

## **A assistência estudantil no IFPR-Campus Iraty: interpretações dos beneficiários**

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### **Resumo**

Este artigo tem como objetivo apresentar as interpretações dos estudantes bolsistas do IFPR-Campus Iraty acerca da política de assistência estudantil oferecida pela instituição no ano de 2019. Conceitos como assistência e vulnerabilidade, bem como o papel da política assistencial foram analisados à luz dos seguintes referenciais teóricos: Demo (1994), Paiva (2012), Yazbek (2016), Semzezem e Alves (2013) e Tonet (2012). A investigação, inspirada na leitura antropológica de Geertz, propôs dar visibilidade aos beneficiários, utilizando como método de coleta de dados a entrevista semiestruturada. Entre os resultados, constatamos que a maioria dos bolsistas não demonstrou, de forma explícita, em suas narrativas a ideia de assistência como um direito humano, assim como não assumiu estar em condições de vulnerabilidades; além disso, identificamos que os vários sentidos expostos por eles acerca do impacto da política de assistência em suas vidas é fruto da diversidade socioeconômica e cultural existente entre o público entrevistado.

**Palavras-chave:** Educação Federal. Estudantes. Narrativas. Assistência Estudantil.

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## **Student assistance at IFPR-Campus Irati: interpretations of beneficiaries**

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### **Abstract**

This article has the aim of presenting the interpretations of scholarship students at IFPR- Campus of Irati regarding the student support policy offered by the institution in the year 2019. Concepts such as support and vulnerability, as well as the role of the support policy were analyzed in the light of the following theoretical reference: Demo (1994), Paiva (2012), Yazbek (2016), Semzezem & Alves (2013) and Tonet (2012). The investigation, inspired by the anthropological reading of Geertz has purposed to give visibility to the beneficiaries by utilizing the semi-structured interview as a means of data gathering. Amongst the results we have verified that the majority of scholarship students did not show, in an explicit manner, in their narratives the idea of support as a human right, nor did they acknowledge being in condition of vulnerability, furthermore, we have identified that the many senses exposed by them in regards to the impact of the support policy in their lives is the fruit of the socioeconomic and cultural diversity that exists among the interviewed public.

**Keywords:** Federal Education. Students. Narratives. Student Support

## **La asistencia estudiantil en el IFPR-Campus Iratí: Interpretaciones de los beneficiarios**

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### **Resumen**

Este artículo tiene como objetivo presentar las interpretaciones de los becarios IFPR-Campus Iratí sobre la política de asistencia al estudiante que ofreció la institución en el año 2019. Conceptos como asistencia y vulnerabilidad, así como el papel de la política asistencial, fueron analizados a la luz de los siguientes referenciales teóricos: Demo (1994), Paiva (2012), Yazbek (2016), Semzezem y Alves (2013) y Tonet (2012). La investigación, inspirada en la lectura antropológica de Geertz, se propuso dar visibilidad a los beneficiarios utilizando como método de recolección de datos la entrevista semiestructurada. Entre los resultados, constatamos que la mayoría de los becarios no manifestaron explícitamente, en sus narrativas, la idea de la asistencia como un derecho humano, ni asumieron estar en condiciones de vulnerabilidad, además, identificamos que las diversas acepciones expuestas por ellos acerca del impacto de la política asistencial en sus vidas es resultado de la diversidad socioeconómica y cultural existente entre el público entrevistado.

**Palabras clave:** Educación Federal. Estudiantes. Narrativas. Asistencia Estudiantil.

## Introduction

The Federal Institutes of Education, Science, and Technology (IFs) were established in 2008 through the restructuring of existing institutions in different regions of Brazil, such as the Federal Centers for Technological Education and the Federal Technical Schools, some of which were affiliated with Federal Universities. The role of the IFs in Brazilian society was thus defined by the Ministry of Education:

The focus of the Federal Institutes will be social justice, equity, economic competitiveness, and the generation of new technologies. They will respond swiftly and effectively to the growing demands for professional training, the dissemination of scientific and technological knowledge, and support for local productive arrangements.

The new Federal Institutes will operate at all levels and modalities of professional education, with a strong commitment to the holistic development of the working citizen; and they will integrate, in an innovative institutional experience, all the guiding principles of the Education Development Plan (PDE) (BRASIL, 2010b, p. 1).

The provision of a comprehensive education for the working citizen by the Federal Institutes, as indicated by the Ministry of Education, demonstrates the institutional commitment to enable the working class to claim their rights (access to education, work, and some basic life necessities such as health and leisure); however, this appropriation occurs as a class. It is important to highlight that in a capitalist society like ours, the idea of citizenship is linked to liberal principles and the dominant ideological expression; thus, the conquest and exercise of rights can help mitigate the brutal impacts of a system based on social inequality (TONET, 2012).

