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SUMMARY

Distance Education students have specific characteristics that are worth studying. This article sought to study one of the variables in the profile of distance undergraduate students. The variable in question was the age at which these students choose to enter this modality. This is quantitative, cross-sectional and descriptive research. A closed questionnaire with one question was used, applied through a form, the sample is made up of 500 participants, undergraduate students from private and public higher education institutions. The result of the data showed that Distance Education students are, for the most part, people aged 38.5. Knowing in detail the age of students who pursue this modality is the main objective of this study, so the research sought to enroll in this modality by age group.

Key words: Education. Entrants. Age.

ABSTRACT

Distance Education students have specific characteristics that are worth studying. This article sought to study one of the variables in the profile of distance undergraduate students. The variable in question was the age at which these students chose to enter this modality. This is a quantitative, transversal, and descriptive research. A closed questionnaire with one question was used, the instrument was applied through forms, the sample is composed of 500 participants, undergraduate students from private and public higher education institutions. The result of the data showed that distance education students are mostly people aged between 38.5 and years old. Knowing in detail the age of students who seek this modality is the main objective of this study, thus the research sought to enter this modality by age group.

Keywords: Education. Newcomers. Age.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to the Ministry of Education and Culture, distance education is a form of teaching that enables self-learning, with the mediation of systematically organized teaching resources, presented in different information supports, used alone or in combination, and conveyed through different media.

There is a constant debate in the academic world about who is encouraged to study remotely. It is a fact that students who study online are adults, as this type of learning, which takes place anywhere and at any time, allows them to continue working full time while also paying attention to their family. . The 'typical' online learner is generally described as someone who is over the age of 25, employed, concerned about the well-being of the community, has some higher education in progress, and can be either male or female" (BELLONI, 2003).

According to Laaser, *apud* McKenzie *et al.* (1979, p 17) the term distance education gained universal acceptance in 1982, when the International Council for Correspondence Education (ICCE), an organization affiliated with UNESCO, changed its name to the International Council for Distance Education (ICDE).

Distance education has some advantages over other types of teaching, as the person can choose both when to study and when to start their studies. As we know, each student has their own study pace and distance education allows the student to impose their individual pace and this is a great advantage of distance learning. However, it has some disadvantages such as: students may feel isolated as they are carrying out their studies alone. This requires great motivation on the part of the student to continue the desired course, since, otherwise, the student will possibly drop out of this course. This is one of the biggest reasons for dropouts during distance learning courses.

Today there are studies on the characteristics and structures of Distance Education (TORI, 2010; MENDES, 2012). According to research by the NMC Horizon Report: 2014 Higher Education Edition (JOHNSON *et al.*, 2014), which investigates the future of technology in teaching, distance education is learning that for years has provided and continues to provide the development of skills and competencies in people. However, discipline is necessary to study in this modality and this article wants to know who this student is. In recent decades, EaD has shown an active and powerful role in the teaching process and

learning, which can be considered a dynamic modality, which continues to grow constantly, between ages has been greater, which has become a great ally in the scenario of distance educational training. Through distance learning courses mediated by technology, it is possible to meet the interests of students in various age groups in the search for new learning, as well as the most diverse institutional interests (TESTA; LUCIANO, 2010).

Today, more than 80 countries, on five continents, adopt distance learning at all levels of education, in formal and non-formal programs, serving millions of students. In Brazil, with the expansion of the Internet and the publication of the Law of Guidelines and Bases for National Education (LDBEN), in December 1996, distance learning began to be officially considered as a modality of education. With this step, from 1997 onwards, higher education institutions and education research centers began to generate virtual learning environments, initially offering Lato Sensu postgraduate courses via the internet, and later, undergraduate courses, and this moment can be defined as the historic milestone in the emergence of virtual undergraduate education in Brazil (NUNES, 2009).

From then on, distance learning in Brazil grew at an accelerated pace, with the number of distance undergraduate students jumping from 1,682 in 2000 (BRASIL, 2009), to a total of 2,325,045 enrolled in 2019, according to Inep (INEP, 2019).

As for the student profile, although it has undergone some changes in recent years, basically, according to data from the 2019 Higher Education Census, carried out by the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP) (BRASIL, 2020), EaD still It is a study option for an older population, with an average age of 33 years. Schnitman (2020) confirms this data, stating that the main characteristics of distance learning students, for the most part, are being adults who see distance education as an alternative to continue their studies.

One of the most relevant issues in distance learning is the age of the students who attend it, as virtual environments require an active individual, who knows how to control their own learning processes and participate actively, using these skills in a positive way, that is, who learn to learn (KORKMAZ; KAYA, 2012).

Therefore, the present research aimed to describe the profile of Education students in relation to the age at which they choose this type of teaching.

2 MATERIAL AND METHODS

500 students enrolled in 2020 and 2021.1 participated in the research in courses offered at a distance, by private and public higher education institutions.

