b) Cualificación profesional para inserción en el mercado laboral y aumento salarial; c) Profundizar conocimientos / Pesquisa, d) Cuestiones personales/ Falta de opción. Los procesos de aprendizaje y desarrollo necesitan ser comprendidos y mediados por acciones pedagógicas intencionalmente elaboradas y destinadas a ese público en la universidad. Además de eso, el motivo generador de sentido para la realización de un curso de maestría o doctorado necesita vincularse al significado social del posgrado de modo ampliado, visando la formación y a la emancipación humana.

Palabras clave: estudiantes; posgrado *stricto sensu*; psicología histórico-cultural; psicología escolar; motivo

Motivos para o ingresso na pós-graduação *stricto sensu* – uma pesquisa com estudantes de uma IES pública

RESUMO

No mundo gerido pelas relações de trabalho, a escolha por realizar um curso após a conclusão da graduação vislumbra possíveis perspectivas em termos profissionais. Fundamentada na Psicologia Histórico-Cultural, a pesquisa aqui

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apresentada teve como objetivo conhecer os motivos relatados por estudantes de pós-graduação *stricto sensu* da Universidade Federal de Uberlândia (UFU) para o ingresso no curso. De caráter quali-quantitativo, o estudo envolveu aplicação de questionário *on-line*, pela Plataforma *SurveyMonkey*, respondido por 374 estudantes de 36 programas de mestrado e doutorado. A análise de dados foi realizada por meio do *Statistical Package for Social Sciences* (SPSS) e da análise de conteúdo e propiciou a organização das respostas em quatro eixos de análise: a) Carreira acadêmica; b) Qualificação profissional para inserção no mercado de trabalho e aumento salarial; c) Aprofundar conhecimentos / Pesquisa; d) Questões pessoais/ Falta de opção. Os processos de aprendizagem e desenvolvimento precisam ser compreendidos e mediados por ações pedagógicas intencionalmente elaboradas e destinadas a esse público na universidade. Além disso, o motivo gerador de sentido para a realização de um mestrado ou doutorado precisa vincular-se ao significado social da pós-graduação de modo ampliado, visando à formação e à emancipação humana.

Palavras-chave: estudantes; pós-graduação; psicologia histórico-cultural; psicologia escolar; motivo

INTRODUCTION

“Determine, boy
Where will your postgraduate course be?”
(Gilberto Gil. Oriente)

What reasons lead a person to decide to take a *Stricto sensu* postgraduate course? As supervisors of master’s and doctoral courses, we frequently come across this issue, as students often seem to be unclear about their choice and/or the specificities of the *Stricto* and *Lato sensu*¹ postgraduate course. Difficulties of the most different types, relating to defining the theme and object of the research; engagement in research activities, guidance and classes; writing the dissertation or thesis; organization of time and interest in the course itself are some examples of situations that often lead us to ask the question above.

Let us remember, initially, that the option for this training also depends on the social and historical determinations that enable or not human development and its insertion in different workspaces, that is, this choice is never just individual and subjective. For this discussion, we bring the framework that supports us in this article, Historical-cultural Psychology, anchored in historical-dialectical materialism. In it, the psyche is understood “in its becoming and development, in its essential dependence on the way of life, which is determined by existing social relations and by the

¹ On the MEC page, we find the following definitions: “*Lato sensu* postgraduate courses comprise specialization programs and include courses designated as MBA (Master Business Administration). With a minimum duration of 360 hours, at the end of the course, the student will obtain a certificate, not a diploma. Furthermore, they are open to candidates who have graduated from Higher Education courses and who meet the requirements of educational institutions – Art. 44, III, Law No. 9,394/1996. *Stricto sensu* postgraduate courses comprise master’s and doctoral programs open to candidates who have graduated from Higher Education courses and who meet the requirements of educational institutions and the student selection notice (Art. 44, III, Law No. 9,394/1996). At the end of the course, the student will obtain a diploma.” Available: <http://portal.mec.gov.br/component/content/article?id=13072:qual-a-diferenca-entre-pos-graduacao-lato-sensu-e-stricto-sensu>. Access: 11 Jan. 2021

place that the considered individual occupies in these relations” (Leontiev, 1978, p. 89).

According to Historical-cultural Psychology, work is a universal condition for the humanization process and this Marxian category is appropriated by the aforementioned theory as “explanatory of the human psyche and expanded to the concept of activity”, which appears in the initial propositions of Vygotski (Asbahr, 2011, p. 27).

When approaching the development of children’s psyche, Leontiev (1991) states the need to analyze the development of activity and its elaboration in concrete life conditions; the analysis of the content of the activity in this development process allows us to understand the role of education, “operating precisely in its activity and in its attitude towards reality and therefore determining its psyche and its consciousness.” (p. 63). Each stage of psychic development is distinguished by a dominant and specific type of activity; the function of this is to configure the subject’s relation with their social conditions and the author names it as an activity

those processes that, realizing man’s relations with the world, satisfy a special need corresponding to him. [...] the processes psychologically characterized by what the process, as a whole, is directed to (its object), always coinciding with the objective that encourages the subject to carry out this activity, that is, the motive. (p. 68)

Leontiev clarifies this concept with the example of a student who, when preparing for an exam, reads a history textbook. How can we identify if it is a psychological process in terms of activity? We can only say this when we know what this process represents for the student. If a colleague says that the book will not pass the test, the student may abandon the book immediately, continue reading or, reluctantly, regret it and give up. In the last two situations, the content of the book was the reason, as it instigated reading; some need to understand, know that content. The first situation shows us that the reason for reading was just to pass the exam and not the book itself.