By committing to social transformation, the pursuit of a fairer Brazil, and the comprehensive education of workers, the Federal Institutes have been developing practices aimed at ensuring equal opportunities for Brazilians facing greater socioeconomic challenges. Among these practices, we highlight student assistance, an initiative that seeks to help workers and their children successfully complete technical and higher education courses, thereby altering their reality and that of their surroundings.

In 2010, the National Student Assistance Program (PNAES) was established through Decree No. 7.234/2010 with the aim of contributing to the retention and graduation of students in federal public higher education. Federal higher education institutions, including the Federal Institutes, should implement student assistance actions in accordance with “[...] the strategic areas of teaching, research, and extension and those that meet the needs identified by their student body” (BRASIL, 2010a, p. 2).

In this context, the Federal Institutes, in compliance with new legislation and considering their specificities and existing actions, began to establish their student assistance programs. In the case of the Federal Institute of Paraná (IFPR), the regulation of the student support policy occurred at the end of 2009, that is, one semester prior to the publication of the decree that established the PNAES. Since then, the institution has made several changes to its initial legislation and implemented various support programs for students over different periods.

The IFPR has created the following student support programs during its existence (2009-2019): the Monitoring Scholarship Program, the Social Inclusion Academic Scholarship Program (PBIS), and the Student Event Support Program, all created in 2010; the National Integration Program of Professional Education with Basic Education for Youth and Adults (PROEJA) and Initial and Continuing Education Integrated with Elementary Education (PROEJA-FIC), established in 2011; the Complementary Student Support Program (PACE), created in 2012; and the Student Athlete Scholarship Program (PEA), established in 2014.

In the case of the student assistance policy implemented by IFPR, the beneficiaries are primarily students enrolled in the federal education system, originating from the public basic education network or with a family income *per capita* of up to one and a half minimum wages. A considerable portion of these young people lives in conditions of social vulnerability, composed of various factors such as financial, emotional, ethnic-racial, and gender issues; these factors, in turn, can interfere with their educational formation, leading to low academic performance, retention, and dropout.

We believe that the perception of beneficiaries is of utmost importance for understanding the effectiveness of student assistance policies, which is why studies on this topic have gained prominence in contemporary discussions<sup>3</sup>. In this sense, a master's research project was conducted, completed in 2020, titled "Student Assistance at the Federal Institute of Paraná – Irati Campus: Interpretations from the Beneficiaries' Perspective." In order to partially democratize the results of this research, the present article aims to present the views of the scholarship recipients from the year 2019 at the mentioned educational institution regarding the assistance programs, particularly concerning the concept of assistance, their condition of vulnerability, and the role of this policy in their educational development and personal lives.

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<sup>3</sup> Another study on the student assistance policy at the Federal Institutes is the article by Teodoro and Oliveira (2021) published in the journal *Educação em Foco*.

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The interpretations were collected through semi-structured interviews with nine students from the Technical and Technological High School programs<sup>4</sup> which involved counterpart obligations from the scholarship recipients, as well as with a staff member directly connected to the assistance. The selection of interviewees was not random and did not stem from the researcher's choice; rather, it was conducted after discussions with the staff of the SEPAE, who were more familiar with the reality of the scholarship recipients.

Several criteria were pre-defined for the selection of interviewees, as follows: a) a student participating in both a continuous program and an occasional one (event announcement), as this would allow us to identify the diverse meanings expressed by the same beneficiary regarding the two programs; b) a student who was involved in the process of vertical integration of the courses offered by the Irati Campus, in order to reveal the relevance of the assistance policy in the continuation of studies and, consequently, in the professional training of students facing vulnerabilities; c) a beneficiary of a program that did not require any counterpart beyond attendance, in this case, the PACE, so that we could contrast their perception with that of other beneficiaries of programs that do require counterparts; d) students who benefited from the Monitoring, PEA, and Events programs, since these programs require productive activities during the off-hours from the scholarship recipients, hence their interpretations could provide relevant data to the research issues; and e) a student who did not reside in the municipality of Irati, in order to understand how the benefit tends to aid in their permanence at the institution.

The interviews<sup>5</sup> were conducted in November and December 2019, within the premises of IFPR-Campus Irati, and constitute the documentary corpus of a master's research, inspired by Geertz's anthropological reading, on the student assistance policy at this educational institution. We start from the assumption that the interpretations of the beneficiaries are filled with intertwined meanings, as they present themselves as "[...] a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of which are overlapping or tied to one another, that are simultaneously strange, irregular, and unexplained [...]" (GEERTZ, 2014a, p. 7). The study, therefore, consists of interpreting the meanings attributed to student assistance at IFPR by its own beneficiaries. Such meanings constitute cultural elements and can be interpreted in the research process through what Geertz calls social discourse analysis.