To carry out the research, a questionnaire was used, containing only one question about the age at which the student entered higher education via distance learning. Being a closed question containing the age groups where the student would choose the one they fit into, only one answer per student is allowed.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 01 shows the age groups with the respective number of students per age they chose to study in distance education, remembering that our sample size was 500 participants.

Weddro 01–Age Range with number of discs loved ones

Age Range	Number of Students	%
17 to 20 YEARS	15	3.00%
21 to 24 YEARS OLD	56	11.21%
25 to 28 YEARS	47	9.35%
29 to 32 YEARS	48	9.60%
33 to 36 YEARS	79	15.80%
37 to 40 YEARS	118	23.60%
41 to 44 YEARS	47	9.40%
45 to 48 YEARS	43	8.60%
49 to 52 YEARS	28	5.61%
53 to 56 YEARS	5	1.00%
57 to 60 YEARS	9	1.87%
61 to 64 YEARS	5	1.00%

Source: Author

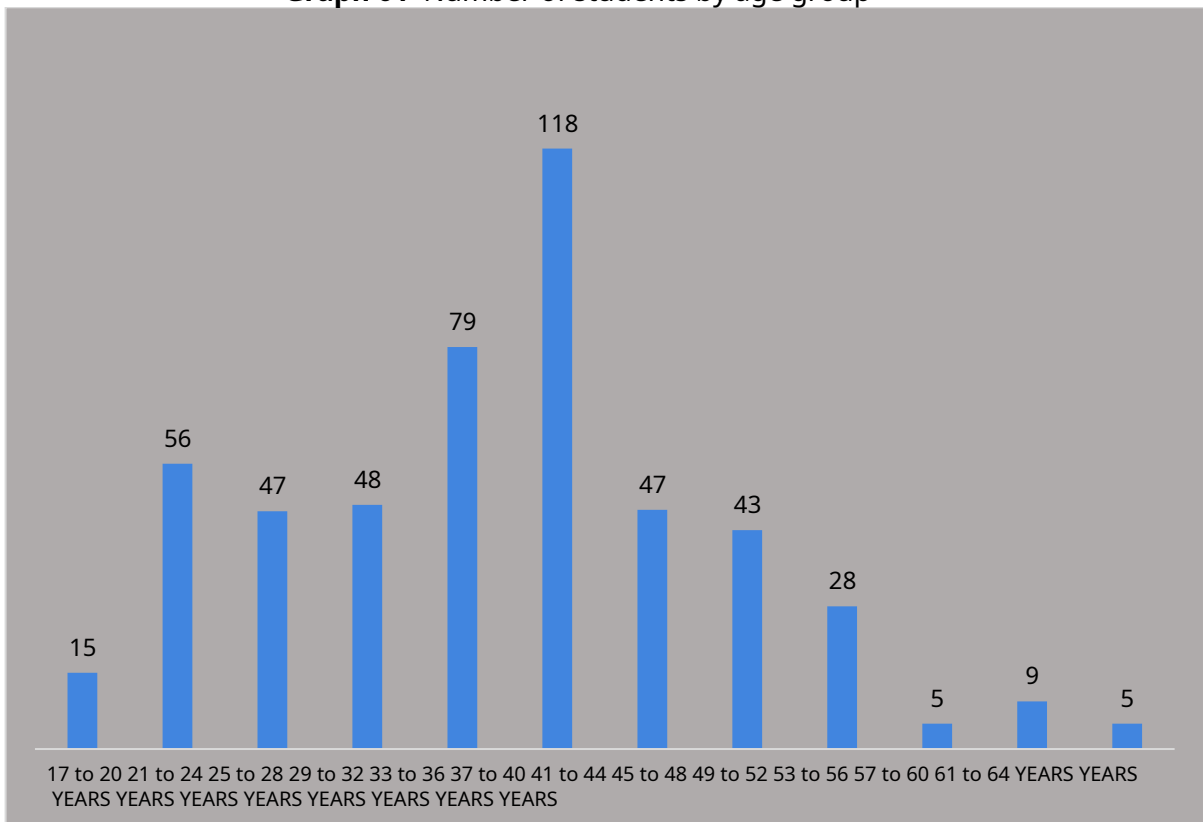
The survey showed that the largest number of students who entered distance education are in the age group between 37 and 40 years old, representing 23.06% of students who responded to the survey. The age group between 53 and 56 years of age and the age group between 61 and 64 years of age had the smallest number of entrants, 5 students in each age group representing 1% each.

The research also showed that the age group with the second largest number of students is between 33 and 36 years old with 79 students. The difference between the age group that has the largest number of students and the second age group is 39 students, which represents

66.95% difference between one age group and another, which shows that it is a considered difference. In relation to the total number of students who responded to the survey, this difference of 39 students represents 7.80%.