Emotions and feelings also make up psychological experiences constitutive of the activity, according to

Leontiev (1991). Such experiences are guided “by the object, direction and result of the activity of which they are part” (p. 68). Another important item in this concept is the distinction between action and activity. Action is a process whose motive does not match its objective, but is related to the activity in which it participates. In the example above, when the student continues reading because this is essential for passing the exam, reading is an action. On the other hand, there is a peculiar relation between action and activity; this can become that when there is a change in the motive and this process is precisely “the concrete psychological basis on which changes in the main activity occur and, consequently, transitions from one stage of development to the other” (p. 69).

Finding the main activity of each stage is necessary to understand the development of the psyche. Leontiev (1991) lists three criteria that define the main activity, which are not just quantitative indices: 1) in its form, other types of activities appear and, within it, these are differentiated; 2) psychic processes are formed or reorganized in it, 3) the main changes in personality depend on the main activity. The change from one activity to another needs to be understood considering the historical and social conditions experienced by the subject; the contradictions generated between their potential and their way of life instigate the reorganization of activity and a change in their psychic development. As Asbahr (2011, p. 51) writes, “[the] transformation the objective of action into motive of activity, that is, the transformation of action into activity, expresses the way in which all activities and new relations of the subject arise with reality.”

And how do motives change? Leontiev (1991) presents the genesis of these and divides them into understandable reasons and effective reasons. Using the same example as the aforementioned student, Asbahr (2011) explains that, in the first situation,

the motive was external to the student’s activity and functioned only as a stimulus for the activity, that is, it was only understood by the student. In the second case, the reason for the activity was really effective and generated a personal meaning for reading the book. The reason stopped being external, the teacher’s requirement, and started to have a prominent role in the subject’s life. (p. 52).

For Tuleski and Eidt (2016), reasons that are only understandable will stimulate immediate action, while truly effective reasons will provoke a certain meaning about the related process. A change of motive happens when the result of the action is more significant than the reason that generated it. From this perspective, the role of the teacher is highlighted in transforming merely comprehensible motives into effective ones, through the conscious organization of the pedagogical process.

The operation is another element concerning the structure of the activity and concerns the way of carrying out an action, the indispensable content of every action, but which is not identified with it.

One and the same action can be carried out through different operations, and conversely, different actions can be carried out through the same operations. This is explained by the fact that while an action is determined by its end, operations depend on the conditions under which this end is given. (Leontiev, 1978, pp. 303-304).

Human activity is carried out through actions, its fundamental elements, but what changes in that “is the character of the relationships that link the objectives of the actions and the reasons for the activity” (Asbahr & Souza, 2014, p. 171). The reason for university teaching, for example, may be the same: to enable students to learn; however, the objectives of a teacher’s actions, regarding what to do to achieve this reason, may vary.

In the case of the student, the study activity is made up of different actions that need to be carried out by the student, which involves everything from organizing the material and space for studying, to the ways in which one studies. This activity must be linked to a reason – in this case, learning – and all corresponding actions require organization in order to articulate themselves with the needs that fostered the reason for the respective activity and thus produce a certain personal meaning for the student.

In order to analyze the attribution of personal meaning to some activity, we need to find both the reasons for it and the actions that correspond to it (Asbahr & Souza, 2014). Vygotsky (1934/1991) thus differentiates meaning and meaning²:

The meaning of a word is the sum of all the psychological facts that it awakens in our consciousness. Thus, meaning is always a dynamic, fluid, complex formation, which has several zones of varying stability. Meaning is just one of those zones of meaning that the word acquires in the context of some course and, moreover, a more stable, uniform and exact area. (p. 465).

Social meanings have a more stable and objective character³ (Leontiev, 1978); They are elaborated in the sphere of society and constitute the subject’s consciousness as he or she appropriates them, through personal meaning. Therefore, the more opportunities to access social meanings, the more personal meanings will

² It is not within the scope and space of this article to go deeper into these concepts. We recommend reading Asbahr (2011, 2014), Asbahr and Souza (2014) and Longarezzi and Franco (2013).

³ And they can also transform and develop throughout human life.

be created, which entails greater development of their psyche (Pessoa, 2018).

Given the personality of meaning and its articulation with subjective experiences, it is directly related to the reason that drives the subject to the object to which their actions are directed (Longarezi & Franco, 2013). "Therefore, in order to understand the personal meaning made about something, it is necessary to understand the **reasons** for the activity, and how the social meaning was appropriated in order to form subjective and personal meanings in the subject's consciousness" (Pessoa, 2018, p. 61, emphasis by the author).

The research presented here is located within this theoretical discussion. Making a parallel with the choice of a *Stricto sensu* postgraduate course, we can think about the social meaning of postgraduate studies, which, for teachers and researchers, notably those in Higher Education, is close to that defined by CAPES, aimed at training for teaching and research at the university level. With this aim, we sought to understand the reasons reported by *stricto sensu* postgraduate students at the Federal University of Uberlândia (UFU) for enrolling in the course.