<sup>4</sup> To preserve the beneficiaries' identities, we employed pseudonyms for all interviewees, thereby concealing their identification. In the article, the pseudonyms are presented as single terms, without the use of surnames, along with the date on which the academic research was completed.

<sup>5</sup> The interviews were conducted with the consent of the highest authority of IFPR-Campus Irati through a Letter of Consent, as well as the interviewed subjects and their legal representatives, in the case of minors, through a Free and Informed Consent Form.

The central themes of the investigation—the concept of assistance, the condition of vulnerability, and the role of the assistance policy—were analyzed in light of the following references: Demo (1994), Paiva (2012), Yazbek (2016), Semzezem and Alves (2013), and Tonet (2012). These authors contribute to understanding the particularities of the scholarship holders' narratives and the similarities regarding the student assistance policy promoted at IFPR - Campus Irati in 2019.

## **Student Assistance: Right or Benevolence?**

Assistance to individuals in conditions of vulnerability is a human right, and it is the state's obligation to promote public policies that enable these individuals to meet their basic needs, such as the right to vocational education. The "[...] right to assistance is part of democracy and citizenship" (DEMO, 1994, p. 27), and in this sense, it must be recognized by its users as a political and social achievement governed by legislation established by the representatives of the population, rather than being conceived as a benevolent action by the government or a particular institution that is, merely charity for the poor.

Of the nine students interviewed, only one scholarship recipient defined the assistance policy as a right, but only mentioned the term without elaborating on or clarifying that definition. Throughout their narrative, they ended up emphasizing the notion of assistance as a benefit offered by IFPR as a "bargaining chip" for the extension projects carried out.

Ideas such as favoritism, incentive, support, donation, and aid were the most cited by the scholarship recipients, demonstrating limitations in understanding the student assistance policy as a right they possess due to their vulnerable conditions. In their statements, the references are directly linked to the notion of benevolence, whether from IFPR or the state, as we can observe in the following narrative:

For me, student assistance is actually a way to favor students in areas that the Institute does not provide for them beforehand, such as transportation and food. Other schools provide these things for students for free, as part of government support. You see, food, snacks, and public transportation (Samuel, 2020).

For the scholarship recipient Samuel, IFPR, by not having a school meal program and a partnership with the municipal network for student transportation, similar to other educational institutions with which the student has likely been in contact, addresses this gap through assistance.

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In his discourse, both the provision of food and transportation are seen as "donations" from the school and the government. This notion was also present in the account of scholarship recipient Regina, who emphasized the government as the entity granting the benefits:

I believe it's support that comes from the government, right? It's support that the government provides to generate more education for the country, because it's related to that. They provide money for transportation so that students have the possibility to come to class every day, to be able to come (Regina, 2020).

In the same way, the interpretation of the scholarship recipient Luiza is that student assistance is a donation, but the organization she praises is the IFPR itself. In her words, it is an "[...]" aid that the Institute provides that facilitates the student's permanence, preventing school dropout and all that [...]" (Luiza, 2020).

When we talk about assistance, we understand this action as a social policy of a transformative nature, that is, one that does not merely aim to reduce the recurring problems of social inequalities, but rather a policy that can mobilize those who demand this right to address their greatest individual and collective interests, since social policy is both a product and a means of class struggle (PAIVA et al., 2012). However, Brazilian society still shows traces of a conservative, clientelistic policy that characterizes social policies, and thus some of them can be termed assistentialist programs for failing to promote the protagonism and emancipation of users regarding their vulnerabilities, giving the State the role of a guardian agent.

The narratives of beneficiaries of the student assistance policy at the Iriti Campus revealed that their interpretations are laden with elements that compose an assistentialist policy, which "[...]" always signifies the cultivation of the social problem under the guise of aid" (DEMO, 1994, p. 30). We believe that this reality can be changed when the educational institution increasingly provides the academic community and, particularly, the scholarship recipients with spaces for empowerment, in which assistance is defined as a human right capable of elevating the individual as the protagonist of their own story.

As we have seen from the cited narratives, the meanings that the scholarship recipients at the Iriti Campus attach to the benefits received from the assistance policy carry remnants of a cultural legacy still deeply rooted in our society. This mindset, which defines assistance as help/donation, seeks to hinder any deeper understanding of the conditions and social realities faced by the less fortunate (YAZBEK, 2016).

