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Growth in sight

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Government programs to encourage education, such as Fies and Pronatec, generate opportunities for higher education and also positive movements in the sector

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The Student Financing Program (Fies), an initiative of the Federal Government, is giving a new face to university education in Brazil. In addition to enabling easy access for students to higher education, Fies is now considered one of the best development opportunities, especially for small and medium-sized institutions.

The price war in monthly fees, although much practiced, is far from being the most sustainable way to gain space. The initiative generates harmful effects such as the high risk of evasion and the inability of the institution to invest in infrastructure and the quality of education. It is necessary to seek safer ways that also allow consolidation in the sector as a source of high-performance courses. And that's where federal programs come in, such as Fies and the National Program for Access to Technical Education and Employment (Pronatec).

The numbers demonstrate the significant adherence to Fies in recent years: from 1999 to 2009 564,000 contracts were finalized and, in 2013 alone, 556,000 loans were contracted. In January 2014, 110,000 contracts had already been made, proving the growing receptivity of students to the program.

Financing, which emerged in 1976 as the Educational Credit System (Creduc), became Fies in 1999, underwent changes in its operation in 2010 and became known as Novo Fies. The changes brought significant improvements to students. The interest rate, which until 2006 was 9% per year, became 3.4%, with a grace period for payment of 18 months and amortization of three times the time to complete the course with the increase of 12 months. In addition, medical students and bachelor's degrees can pay their debt through work for the public service network.

Breaking paradigms
One of the most important effects generated by Fies is the change in the student's relationship with higher education. The student no longer looks for the institution due to the price or location, as was done some time ago. Today, due to Fies, he can make a more vocational choice and less connected or dependent on his financial situation.

This is the case of Paula Carvalho Santos: the student studies nursing at the Italo Brasileiro University Center (Unifitalo) thanks to Fies. "I chose the course because I'm passionate about the area. The price was not a question at the time of the choice," comments the student. This scenario creates a new possibility, especially for small and medium-sized institutions, which live in an often disloyal dispute with the teaching giants.

According to Alexandre Mori, president and member of the Permanent Commission for Supervision and Monitoring (CPSA) of Student Financing (Fies) at the University Center of Araraquara (Uniarara) and consultant to the Union of Maintaining Entities of Higher Education Establishments in the State of São Paulo (Semesp), Fies is the star of the moment and, in addition to helping to attract students, for small and medium-sized companies it can be used for student retention. "Offering it correctly can be the great opportunity for growth. We have examples of higher education institutions that went from 1,800 students to 4,500 in three years," Mori points out.

Rodrigo Michielin, president of the CPSA of the Herminio Ometto University Center (Uniararas), has the same opinion. According to the president, Fies allows the institution to spend more time thinking about significant improvements. "With the financing we can fight evasion, reduce defaults and we still attract students. Fies can bring a student who previously would not have access to higher education," comments Michielin.

With the changes defined by Normative Ordinance No. 3 of January 13, 2014, which establishes that the risk of maintainers will be partially covered by the Educational Credit Operations Guarantee Fund (Fgeduc), the situation has become even more favorable for institutions. Although Fgeduc generates a cost for university institutions of 6.25% of 90% of each monthly fee paid with Fies, it generates an increase in enrollment, reduces participation in credit risk, reduces default and also the provision of risk guarantee.

However, Alexandre Mori warns that it is necessary to have a thoughtful management of Fies, with a specific service area and well-informed employees. "If the university institution has a professional management, it can identify bimonthly, for example, which students are with the monthly fee in arrears and offer Fies. In this case, the student goes from defaulter to defaulter in a maximum of 30 days," he explains.

Currently, institutions that have the funding available for engineering courses are in an advantageous position. The course is the most sought after by students, accounting for 222,000 contracts of the current total. The preference reflects the moment of higher education in Brazil, which demonstrates the evolution of the country's economy and consequent increase in civil construction and demand for good engineers. Law, administration and nursing courses are also, respectively, among the most sought after.

Positive effects
Some unusual movements in the education market in early 2014 also generated the opening of thousands of vacancies in private institutions. The National Program for Access to Technical Education and Employment (Pronatec), which since last year has the participation of the private network, brought 246,000 new vacancies in 250 institutions. In addition to him, in three Rio de Janeiro higher education establishments, more than 10,000 vacancies were opened to receive students from Gama Filho University (UGF) and the University Center of the City (UniverCidade), discredited by the Ministry of Education (MEC) in January.

Included in Pronatec in 2013, private institutions were responsible for 197,343 vacancies last year, equivalent to 82.3% of the 239,792 offered by the Program. The entry of private individuals was tumuled by tight deadlines and marked by the low number of students enrolled. Even so, the interest remained, since he offers revenue without default, guaranteed by the government, in exchange for low investment.

This semester, the number of vacancies rose to 246,228 in private ones (84.5% of the total), reflecting the extensive existing infrastructure in the sector, responsible for 73% of higher education enrollments in the country, according to data from the 2012 Higher Education Census, produced by the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (Inep).

Among the institutions that had the highest number of approved vacancies is Estácio, which totals 24,000 vacancies distributed in 25 courses in the State of Rio de Janeiro. In addition to the capital, there are also courses in Niterói, Nova Iguaçu, Nova Friburgo, Petrópolis, Cabo Frio and Campos dos Goytacazes. Abilio Gomes, Director of Operations at Estácio Participações in Rio de Janeiro, says that the university created a board to take special care of Pronatec's activities. "Estácio has laboratories equipped to meet the needs of all the courses we are offering. As the courses will be offered in the morning and afternoon shifts, this whole structure will be available to the students of the technicians," he explains.