Furthermore, in a survey pertinent to *Stricto sensu* postgraduate students in Brazil between 2010 and 2020 in seven databases: SciELO, Lilacs, Electronic Journals of Psychology (PePSIC), BVS-Psi, Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (BDTD), Google Scholar and the CAPES/MEC Journal Portal, we found only 65 related to the scope of the research. Of these, only six from the field of Psychology and none from School and Educational Psychology. We therefore note a large gap on the topic of this article, which reiterates the need for the discussion presented here.

Stricto sensu postgraduate studies

Teaching in Higher Education, in accordance with the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDB) (Brazil, 1996), provides that preparation for teaching at this level must take place in postgraduate studies, mostly in master's and doctorate degree. In this sense, let us remember that the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (Capes) aims to "ensure the existence of specialized personnel in sufficient quantity and quality to meet the needs of public and private enterprises aimed at the development of the country" (Brazil, 2008, s/p).

According to Capes itself, based on Opinion CES/CFE 977, of 1965, which established⁴ it, the need to offer "high quality" master's and doctorate degrees is justified by three objectives:

1. training of competent teachers who can meet the demand in basic and higher education,

ensuring, at the same time, constant improvement in quality;

2. stimulate the development of scientific research through the adequate preparation of researchers;
3. ensure the effective training of technicians and intellectual workers of the highest standard to meet the needs of national development in all sectors. (s/p).

Resolution No. 7, of December 11, 2017, of the National Education Council, establishes standards for the operation of *Stricto sensu* postgraduate courses and makes the following assumptions in its article 2:

§ 1 The evaluation and recognition of the courses provided for in the *caput* must take into account the following requirements:

I - qualified professional training for advanced, innovative and transformative practices in work processes, aiming to meet the social, economic and organizational demands of the different sectors of the economy;

II - the transfer of knowledge to society in order to meet social and economic demands, with a view to national, regional and local development;

III - the contribution to the aggregation of knowledge in order to boost productivity in companies, public and private organizations;

IV - attention to innovation processes and procedures, whether in industrial activities generating products or in the organization of public or private services. (CNE, 2017).

The National Postgraduate Plan (PNPG) 2011-2020, prepared by Capes in 2010, aimed to

define new guidelines, strategies and goals to continue and advance the proposals for postgraduate and research policy in Brazil⁵ and focuses on the country's strategic development in different areas of knowledge, anchored in science, recognized as an essential partner. The document, which is quite broad, highlights the "need for a new contract between science and society, work aimed at ensuring that scientific progress is oriented towards resolving the real problems that affect humanity. (Capes, 2010, p. 157).

However, to establish this relation between society and science, it is necessary that citizens have

a scientific training and culture that allows them to understand and manage everyday life, face and

⁴ Available at: <http://capes.gov.br/avaliacao/sobre-a-avaliacao/mestrado-e-doutorado-o-que-sao> Access: 6 Mar. 2019

⁵ https://uab.capes.gov.br/images/stories/download/PNPG_Miolo_V2.pdf

integrate critically and autonomously into that life. [...] are able to make decisions based about their own knowledge. Nowadays, the exercise of citizenship requires knowledge of science, as well as the methodologies adopted by scientists in their research. (Capes, 2010, 157).

Now, if the majority of this public can only have access to scientific knowledge at school, teacher training is absolutely vital for this to happen. Such training through the National Postgraduate System (SNPG) is also highlighted in the document, proposing the development of studies relevant to it, as well as “the establishment of minimum quality standards, the management of schools and the adequacy of curricula taking into account in view of the needs and interests of adolescents and young people subject to Basic Education, notably High School.” (p. 21).

The PNPG also defends the need to expand our scientific base, which, in turn, needs to be made available to all Brazilian people, especially young people and children. For Historical-cultural Psychology, the schooling process is fundamental for the development of the psyche, as it is through it that the appropriation of scientific concepts occurs, which, in turn, play an essential role in the humanization of subjects. In his theory, Vygotski (1993) addressed two forms of concepts: spontaneous ones, elaborated in practical everyday experience, and scientific ones, constituted through formal education, which also enables the development of higher psychic functions (such as perception, attention and memory, among others) with the help and participation of the adult – here, the teacher.

Adequate understanding of different scientific concepts is not only related to socioeconomic conditions, but to the possibility of each person, in their schooling process, having effective opportunities to appropriate them and develop their higher psychological functions (Vygotski, 1993). Furthermore, according to the author, the formation of scientific concepts allows for higher levels of awareness.

The document highlights the need to improve the quality of Basic Education and, therefore, the qualification of teachers to practice the profession is also a focus of the PNPG; thus, the conception of training to be adopted in undergraduate courses is mentioned and, in addition to the many difficulties presented, there are still

a problem with our ability to teach. It seems necessary that we expand studies about new methodologies, about new knowledge developed and research carried out so that these results can reach our classrooms. We consider that postgraduate courses are qualified for this highlighted task because they are located in universities, places that are, par excellence,

focused on carrying out teacher training. (Capes, 2010, p. 171).

Interestingly, we read in the PNPG that “The core of postgraduate studies is research” (p. 18). In any case, given the relevance of scientific knowledge for the development of subjects and the need for careful training of teachers so that they can carry out their profession in the best possible way, masters and doctors must be trained with the conditions not only to practice adequately perform their role, but also so that they can continue to perform it, whether in teaching, research or both activities. However, despite the role of postgraduate studies for the country’s development, duly highlighted by the PNPG, we did not find any mention of training, strictly speaking, for teaching and research.