## Social and Economic Vulnerabilities of Students

The assistance programs offered at the Irati Campus (PACE, PBIS, PEA, and Monitoring) primarily select students in situations of socioeconomic vulnerability, specifically individuals with a family income *per capita* of up to one and a half minimum wages, in accordance with Article 5 of the PNAES. Thus, the students at the Irati Campus are scholarship recipients because, when they enroll in the program and receive the benefit, they meet this income *per capita* criterion.

At the end of 2018, the IFPR approved Resolution No. 66, which defined certain criteria and procedures to be adopted for the socioeconomic analysis of the students' family groups, establishing a document that instituted the Social Vulnerability Index (IVS). The indicators that compose the IVS are:

[...] family income per capita; family composition; occupation, work, and employment status; educational background of the student; housing situation; health conditions; mobility conditions; participation in social programs; and atypical family situations that exacerbate their vulnerability [...] (IFPR, 2018, p. 3).

Based on the indicators mentioned, we have a group of mandatory indicators, which include: family composition; gross income per capita; and occupation, work, and employment. The other indicators are considered complementary, and conducting interviews and home visits is permitted when necessary.

According to the social worker at the Irati Campus, the Social Vulnerability Index (IVS) helps evaluate the socioeconomic conditions of students, as it aids in “[...] defining what generates vulnerability, which student is more vulnerable, more susceptible; for example, which student is at a greater risk of dropping out due to a situation of economic vulnerability” (Augusto, 2020).

Often, the issue of socioeconomic vulnerability is conceived solely from financial elements, such as low income and unemployment. However, a deeper analysis of the term reveals the existence of other relevant aspects. For the authors Semzezem and Alves (2013, p. 144),

[...] social vulnerabilities are linked to situations of impoverishment of the working class, related to material difficulties for survival, but also to relational and cultural difficulties, as these interfere with the way workers and their families live.

In the case of the students served by the student assistance program at IFPR-Campus Irati, we observed that their interpretations revealed both elements of a vulnerability concept tied to financial aspects and a broader perspective beyond this factor. In some cases, there were scholarship recipients

A assistência estudantil no IFPR-Campus Iriti: interpretações dos beneficiários who pointed out their personal and family limitations, relating them to the concept of vulnerability; others addressed the issue referring to their peers; and some did not see themselves in this condition. Following the assumptions of the anthropologist Geertz (2014a), once this plurality of conceptions was unveiled from the context of each student's experience, we were able to give visibility to the discourse of beneficiaries regarding complex issues such as vulnerability.

As this situation reveals not only the personal fragility of the student but also that of their entire family in various aspects, it is possible that many chose to divert from the subject to avoid exposing their private lives. Furthermore, the scholarship students at Campus Iriti belong to the working class but do not have an understanding of the complexity of the social structure marked by various inequalities. Consequently, they lack class identity, which could help distance them from the culture of vanity present in our current society and, at the same time, express their real vulnerabilities.

Scholarship recipients Samuel, Renata, and Fernando revealed their vulnerabilities and pointed out the main expenses subsidized by the student assistance aid:

I think I found myself in a vulnerable situation, especially in the first years at IF due to family financial issues. Because, as I mentioned, in those first two years, particularly during the transition period, we had a truck that was lost to the bank. During this transition period, we didn't have the means to come here; for example, I had to take the bus. The fare, as I said, is not covered by the IF since there's no agreement with the transport company, so they don't pay half fare. Paying for bus tickets adds up, and in the end of the month, it really adds up, so this amount covered that expense quite well (Samuel, 2020).

Scholar Renata, when asked if she ever felt vulnerable as a student at IFPR-Campus Iriti, responded affirmatively and emphasized her dependence on the financial aid received:

Yes, especially to continue here, because I think that maybe next year I won't have this assistance, and then I won't be able to pay for transportation, and my mother won't be able to either. There are other issues, but I wouldn't know how to say much more than that; this is how I see myself (Renata, 2020).

Student Renata was the only interviewee who transparently expressed her situation of vulnerability and also demonstrated political awareness regarding class relations in our society and the various forms of vulnerability.

So, I think that we come from different realities, right? And our parents are responsible for us, and we depend on that. Even if we are very good and perform excellently, we are affected by this, and it's complicated because there are different vulnerabilities. Sometimes you don't have a family that supports you; sometimes you don't have money; there are different forms of vulnerabilities [...]

[...] Before, I didn't realize that they used to offer scholarships here at the IF. I also wondered how students from different social classes managed. When I noticed that there was no urban transport for students, I realized how important this support is. Maybe I wouldn't have been able to continue here if it weren't for this assistance this year [...] (Renata, 2020).

Renata's broader understanding of vulnerability may stem from various factors, one of which we identified through the interview. According to her, the topic of student assistance is discussed in her home: "It's not a deep discussion; it's more superficial, but I always talk to my mom about how we need to allocate our income and what we can apply for [...]" (Renata, 2020).