Without much need for new classrooms or more teachers, these institutions should increase the number of students per room, making better use of resources. In addition to increasing billing, the gain in scale proportionally reduces costs, increasing profitability. The infrastructure demanded for the technical courses is based on the existing one in graduation.

In addition to receiving more students due to Pronatec, Estácio also partnered earlier this year with Contax Contact Center, to train employees of the Call Center company. Estácio will train about 4,000 Contax operators and supervisors by 2017. The value of this contract reached the mark of R\$ 30 million.

Marketing made at home
Francisco Borges, former academic director of the Ibmec Faculties and the Brazilian Institute of Advanced Technology (Ibta) and consultant to the Technology Support Foundation for vocational education programs, highlights that other great advantages brought by Pronatec are, in addition to the revenue guarantee at times when the university structure is idle, the direct conquest of new undergraduate students and also the best qualification of trained professionals. This establishes a relationship of gains for both sides: on the one hand, the gap between students who complete high school and those who enter higher education would be reduced; on the other hand, private institutions have the possibility of winning over students within their own structure. "The young person who leaves high school is often not prepared for higher education. The data from the National High School Exam (Enem) and the admission of undergraduate students show that there are a large number of young people who leave school and do not enter higher education," Borges says.

The bet is that students who go to technical courses will be encouraged to continue at the institution and enter the graduation. For institutions, this perspective brings advantages, since the performance of graduates in the National Student Performance Exam (Enade) also tends to grow in these cases.

Challenges and appreciation
The arrival of new students needs to be well planned and accompanied. "Every great growth has a risk, but the volume of students per course unit, in the case of Pronatec, is not so large. If the institution has a well-defined methodology, it will have no difficulty receiving students," defends Francisco Borges.

The new Pronatec students will be absorbed by the existing structure in the institutions - and many of them are already familiar with the model by practice with the technological graduation. At Anhembí Morumbi University, vacancies are offered in seven courses. According to the leader of Pronatec in the institution, Marcelo Vasconcelos, the institutional requirements for participation in the program limit the adhesion and qualification to institutions already with expertise and necessary infrastructure. "We have correlated undergraduate courses that meet essential conditions for the development of technicians, and minimal adjustments are necessary for their execution," says Vasconcelos.

The same happens at Anhanguera, which obtained approval of 33,000 vacancies in 30 courses, offered in 50 units in different regions of the country. Ana Maria Sousa, academic vice president, explains that the institution has been preparing since September 2013 with investments in all areas, but taking advantage of the existing facilities. "Efforts were made in the hiring and training of employees and teachers, in the preparation of laboratories and classrooms, in the development of exclusive content," explains the vice president. Ana Maria also highlights that there was a review of the operational and administrative processes to receive the thousands of new students. Like other managers, she trusts in the return of the technician's student to graduation. "The success of this work will certainly bring student loyalty, making him continue his studies with us," Ana Maria believes.

Following the new market possibilities is essential. The study of Federal Programs launched by the government and its understanding generate opportunities for fundraising, improvement of results, reduction of evasion and brand strengthening.

The appreciation of higher education institutions appears, in all cases, as the main gain in the arrival of new students. Francisco Borges also highlights that the boards of directors are valuing the occupation and openness of institutions to communities - the more inserted they are, the greater their visibility, and the less effort is needed to attract new students. "All over the world, the institutions that consolidate themselves the most financially are those dedicated to professional education," Borges adds.

Support for professionalization

Pronatec was launched in 2011, with the aim of expanding the offer of technical and professional courses to meet the demand of the labor market for qualified labor. Until the second half of 2013 the Program was directed only to Federal Institutes of Education. The release for private higher education institutions to participate happened that same year, after the approval of a Provisional Measure. However, the rush for the implementation of Pronatec generated problems: the enrollment period and the dates for the start of classes happened in very short deadlines, generating low student adherence to the Program and frustration on the part of university institutions. In 2014 the procedures improved and institutions feel safer when joining. The Notice of the Secretariat of Professional and Technological Education (Setec) nº 3 (03/12/2014) has already presented the Pronatec schedule and the detailed procedures for filling vacancies. Regular registration for the Program was opened in March and students interested in the remaining vacancies will have access to online registrations in April. 2014 classes will begin between April 14 and May 12. This year, a special version of Pronatec was born, Pronatec Copa 2014, an extension of the Program in which 240,000 vacancies will be offered for training professionals for the World Cup, and another 32,000 vacancies for English, Libras and Spanish courses.

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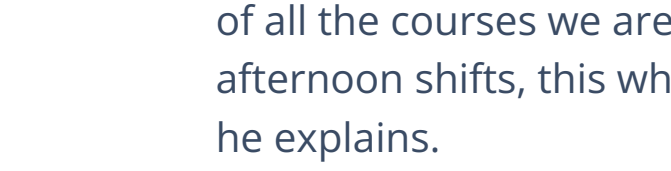
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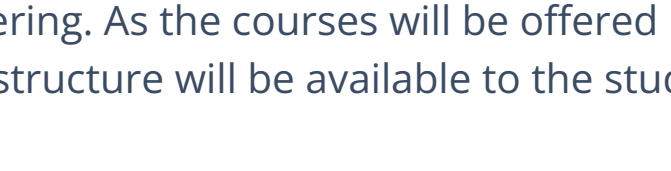
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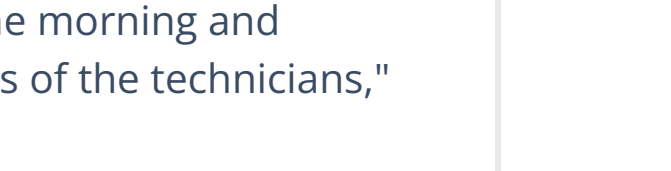
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