We report here an excerpt from a larger study, which had as its object the psychological suffering of *stricto sensu* postgraduate students at the Federal University of Uberlândia (UFU). The questionnaire used in this study began with the following sentence to be completed: “1. I am doing a *stricto sensu* postgraduate course (Masters or Doctorate) because ...”. Thus, considering the question which we began this article, we found that there was enough empirical material to analyze and thus reorganize the objective: to know the reasons reported by *stricto sensu* postgraduate students at UFU for joining the course.

METHOD

This is survey-type research, of a quantitative and qualitative nature and involved the application of an online questionnaire, via the *Survey Monkey* Platform, with *stricto sensu* postgraduate students (masters and doctorate) at the Federal University of Uberlândia. The questionnaire consisted of 100 questions, which covered sociodemographic data, interest in postgraduate studies, conditions for staying and completing the course. We chose to incorporate many questions from the questionnaire applied to students in the fifth edition of the Survey of the Socioeconomic Profile of Students at Federal Universities⁶, carried out by the Associação Nacional dos Dirigentes das Instituições Federais de Ensino Superior (Andifes) and by the Fórum Nacional de Pró-Reitores de Assuntos Estudantis (Fonaprace) (2018), as we consider them relevant to the study. According to Andifes, “[t]he data is fundamental as it generates support for public policies and diagnosis of how the university student body is constituted, with the purpose of also assisting with student assistance demands”.⁷

Initially, the research was presented at a meeting of

⁶ The following instruments were also included: Perceived Stress Scale, Worry Scale (cf. Rezende, 2016) and Difficulties Indicator, the answers to which will not be analyzed in this article.

⁷ <http://www.andifes.org.br/v-pesquisa-perfil-graduando-encerra-fase-de-coleta-de-dados/>

the UFU Research and Postgraduate Council, with the request for collaboration from all coordinators present there. Next, an email was sent to all Coordination of the 53 *stricto sensu* Postgraduate Programs (master and doctorate) inviting students who wished to participate in the study after being duly informed of the objective of the research and signing the Term of Consent Free and Informed Entity (TCLE). This time, it was, as can be seen, a non-probabilistic (non-random) convenience sample. The choice of the questionnaire as an instrument is due to some factors, such as the large number of potential study participants; questions related to the research objective and necessary to achieve it; access to students, since many do not live in Uberlândia and, also, the possibility of being responded to at the time they deemed most appropriate.

Data analysis was carried out on two fronts: the first, using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), which organized the data in a quantitative modality. The second involved responses to open questions and was based on content analysis, inspired by Bardin (2010).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The axes of analysis presented were grouped in a didactic way, but not mutually exclusive. Due to the limitations of the questionnaire, we focused on writing open responses that allowed us to perform a content analysis (Bardin, 2010). Currently, UFU has 53 *stricto sensu* postgraduate programs, spread across eight campuses: in Uberlândia – Physical Education *Campus*, Glória *Campus*, Santa Mônica *Campus* and Umarama *Campus*; in Monte Carmelo – Monte Carmelo *Campus*; in Patos de Minas – *Campus* Patos de Minas and in Ituiutaba – Pontal *Campus*. In order to serve the population around five thousand postgraduate students, the University has 1100 professors working in this segment, that is, more than half of the teaching staff.

The questionnaire was answered by 426 students, however, as not all answers were complete, for the analysis, 374 fully completed questionnaires were considered. They were all read in full, even the incomplete ones, as the majority (96.71%) answered the first question, the focus of this article. Given the instrument breadth and the information prepared in the research, here we will make an excerpt presenting data related to the reason and the students' profile, referring to other information from the questionnaire when there is a need to deepen or complement the analysis.

Students' profile

In relation to age group, 44.7% of respondents are between 25 and 29 years old and 20.10% are between 30 and 34 years old; thus, the majority of students (64.8%) are between 25 and 34 years old. The youngest is 21 years old and the oldest is 59 years old. 65.2% are single and regarding race/color, 65.8% declared themselves white. 66.6% said they had some religion; 27.8% are

Catholic and 13.9% Spiritist.

We asked, in the questionnaire, whether the student had any **work beyond the postgraduate course**. This question highlights the student profession (Coulon, 2008) as a work activity, something not always understood in academia and beyond. Of the students, 54.3% have another job besides *stricto sensu* postgraduate studies, with 45.5% working in the course area.

As for family income, 23.3% of students (87) have an income between 1.5 and 3 minimum wages; 19.8% (74) between 3 and 4.5 minimum wages. The monthly per capita family income of 43.8% of the participants is between half and one and a half minimum wages; 24.3% reported that two people, including the respondent, live off the family group's monthly income; 22.7% include three people and 21.4% four. Of the respondents, 46.06% are the main supporters of their family group; 25.5% are supported by a father or stepfather; 79.9% do not have children.

Regarding the educational level of the father or the person who fulfilled/fulfills this role, we have 31.3% with high school education and 25.1% with elementary education (1st to 5th year or 1st to 4th grade). Only 14.4% of parents have Higher Education. As for the mother or person who fulfilled/fulfills this role, 29.1% have high school education and 20.1% higher education.