Student Fernando was graduating from the higher education program at Campus Irati and was part of the first integrated high school class. Over the six years he was enrolled at the institution, he received scholarships and participated in several assistance programs; his younger brother is currently finishing high school. Fernando is well-known at the institution for having undergone the vertical integration process and for being a student representative on the Higher Council of IFPR.

The scholarship recipient's account is very significant because, as a staff member of Campus Irati, I am aware of the social reality of the young man and his family. During the interview, he addressed the theme of vulnerability, emphasizing the experiences of his peers who live in his neighborhood, where IFPR is located. He pointed out several vulnerability factors, including the lack of internet access, poor road infrastructure, and existing crime in the area. He also discussed the importance of having nutritious food and a mindset that "[...] school can be beneficial in the long run [...]" (Fernando, 2020).

According to Fernando, IFPR helped him realize that education is a way to escape paths that lead to criminality:

[...] But I believe that I didn't have, when I was vulnerable, a perception of it. For example, during my adolescence, you grow up, whether you want to or not, in a place where many people give up on school, where many sometimes choose the easier path, or perhaps the only alternative, I don't know. So, you become vulnerable to that because if you hang out with the wrong crowd, things can go off track, and you might end up committing a crime or something like that. It's something that, when I was vulnerable and susceptible to it, especially in my pre-adolescence, before I had a good awareness to perceive it - I didn't know. So, I think it was later that I realized, 'I'm glad I took a different path.' I believe that during my time at the Institute, especially at the beginning when I was younger, it changes your perspective a lot, your path, having access to education (Fernando, 2020).

Although Fernando had a lot of information to reveal about his social condition, a realization stemming from the researcher-interviewee relationship, he limited himself to discussing examples

A assistência estudantil no IFPR-Campus Irati: interpretações dos beneficiários external to himself. Only at certain moments in his narrative did we observe his identification with socioeconomic vulnerability.

One of the most intriguing revelations was the fact that he mentioned sometimes using the benefit money for “[...] food here on campus, because sometimes it was tough, for example, to go home in the afternoon, even though I live close by, so I used it to stay here [...]” (Fernando, 2020).

This statement drew attention for two reasons: first, due to the proximity between the young man's residence and the Campus Irati, and yet he chose to eat at the institution; second, because throughout the interview, the scholarship holder emphasized the importance of healthy food for educational success. Given this, could we infer that he and his family had experienced food insecurity at some point? Was his "choice" to have lunch on campus during the after-school hours an alternative or a necessity?

Like Fernando, other scholarship holders struggled to fully disclose their possible limitations, as they did not feel comfortable discussing their privacy with someone they did not know. Furthermore, we live in a society where traces of a culture of vanity are sufficiently present, making the gaze of others on oneself fundamental (LA TAILLE, 2016). This condition may lead scholarship students not to reveal who they really are, but rather what is apparent and may be admired by others.

There is also another situation in which the researcher personally knows the parents/guardians of the scholarship holder. In this case, the interviewee may feel the need to justify certain information that may appear contradictory.

We noticed that the scholarship holder Luiza appeared anxious during the interview due to the friendship between the researcher and her father. Perhaps because of this, when discussing vulnerability, she referred to her peers rather than herself, as we can see in the following statement:

[...] i think it has to do with those people who sometimes don't have a fixed income in their family structure and whose parents have unstable jobs. Sometimes they are subject to having to leave school or something like that to work and contribute to the family's income. There are people whose families can't, for example, spare R\$200.00 from their income to come to the IF or any other institution; I think it relates more to those people (Luiza, 2020).

Despite not considering herself a person in a vulnerable situation, pointing out the existence of other students who needed much more than she did, the scholarship holder emphasized that the assistance helped her socially. Luiza mentioned that she used the R\$168 (one hundred sixty-eight reais) from the PACE program to pay for the van that transported her to the IFPR, which cost R\$210

(two hundred ten reais). However, she did not indicate whether she could afford this expense without the student assistance.

On the other hand, the scholarship holder Marcos stated that he never felt vulnerable while studying at IFPR-Campus Irati. Marcos, who received assistance from the Monitoring program, believed that the issue of vulnerability was more pronounced in other programs offered by the institution. Throughout the interview, he made it clear that even without a scholarship, he would be able to participate in the teaching activities, except for external event.

The student was the only interviewee who mentioned various forms of vulnerabilities, as we can see in the following statement:

I think that, for example, some students have weakened housing conditions; family difficulties, for instance, that affect academic performance. So I think that would be a question of vulnerability if they receive, for example, assistance, it can provide them with extra encouragement to perform better in school. Then there's the issue of transportation; perhaps some students don't have the money to pay for transport. Or, for instance, students who struggle with the coursework itself could be considered a question of vulnerability. There's also the social aspect, like social relationships sometimes a person might have difficulties interacting with their peers, which can also affect their experience at school (Marcos, 2020).