It was observed that between 21 and 52 years of age there are 466 students, this amount represents 93.20% of the students who participated in the research. Graph 01 shows the distribution among distance education entrants.

Graph 01–Number of students by age group

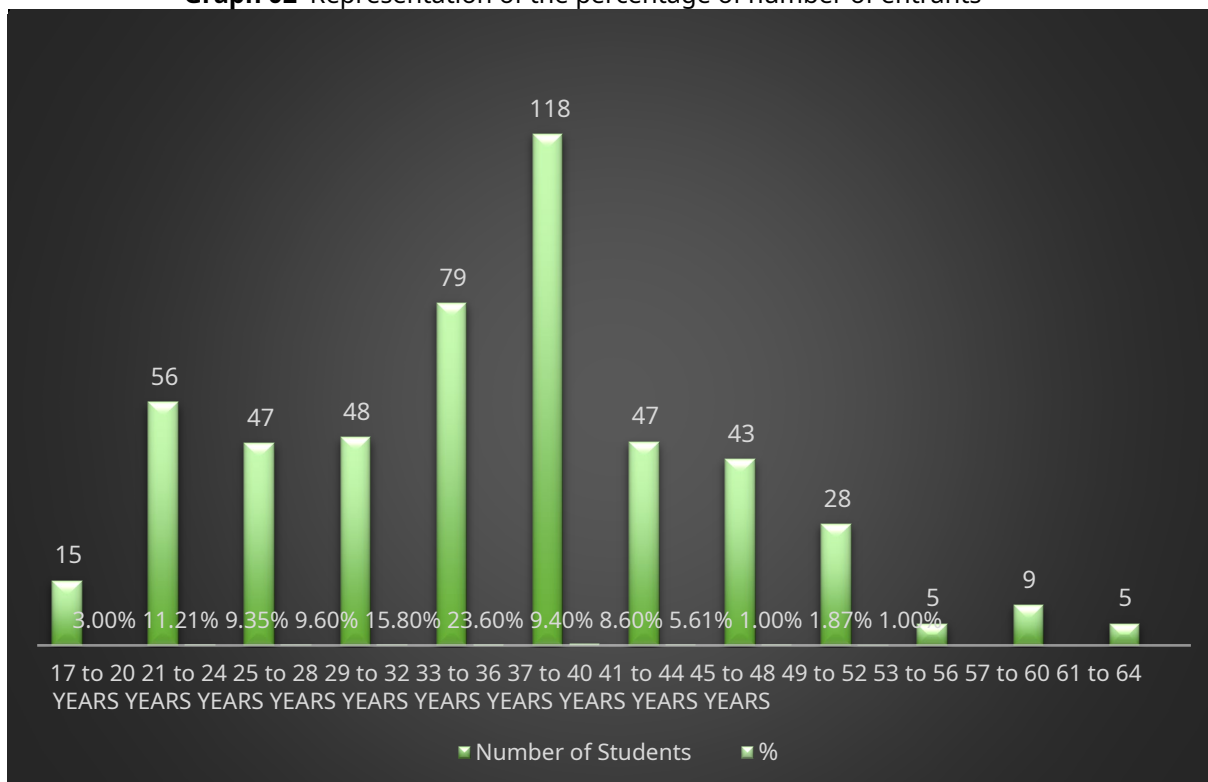


Source: Author

Looking at graph 01, it is possible to see that after the age of 52 the demand for this type of teaching is very low, of the 500 students who participated in the research, only 18 were over the age of 52 when they entered distance education, this number represents 3, 60% of the total students who participated in the research.

Graph 02 shows the percentage of the number of entrants within each age group in the research universe.

Graph 02–Representation of the percentage of number of entrants



Source: Author

The previous paragraphs of this method, such as table 01 and graphs 01 and 02, also show important information for private higher education institutions, as they, unlike public higher education institutions, need to attract students to maintain their active economic health. .

In this way, showing that investing in attracting new students to these institutions is easier within an age range between 37 and 40 years, it also shows that they should not invest among people over the age of 52, as according to the research has no interest in studying in the distance learning modality.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This work sought to research the profile of Distance Education students at private higher education institutions. The result of this study was in line with research already carried out on the profile of Distance Education students (FIUZA, 2012). Based on the results obtained from the application of the questionnaire, it can be seen that this type of

Education is still a study option for a population with an average age of 38.5 years, leading to the largest population being between 37 and 40 years of age.

It is worth noting that, despite the information presented, the data is limited to a specific context, as it did not involve other variables. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized, even due to the sample size. Another limitation of the study is the data analysis method and the lack of correlation between aspects. For new work, anova analysis is proposed, analyzing other variables.

However, these study limitations do not diminish the importance of research on the topic. The research indicates that age is favorable for choosing the distance learning modality, a modality that requires greater autonomy in the knowledge construction process. motivated to study.

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