We consider it very important to know the Academic History of master's and doctoral students, in order to understand their academic trajectory until postgraduate studies. In this sense, 54.4% of students completed their entire high school education in public schools; 34.7% did so in private schools. The majority, 78.90%, studied at a public HEI.

The 374 respondents came from 55 different undergraduate courses. Of them, 27 (7.2%) have degrees in Geography, 20 (5.3%) in Accounting and 20 in Psychology.⁸ 49.5% of students are pursuing an academic master's degree; adding to those of the professional master's degree, we have 58.9% of master's students and 41.2% of doctoral students. Of the 53 Postgraduate Programs at UFU, students from 36 PPGs (67.92%) responded. All major areas of CNPq knowledge were covered in the responses, with the majority of these coming from Applied Social Sciences (21.7%) and Human Sciences (19.5%). A little more than half of the students are not recipients of the Program (55.6%); Among those who are, Capes is the most cited development agency (27.5%).

Regarding the stage, they were at in the course, 37.2% were taking the credits, 26.5% had already

⁸ All eight major Areas of Knowledge, according to the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), are present, namely: Exact and Earth Sciences; Linguistics, Letters and Arts; Biological Sciences; Agricultural Sciences; Human Sciences; Health Sciences; Applied Social Sciences and Engineering.

completed the credits and were preparing the research and 25.7% were nearing completion. We can consider that we have participants in all phases of a *stricto sensu* postgraduate course, that is, from the beginning to the end of the process. Of the respondents, 65.2% give themselves a grade between 6 and 8 (on a scale of zero to ten), considering their average academic performance in the current course.

Regarding which difficulties significantly interfere with their life or academic context, with the possibility of selecting more than one option, emotional problems appear first, being cited by 45.2%. In second place are financial difficulties, mentioned by 38.2% of participants. Lack of discipline/study habit (33.7%), excessive student work load (32.4%), excessive working hours (31.8%) and social/interpersonal relationships (31.0%) appear with very similar percentages.

Concerning the emotional difficulties that have interfered with academic life in the last twelve months (with the possibility of selecting more than one option), anxiety was reported by 81.3% of students. Discouragement, lack of desire to do things by 61.5%; procrastination by 59.1%; insomnia or significant sleep changes were mentioned by 51.6% and a feeling of helplessness/desperation/hopelessness by 46%. Other important problems are present, such as panic and suicidal thoughts, for example. 96.8% of people report emotional difficulties affecting their academic performance.

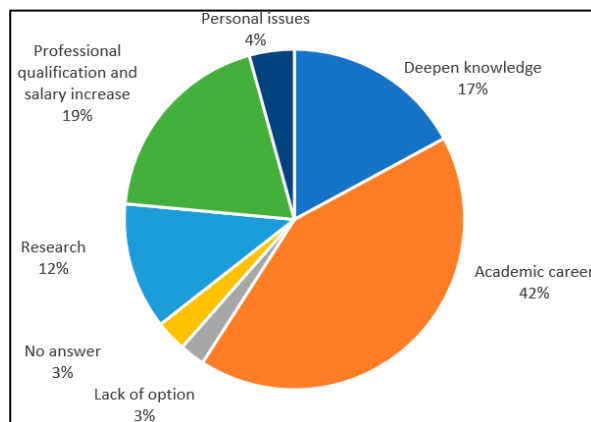
The 59.1% of students have already thought about abandoning the course. Regarding the reasons for this, the level of demand is cited by 24.1% and 21.7% mention difficulty in reconciling work and study. Among the other reasons cited for abandoning the course, in the open question, 13 relate to personal issues and 23 to academic issues.

Reasons to attend *stricto sensu* postgraduate studies

In order to understand the reasons for undertaking the *stricto sensu* postgraduate course, initially, the students were faced with the following sentence to be completed: "1. I'm doing postgraduate studies *stricto sensu* (Master or Doctorate) because..." We grouped the responses into analysis axes, considering the most recurrent and frequent themes, and the objective of the study: a) Academic career; b) Professional qualification for entry into the job market and salary increase; c) Deepen knowledge/Research, d) Personal issues/Lack of options. In each of them, we include some excerpts from the questionnaires that we consider to be illustrative of our organization.

The main reason for entering postgraduate studies is the academic career, corresponding to 42% of responses; professional qualification for entry into the job market and salary increase was the reason chosen by 19%; 17% cited an interest in deepening their knowledge

and research was mentioned by 12%, as we can see in Graphic 1.



Graphic 1 - Reasons for Students to Study Postgraduate Studies at UFU - 2020.

a) Academic career – here are answers that mention interest in an academic career, in future entry or in improving it, as well as those that involve simultaneous interest in teaching and research. The explicit interest in an **academic career**, combining research and teaching activities, is the main reason for undertaking postgraduate studies, whether upon entry, for those who aspire to do so, or upon improvement, for those who are already teachers and was mentioned by 158 students, that is, 42%, of which 28% are female. Let's look at some excerpts from the questionnaires:

"I want to become a teacher and I really like science and research"

"Because I love research and teaching and because I intend to pursue an academic career."

However, there are also doubts in this regard:

"I've been asking myself the same question every month since I started my doctorate. Each season I think of a different answer. But I believe that I started doing it because of the possibility of creating new academic opportunities, with competitions in the teaching area. Furthermore, at the time I signed up I was in a phase without professional prospects, growth and changes. I saw a possibility in the doctorate."