Marcos's lack of feeling vulnerable is related to the concept of vulnerability that he holds. The examples he mentioned reveal situations he has not experienced, as he indicated he would be able to cover transportation costs without assistance, maintains good academic performance, and has a harmonious relationship with his family.

Another scholarship recipient who reported not feeling vulnerable in terms of financial issues was Julio. The son of a teacher with a stable job, he pointed out, “[...] that our campus doesn't have a significant social vulnerability, but that doesn't mean it doesn't exist [...]” (Julio, 2020).

Although he reported using the PACE funds to pay for graduation fees, registrations for artistic events due to his involvement in a dance group, and other personal demands, the student revealed the importance of assistance for his continued presence at the Campus Irati:

regarding PACE, besides allowing me to come to IF and take my regular classes, it gives me greater assurance that I can continue here, you know... when we have PACE, it feels more secure, you know, we can study better knowing that there's more security (Julio, 2020).

The conception of the interviewees regarding the theme of vulnerability is related to each individual's way of living and how they wish to be perceived by others, as they do not want to be

A assistência estudantil no IFPR-Campus Irati: interpretações dos beneficiários identified as vulnerable. In a culture of vanity, what matters is the admiration of others rather than compassion. Vulnerability is not synonymous with poverty, although it is included within it. In this sense, the scholarship students at IFPR-Campus Irati have the right to assistance because they are, in a way, in a state of financial instability that can negatively impact their educational development. However, the vast majority do not fully recognize the insecurity faced by the working class within the capitalist production system.

There is a relationship between the lack of political awareness in perceiving student assistance as a right and the absence of class identity among the children of workers. The school environment can often contribute to students having a greater awareness of the contradictions in capitalist society, fostering consciousness that establishes identity relations and the pursuit of their rights, such as the right to assistance for access to quality education.

Assistance “[...] is a possibility for public recognition of the legitimacy of the demands of the subalterns and a space for expanding their protagonism as subjects” (YAZBEK, 2016, p. 72). A social assistance policy aimed at raising the political consciousness of individuals should encourage beneficiaries to be co-participants and co-decision-makers in the programs (DEMO, 1994). Given that the management of the student assistance policy at IFPR is centralized at the rectory, we can infer that scholarship students still need greater articulation as collective subjects and holders of social rights to actively participate in the administration of assistance programs.

Citizenship is a conquest and not something given; through it, students can critically understand reality and thus intervene to transform themselves and their surroundings, becoming subjects of their own history (DEMO, 1994). We know that assistance involves the provision of services and goods, but it also has another characteristic: it is a socio-educational action. This action will only have concrete effects if the beneficiary of the assistance program emerges as an active subject, aware of the causes of their vulnerabilities; therefore, they must be the protagonist of the entire process involving the assistance policy.

## **The role of assistance in the educational formation and private lives of students**

At IFPR-Campus Irati, we observe a socioeconomic and cultural plurality, a reality evident in the school profile, clothing, and even the transportation used to reach the institution. We are talking about individuals with high income alongside others facing cognitive difficulties; some are only children while others share their homes with parents, siblings, and grandparents; there are people from rural areas and those from central and peripheral neighborhoods; some arrive in their own cars,

some by bicycle, and the majority by van or transportation provided by the municipalities of neighboring towns; students with or without money for food and others bringing prepared meals.

Just as Geertz (2014b) sought to identify how members of various societies defined themselves through their symbolic forms, our intention was to unveil the interpretations of the beneficiaries of student assistance at IFPR - Campus Iriti regarding this policy and, specifically, how they assess its impact on their educational formation and other dimensions related to their lives. We know that for many young people attending public schools in Brazil, experiences in the educational space<sup>6</sup> significantly influence their ways of thinking and acting, provoking visible changes in the medium and long term.

This diversity was revealed during the interviews with the beneficiaries of the student assistance programs at Campus Iriti, as we identified a variety of meanings regarding the assistance policy, stemming from the socioeconomic and cultural reality to which these students belong. Overall, the young interviewees expressed the importance of this policy in their educational formation and personal lives. In their narratives, we observed that participating in this policy held a particular significance for each of the beneficiaries. Such interpretations are influenced by how they live, their self-perceptions, their relationships with others, and their aspirations.

The beneficiaries reported that the assistance they received helped cover transportation costs to IFPR, since Campus Iriti does not have a partnership with the municipal transportation network, unlike students enrolled in the state education system. In addition to these costs, the assistance, according to the interviewees, also supported the purchase of educational materials and favored student retention and academic success.