"Improve knowledge and **perhaps** pursue teaching" (emphasis added)

The main objectives of *stricto sensu* Postgraduate courses in our country are the training of researchers and teachers. From this perspective, the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (Capes) aims to "ensure the existence of specialized personnel in sufficient quantity and quality to meet the needs of public and private enterprises aimed at the development of the country" (Brazil, 2008). Thus, considering the

primary functions of *stricto sensu* postgraduate studies, that is, training for teaching and research, this can be considered the reason that most justifies completing a Master's and/or Doctorate.

In this case, we can consider that the social meaning of postgraduate studies coincides with the personal meaning attributed to it, which is fundamental so that the activity is not alienated. The unity between education and learning (Leontiev, 1978) drives the development of students' consciousness and, consequently, of their internal structure – social meanings and personal meanings. However, not any educational process can promote the appropriation of knowledge and instigate learning and development processes (Vigotskii, 1991). Thus, for learning to be a process that effectively encourages the maximum potential of human development, the appropriation of social meanings related to education within the scope of postgraduate studies must occur from an intentionally grounded study activity and, furthermore, systematized and supported by solid scientific knowledge.

The activity carried out in *stricto sensu* postgraduate studies needs to be guided by the personal meaning elaborated on it, configuring the ways in which actions are organized and the development of the activity itself. Training for teaching and research needs to enable students to construct meanings in order to form truly effective reasons (Leontiev, 1978) and coherent with the purposes of this level of education.

Paraphrasing Pessoa (2018), we can only understand how the activity developed in postgraduate studies is elaborated and conducted if we know the personal meanings attributed to it.

We also analyze that teaching activity is crossed by determinants that go beyond professional training, but we agree with Leontiev (1975/1978, 1975/1983) in arguing that, even with alienating working conditions, the more awareness the teacher has of the reasons that lead you to your teaching activity, more humanizing actions will be possible and the closer the personal meaning will be built in line with the motive. (Pessoa, 2018, p. 213).

Although the author refers to the training of Basic Education teachers, her considerations also apply to the training offered in Master's and Doctorate programs. In this way, the personal meaning of the activity configured by the *stricto sensu* postgraduate course needs to be linked to the reasons and social meanings of research and teaching activities. In the case of the students in the present study, the fact that the majority have an academic career as the reason for completing postgraduate studies is fundamental to the learning processes of research and teaching, and the HEI must ensure that this cohesion remain throughout the training.

b) Professional qualification for entry into the job market and salary increase – in this axis, we combine the answers that deal with a curricular increase, in the sense of greater qualification for the job market and, sometimes, with a view to a salary increase. We have both respondents who do not yet work, and those who have no intention of pursuing a teaching career and, still, have interest in salary gains resulting from qualification, as shown by some responses: “*I want to qualify for possible job opportunities that are better than those for a graduate*”; “*I seek to improve my work and intellectual capabilities and have a financial return*” and “*salary improvement*”

After the military coup of 1964, according to Rossato (2005) “education began to be seen as the main form of social ascension within the individual's reach; through it, the individual could better prepare themselves and potentially fight for better wages and better living conditions” (p. 146). Higher Education and, in the specific case of our participants, *stricto sensu* postgraduate studies, are also considered as opportunities to “*Increase the chances of having a job in the future*” and “*achieve better salaries in professional career*”, for example. The social meaning of this professional specialization, then, is related to social mobility through study, based on economic issues, almost a redemption. Formal education is an important element for access to better professions and higher income levels, although it does not always guarantee jobs with minimally decent conditions.

Of course, we do not deny the importance of these issues for human life, but we question the fact that the training made possible by *stricto sensu* postgraduate studies is based exclusively on this aspect for some students. The salary improvement, in fact, is not even guaranteed for all people with such qualifications, as we have heard reports from colleagues and graduates about teachers' dismissals with higher degrees⁹ in the private education system or, even, of recent PhD, who do not formalize this title in their career for fear of dismissal. Lima (2014) researched the phenomenon of discrimination due to high academic qualifications which, in addition to reiterating this process, contributed to the precariousness of teaching work.

In our country, unemployment is a real and genuine concern for a large part of the population, including people with jobs. The Pesquisa Nacional por Amostragem de Domicílios (PNAD), a continuous study carried out by IBGE (2019), shows that, in the 1st quarter of 2019¹⁰, the

⁹ https://www.correiobraziliense.com.br/app/noticia/economia/2017/12/06/internas_economia,645905/estacio-confirma-demissao-de-1-2-mil-professores-em-todo-o-pais.shtml. <https://www.sinproesc.org.br/demissao-em-massa-de-mestres-e-doutores/>

¹⁰ The moment when we close the responses to the online questionnaire.

unemployment rate¹¹ in Brazil was assessed at 12.7%, totaling 1.4 million of Brazilian women with completed higher education without employment. Also according to the research, the groups of people aged 18 to 24 (31.8%) and 25 to 39 years old (34.7%) presented a higher level than other age groups and is the age range of our participants, who are in another condition. In the 2nd quarter of 2019, the majority of unemployed people were adults aged 25 to 39 (34.2%). Proportionally, unemployment operates more vigorously on people with a lower level of formal education; furthermore, according to the Synthesis of Social Indicators published by IBGE in 2018, the average hourly income from work of employed people in 2017 was R\$7.20 for those with no education or incomplete primary education, R\$8.20 with primary complete or incomplete secondary education, R\$10.30 for people with complete secondary or incomplete higher education and R\$28.90 for those with complete higher education (IBGE, 2018).

We see, therefore, that although the national salary average is higher for people with higher education, when it comes to university teaching, this scenario may be different. Thus, if postgraduate training is not a guarantee of better occupations and salaries and, furthermore, if the personal meaning of the activity related to the master's or doctorate is not in line with the reason and social meaning of the activity, it can be characterized as alienated. In this way, we can even think about actions and operations that indicate such a split and can compromise the completion of the process, such as difficulties in engaging and/or defining the research project, writing the dissertation or thesis, procrastination of academic tasks, etc.

Even if there is a consonance between motives and actions, we see a gap between the meaning attributed to academic activity, linked to professional qualification for insertion into the job market and salary increase, and the social meaning of this activity, which, obviously, also involves an improvement probably (but not inevitably, as we have seen) followed by a financial improvement. We see, in this movement of attributing meanings related to postgraduate studies, a rupture between the reasons for the activity and the actions, as well as between the social meanings and the meanings related to the reason for admission, which can contribute, according to Asbahr (2014, p. 169), for the "disintegration of consciousness".

c) Deepen knowledge/Research – here, we group

¹¹ "People without work in that week are classified as unemployed in the reference week and who took some effective action to obtain it in the reference period of 30 days, and who were available to take it up in the reference week [...] [and people] who did not take effective action to achieve it within the 30-day reference period because they had already achieved it and would start it in less than four months after the last day of the reference week. (IBGE, 2020, s/p) https://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/visualizacao/periodicos/2421/pnact_2019_1tri.pdf

both answers that refer to the interest in expanding, seeking, deepening knowledge in general, more *strictu sensu*, one could say, as well as those concerning only the interest in research unrelated to teaching and, therefore, sometimes from the university. Let's look at some examples:

"For the search for better knowledge of the area."

"to acquire more in-depth knowledge about a topic that I find really challenging these days."

"I'm passionate about research"

"I want to be an excellent researcher"

"I believe I have a curious profile that fits into the scientific research environment"

Here, again we can find a disharmony between the personal meaning of the search for knowledge and research and the social meanings linked to these two activities in the university context. The deepening of knowledge, in a strict sense, is one of the functions of postgraduate studies *stricto sensu*, but not the only or the main one. Furthermore, it is not a search for knowledge in a generic way, but knowledge focused on a specific object, that is, that necessary for the development of the dissertation or thesis.

Obviously, we are not referring here to pragmatic knowledge or "interesting" reading, in the words of Ribeiro (1999, p. 93), as it is essential that the student immerses himself in the postgraduate university experience and dialogues with texts and classes that will fuel and provoke your thinking, research, and writing. This process even involves taking courses in other academic units and HEIs, if possible¹². Thus, the student will have access to studies that will not always be incorporated into their dissertation or thesis, but that will help them at different moments in this process, in addition to contributing to expanding their universe, literally.

Therefore, we want to highlight that the interest in deepening knowledge does not justify the search for a master's or doctorate, as this can be covered by a *lato sensu* course, such as a specialization, improvement or residency. On the other hand, some of the respondents are already teachers and want to improve their career and deepen their knowledge; Therefore, they consider enrolling in postgraduate studies to be an interesting option in this regard.

Regarding the reason for attending *stricto sensu* postgraduate studies is to carry out research, we highlight the relevant role of Scientific Initiation during graduation to awaken and encourage such interest, as one respondent wrote: "*I became interested in the academic area during my studies. of a scientific initiation*

¹² This is the case of the sandwich period, for example, but not only.

and the TCC". Research is an essential part of training at this level of education, but the student will also be faced with training focused on teaching, an essential item to avoid the "surprise" reported by Lima, Lacerda de Oliveira, Sousa Araújo and Miranda (2014, p. 50) in which "the subject sleeps as an accountant (or lawyer, doctor, engineer, graduates in general) and wakes up as a teacher".

The public university is anchored in the famous teaching, research and extension tripod. Let us remember, however, that there are professors who are excellent researchers, but who do not commit themselves with the same intensity or dedication to teaching; there are also professors who focus on teaching and do not carry out research. In both cases, we believe that the academic experience throughout the *stricto sensu* postgraduate course can encourage the subject to develop a genuine interest in the activity relegated to the background, so to speak. In this sense, a consonance can be constituted between senses and meanings, so that there is an integration between the contents – objective and subjective – of the activity (Leontiev, 1093); personal meanings, when reflecting the motives engendered by the life relationships of master's and doctoral students, can find objective meanings that appropriately incorporate them (Leontiev, 1978).

d) Personal issues/Lack of options – this axis comprises responses in which subjective aspects prevail, including in the sense of personal fulfillment and responses in which it is clear that the *stricto sensu* postgraduate course originated due to the lack of other options and opportunities and, also, indecision both in the period after graduation and at other moments in life.

"It's a promise I made to my father and it's a personal achievement. It was something I would have liked to have started sooner, but my father's death caused me a huge emotional shock, so I had to postpone this dream."

"I've always liked the area in which I'm currently studying my master's degree, plus I didn't want to go back to live with my mother, so I started studying for my master's degree straight after I finished college."

"Inertia carried me here."