For instance, beneficiary Renata (2020) revealed that whenever there was leftover money from the benefit, she bought books of various genres; and Fernando (2020) recalled his first laptop, purchased with the funds he received from student assistance. Even for those who indicated they were not dependent on the scholarship, the financial aid was used for educational purposes, such as paying for entrance exam registration fees; while for others more reliant on the assistance, the funds covered clothing and home internet expenses.

Beyond educational purposes, one of the beneficiaries highlighted that the money received from PACE also helped pay for medications, as he has muscular dystrophy and the stem cell procedure is performed abroad, incurring high costs. According to him, the funds have significantly subsidized his

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<sup>6</sup> Among the experiences observed through the master's research, we highlight contact with reading and sports, participation in research and extension projects, and the opportunity for internships.

A assistência estudantil no IFPR-Campus Iriti: interpretações dos beneficiários medical expenses; at one point during the interview, the student revealed that not only the scholarship but all the support he has received at IFPR-Campus Iriti from staff and peers has positively contributed to his entire treatment.

I think it has improved a lot because, like, the IF is a place where I enjoy being, I like studying there, and I appreciate all the teachers. I believe it has been very important for me to be there, and this helps my treatment. I think that my treatment isn't just about the applications or the muscular aspect; it's about everything that happens in my day-to-day life, including the physiotherapy sessions and the emotional support people provide. At the IF, I feel very good, and this positively influences my treatment (Carlos, 2020).

Regarding their educational formation, the scholarship recipients of the Monitoring program revealed that assisting teachers during office hours helped them recall the content learned in previous years. This highlights another positive aspect of the program, contributing to the process of acquiring and retaining knowledge in areas where they already had affinities. Furthermore, it is an educational field experience that could foster the monitors' interest in a teaching career.

Look, as a future teacher, I also intend to say that this is one of the best experiences I've ever had... In the monitoring program, I learn by reviewing all the content I studied last year, in my first year. I also learn from the students; every time I review, I learn more, so I'm gaining experience in what it's like to be in the role of a teacher (Pedro, 2020).

The members of the PBIS and the beneficiaries of the event grants also demonstrated that the student assistance policy is fundamental to their educational formation; however, unlike the scholars from other programs, they emphasized the extracurricular experiences they had.

In terms of education, it helps a lot, especially because I receive the PBIS scholarship, which is a research and extension grant. Actually, the PBIS is a social inclusion program, but for me, it's a way to encourage and stimulate something, you know? For example, through these grants, I managed to develop an interest in certain things and sought out ways to participate in events and develop projects—things that I probably wouldn't have been interested in at another school, and the student assistance scholarship in this area really encouraged me to follow this path and pursue my interests." (Samuel).

"[...] in academic life, it was very important because it provided, as I mentioned, opportunities for research and my own continuity... also, for example, the chance to meet new people and have new experiences, like the trips I could take thanks to student assistance. For instance, I've visited many cities in Paraná that I probably wouldn't have gone to otherwise." (Fernando).

"One of the main reasons I went to Aracaju to present my thesis there was also because the IF helped me with the scholarship; I don't know if I would have been able to cover the entire trip myself. And that will add to my résumé, right, this work

I presented there. Also, the games I participated in were related to health, and I got to know new places (Regina, 2020).

One of the objectives of the student support policy at IFPR is to promote actions that enable students to participate in various formative activities, such as research and extension projects, volunteering, exchanges, junior enterprises, student organizations, events, and others" (IFPR, 2009, p. 3). The PBIS is a scientific initiation program where the scholarship holder, together with their advisor, develops research or extension practice that results in findings to be presented at academic events. As a result, many beneficiaries of this program end up presenting their work at events held in various locations.

In the interviews, the scholarship holders expressed both academic experiences and personal experiences, such as the opportunity to visit places they might not have otherwise. Exploring different places and their forms of organization is part of the human right to access the knowledge produced by humanity throughout history; this represents cultural accumulation and, therefore, human formation.

Regarding the private sphere, student assistance has provided experiences for students that have marked this phase of their lives and that will likely remain in their memories for a long time. We noticed in their words a sense of enchantment with certain experiences stemming from the actions that involve the assistance policy on campus.

For the scholarship holder Julio, a significant aspect of his personal life was experiencing financial autonomy:

[...] it was important for me because it was the first time I opened a bank account and received money, you know? So it's kind of like a simulation of having a salary and being responsible for my own money, which wasn't money that came to my mom and she decided how I would spend it. This aspect of managing money was my first contact with finances and organization; it was really significant (Julio, 2020).