"It was the only option at the time. There were no job openings in my area."

Although these responses together make up 4% and 3%, respectively, they are the ones that most point to the alienation between personal meanings and social meanings for carrying out *stricto sensu* postgraduate studies, as they do not even address elements such as teaching, research, knowledge, qualification or salary, as in the previous ones. Such a mismatch between motive and activity (Leontiev, 1983), anchored only in personal

needs, can be reflected in countless disagreements between the student, his/her research, the relationship with the supervisor, the completion of the master's or doctorate etc.

Paraphrasing Pessoa (2018), we reiterate the importance of the personal sense for choosing *stricto sensu* postgraduate studies "to relate to the motives and social meanings of teaching [and research] activity, of humanizing subjects through the appropriation of historically produced elaborations" (p. 214). The reason for undertaking a master's or doctorate degree should not be notably related to the student's personal (dis)satisfaction, but it must be linked to the social meaning of postgraduate studies "in an expanded way: formation of subjects, human emancipation and transformation of reality" (p. 214).

It is also necessary to point out that, from the point of view of Historical-cultural Psychology and School and Educational Psychology, there may be changes in the reasons why students enter the master's or doctorate degree, considering some elements, such as the disciplines offered also aimed at teaching research and teaching; the choice of advisors whose reasons for this activity also integrate senses and meanings; monitoring by course coordination, even if sporadic, classes that enter the Program; the proposition of events that integrate students and teachers, etc.

As Leontiev (1978) writes, the opposition between social meaning and personal meaning characterizes alienated activity. In this way, we understand that researching the reasons for entering *stricto sensu* postgraduate studies allows us to propose institutional activities so that the course generates meaning for the students who participate in it, who constitute themselves and dialectically constitute it. The concrete conditions to be offered in *stricto sensu* postgraduate studies must provide an educational process that is less alienating, despite the often dehumanizing situation for students and teachers.

From this perspective, we cannot fail to mention that the university teaching career is not always attractive in our country, due to salary devaluation, little recognition, pressure for publications by funding agencies, criteria for evaluating postgraduate programs (Tourinho & Palha, 2014) etc., something mentioned in some responses that showed concern in this regard, such as

"Until then, in Brazil, it was a way of life whose personal/social return in terms of achievement and recognition really pleased me (a scenario that is already changing without the future horizons planned today, under the current government)."

Finally, there are many questions regarding the dissociation between motives and ends, that is, between the objective content (meaning) and the subjective content (sense) of the activity carried out in master's

and doctoral courses, with an impact on the subjective constitution of the students.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

“El aprendizaje, los conocimientos que se adquieren, educan, y esto no se debe subestimar. Pero para que los conocimientos eduquen es preciso educar la actitud hacia los conocimientos. Esa es la esencia del carácter consciente del estudio” (Leontiev, 1983, p. 241).

In a world founded on work relations, the choice to take a course after completing your degree provides a glimpse into possible perspectives in professional terms. From this perspective, there were numerous aspects to be addressed in the analysis, but as we highlighted in this article the importance of learning teaching and research in *stricto sensu* postgraduate studies, we focused on the reasons for enrolling in the course, considering that more studies should be carried out about the topic, including with the participation of teachers and course coordinators. Furthermore, if there were also the possibility of interviews with a group of students, we would have more elements to deepen the analysis and, in particular, to get closer to personal meanings and their relationship with other factors. These aspects set an agenda for future studies.

We dare to say that the social meaning of *stricto sensu* postgraduate studies also does not seem to be fully appropriated by the research participants; however, we ask ourselves: is this social meaning really established among students who have already completed an undergraduate or even postgraduate course? To understand the reason, we need to understand the meaning, thus the rupture between this and the meaning can cause great suffering in students. Social meanings and personal senses need to be aligned for non-alienated training and professional performance and this coherence has repercussions not only for the postgraduate student, but also for their future students, as well as to fulfill the social function of the teacher/researcher, according to what is defined as the reason for postgraduate studies.

As we discussed from Historical-Cultural Psychology, for Leontiev (1978), personal meaning is related to the concepts of activity and consciousness, which is formed by work – considered as activity. Understanding the organization of the activity – need, motive, purpose – and its components – actions and operations – helps us understand the importance of organizing the postgraduate course for the training of teachers, when opting for an academic career, will contribute to the training of countless professionals. In the light of Historical-Cultural Psychology, the participants’ responses also bring as relevant, among other aspects, the need for learning and development processes to be not only mentioned, but understood and mediated by

pedagogical actions intentionally designed and aimed at this public at the university.

As a summary, based on the respondents, we highlight the importance of School and Educational Psychology focusing on the level of education focused here, notably absent in research and studies. Considering the possibilities for an innovative role for psychologists in this field, it is necessary to emphasize that the development of the reasons necessary for the professional training provided by *stricto sensu* postgraduate studies must be linked to human development in a broad sense. Therefore, learning teaching and research as elements inherent to the master’s degree and doctorate are equally related to the role of education for the humanization of subjects.

The assumptions of School Psychology in a critical sense consider the break with processes of production of school failure, medicalization and pathologization of everyday educational life. We cannot forget that the University is a school, with many specificities inherent to Higher Education, but with countless similarities to educational processes that take place at other levels of education. A meaning-generating education for postgraduate students also needs to be meaning-generating for teachers and supervisors.

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