From this statement, we can infer that the scholarship recipient, Julio, was not overly dependent on the financial aid he received each month, as his guardians would otherwise have a more significant role in managing the money. For the student Fernando, the student assistance program provided considerable personal support through the "[...] satisfaction of participating in something, having the same opportunity, for example, as others would due to financial reasons, so you end up being placed on a more equal level [...]" (Fernando, 2020).

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The concept of equality is present in the regulations governing the student support policy at IFPR. Among the objectives of this policy, one identified is “to ensure students equal opportunities in the development of academic, cultural, artistic, and sports activities” (IFPR, 2009, p. 3).

Equality of opportunity is embedded in the scope of citizenship and democracy; it represents equality in the realm of jurisprudence, meaning individuals have political and legal rights (formal equality) while living in a materially unequal society. Thus, “it is perceived [...] that real inequality and formal equality are not two separate moments, but parts of the same indivisible totality” (TONET, 2012, p. 82).

This observation of the limits of equality in a class society does not negate the positive effects that student assistance provides to students in their educational formation process, as identified in the interpretations of the scholarship recipients. It merely highlights that assistance is not the solution to eliminate social inequalities and does not alter structural issues, although Demo (1994) argued that social policies aimed at emancipation can intensify the contradictions of the capitalist system and consequently open pathways for its overcoming.

For Ivo Tonet (2012, p. 70), “[...] the field of education is also a space where an incessant struggle occurs, even though hegemony is always in the hands of the dominant classes.” In this sense, student assistance is marked by class antagonism, as it adheres to contradictory interests between social classes and their relationship with the State (YAZBEK, 2016).

We believe, therefore, that for student assistance not to transform into a mere welfare mechanism that obscures its own reason for existence, it must increasingly be led by its users; thus acquiring a politicized and revolutionary character. This presents a significant challenge to educational institutions: transforming beneficiaries from passive agents into active participants in the process of formulating and updating public policies.

Although the issue of citizenship was not explicitly mentioned in the narratives, we identified that the experiences lived by students during the period they received the benefits of the assistance policy, whether in school settings or private spheres, point to the productivity of the programs under this policy. As noted by Demo (1994, p. 31), “the goal of assistance is, obviously, to assist, but whenever possible, it should be done in a way that favors activities of production and participation”.

The study did not aim to elaborate on the complexity of this subject; however, we believe it is crucial to understand the role of the student assistance policy in the lives of beneficiaries. Furthermore, we contend that in the current Brazilian educational and socioeconomic context, it is essential to highlight the contradictions between formal equality and real inequality present in the

narratives of the assisted, given that concrete equality “[...] is necessarily beyond citizenship” (TONET, 2012, p. 66).

## Final considerations

The present article aimed to analyze the student assistance policy of IFPR-Campus Iraty through the interpretations of its beneficiaries. One of the guiding questions for the development of the study was to inquire about the importance of assistance according to the understanding of the subjects directly involved in the process.

The meanings attributed by the beneficiaries are directly related to their way of life, that is, to their economic conditions, social thinking and actions, school trajectory, and even family organization. The plurality of meanings among the scholarship recipients reflects the diversity of students at Campus Iraty, who come from different material realities. Furthermore, for most of the interviewees, this was their first experience participating in an academic research study, which inhibited many and had repercussions in their narratives.

The scholarship recipients emphasized the importance of assistance for their educational formation; according to them, the aid facilitates their continuation and completion of studies, primarily covering expenses for transportation and food two needs that state public schools provide for their enrolled students. Some even pointed out that they can acquire books, pay for college entrance exam registrations, buy clothes, and even cover part of their graduation expenses with the money received through the program.

We found that while assistance plays a crucial role in keeping young people in the institution, some of the most significant contributions they reported were the experiences they had in research and extension projects, external events, and teaching activities. All these activities, according to their accounts, fostered relationships of interaction, provided opportunities to visit new places, and allowed them to acquire knowledge in various fields opportunities they might not have accessed without the assistance.

Despite being classified as vulnerable subjects based on the selection criterion that determines a *per capita* income of up to one and a half minimum wages for participation in assistance programs, the vast majority of interviewees showed limitations in identifying themselves as vulnerable individuals in various aspects. This may be related to the culture of vanity prevalent in our current

A assistência estudantil no IFPR-Campus Iriti: interpretações dos beneficiários society. The conception of assistance as a human right also did not prevail among the scholarship recipients, who viewed assistance as help from the "IFPR" and/or the "government".

We believe that this study, by listening to and giving visibility to the subjects who embody the essence of the student assistance policy, can contribute to educational institutions evaluating the effectiveness of the services provided to the internal community. The aim of the findings is not to create dichotomies but to open up space for dialogue, with the goal of creating opportunities to overcome the assistentialist elements still present in the student assistance policy and to support the protagonism of the beneficiaries.

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