LUMEN ET VIRTUS

Does undergraduate education in business administration contribute to the promotion of sustainable development?

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ABSTRACT

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a critical topic on the agenda of actions on several social fronts, including education, due to their potential as a key component to address new challenges and promote sustainable action. This study investigates to what extent the teaching, research and extension processes of administration courses are aligned with the 2030 Agenda in the mission of promoting Sustainable Development. With a qualitative approach and exploratory and descriptive typology, primary sources resulting from interviews with students and professors are used, as well as secondary sources from documents from the administration course at the Federal University of Amapá, covering a period of 13 years. The results highlight a greater alignment of teaching, research and extension practices of the management course to the SDGs that deal with decent work and economic growth, industry, innovation and infrastructure, and peace, justice and effective institutions. On the other hand, the SDGs related to poverty eradication, gender equality, and clean water and sanitation need greater attention in the actions documented in the guidelines and academic planning instruments of the course. In addition, most actors perceive it as important to incorporate sustainable practices in the actions of the administration course, however there are still barriers that hinder this practical implementation, such as lack of managerial initiative, normative rigidity and cultural paradigms.

Keywords: Administration, Sustainable Development, Education, SDGs.

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INTRODUCTION

Reflection on sustainable development (SD) has been a beacon in the conduct of business and social actions, shaping the path to the construction of more equitable societies. Developing sustainably is not limited to meeting environmental standards, as is commonly believed in many societies. It is a strategic approach to address the pressing challenges that affect humanity on several fronts, such as the eradication of poverty, reduction of social inequalities and the lack of creation of public policies at different social borders. This implies recognizing the interdependence between human well-being and the health of the planet.

A development model that proposes a collective agenda of changes in the way societies and economies function and how human beings relate to the biosphere is fundamental to solving real problems that afflict societies at various levels. A clear example of this type of tool is the 2030 Agenda. These are guidelines signed by several countries, governments and companies, which outline actions aimed at promoting sustainable development. This agenda is composed of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which represent a collective effort to put sustainability on global public agendas in the face of global challenges. Among these, serious problems can be cited, such as extreme poverty, hunger, the climate emergency, social inequalities, humanitarian crises, the destruction of the biosphere and the erosion of democracies.

When analyzing the issue of SD from a local and regional perspective, it becomes evident that the State of Amapá faces several challenges implied in the 2030 Agenda, such as having the third highest unemployment rate in the country, at 12.4% (GTSC A2030, 2019). Also according to the State Secretariat for Planning, the GDP of the State of Amapá in 2019 was estimated at R$ 17.50 billion, and its participation in the national economy was only 0.2% in the same year. This economic factor triggers other problems, such as the population's lack of access to basic sanitation and drinking water. Data from the 2024 Study on the Progress of the New Legal Framework for Basic Sanitation in Brazil (ITB, 2022) show that almost half of the population of Amapá does not have access to treated water and approximately 88% do not have sewage service. In addition, basic education is also a motivator of concern regarding the population of Amapá. According to the Basic Education Yearbook 2021 (BRASIL, 2021), only 20.2% of public school students finish Elementary School with adequate learning in Portuguese. In High School, it is 17.2%. Also according to the AEB (2021), 56 out of every 100 young people in the state of Amapá complete high school by the age of 19.

In this context, a precarious social, economic and educational reflex for a considerable part of the population residing in the state of Amapá is understood, especially the younger class that, upon perceiving the lack of support from the State to generate opportunities for education, professional development and dignity, may tend to criminality.

To formulate strategies and actions that make it possible to overcome these challenges, a joint and coordinated effort by those who have the effective capacity to drive transformations is essential. Among these local agents, we can mention governments, companies, society and educational institutions.

The Federal University of Amapá (UNIFAP), highlighted as an agent of innovation, plays a crucial role in promoting social change, especially in teaching, research and extension. Given this scenario, this institution emerges as a catalyst for efforts to face the numerous regional challenges, as its institutional mission is the formation of citizens and the social, economic, environmental, technological and cultural development of the Amazon Region.

Through its undergraduate and graduate courses, involved in the university triad of teaching, research and extension, UNIFAP is responsible for conducting the processes of change regarding their respective areas of knowledge and activity. To this end, it is essential that its courses are attentive to local and regional demands, aligned with the development of the State, as recommended by its current Institutional Development Plan (UNIFAP, 2020).

UNIFAP's Business Administration course, started in 2013, has as its central purpose to promote social responsibility and contribute to sustainable development, as outlined in its pedagogical project (UNIFAP, 2012). Therefore, it is crucial to evaluate their contributions to Sustainable Development in the light of the global agreement in force for the SD. This evaluation requires a more comprehensive view on the part of professors and students on the subject, as well as on the real contributions of the course to the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda.

This study is important because it evaluates the teaching, research and extension processes of the administration course. Thus, the objective of this study is to analyze the contributions of the UNIFAP administration course, in terms of teaching, research and extension actions and strategies, to promote sustainable development, aligned with the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda.

This work is organized into five sections: the first presents the introduction and problematization; the second presents the theoretical foundation, which includes the discussion on Sustainable Development and the role of Higher Education Institutions for SD; the third addresses the materials and methods used, which includes the research subject, study design, specific procedures and data analysis; the fourth section presents the results and discussions; and, the fifth presents the final considerations.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

The term sustainable development emerged from United Nations studies on climate change, as a response for humanity to the social and environmental crisis that the world was going through

from the second half of the twentieth century onwards (GONÇALVES, 2005). SD is multidimensional, as it incorporates different aspects of society, seeking environmental protection and maintenance of natural capital to achieve economic prosperity and equity for current and future generations (SARTORI; LATRONIC; CAMPOS, 2014).

Actions aimed at SD must involve not only the environmental dimension, but also the social and economic dimension, since its objective is to protect global wealth in terms of financial assets and rights, natural resources and quality of life, which are common means that encompass society.

For Van de Kerk and Manuel (2008), a sustainable society is one in which each individual can (1) develop in a healthy way, (2) obtain adequate education, (3) live in a clean environment and (4) in a balanced and safe society, (5) use non-renewable resources responsibly, so that future generations are not left empty-handed, and (6) contribute to a sustainable world.

At its core, sustainable development is a transformational process in which the use of resources, the economic orientation of technological development, and institutional change coordinate and enhance the current and future potential to meet the human needs and needs of both present and future generations (ELKINGTON, 1997).

The discourse of sustainability has intensified over the last decades, bringing to light a series of concerns relevant to the debate on issues related to it (FARIAS; RABBIT; COELHO, 2019). The concept proposed by Elkington (1997) refers to the satisfaction of needs and the search for a balance in the dimensions known as the "*triple bottom line"* or 3P of sustainability, in English *"people, planet and profit"*.

However, there was a need to encompass these dimensions in society in an interconnected way, that is, with a connection between these measures to make them strategic for a new development philosophy. Thus, approved in December 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development emerged, which is a strategic action guide for achieving economic, social and environmental development. Initially, 193 countries signed it, in order to mobilize global efforts towards more sustainable development and considering the complex interconnections between the challenges historically faced by the planet.

THE 2030 AGENDA AND THE GOALS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The 2030 Agenda represents a milestone for achieving sustainable development. It is the result of the maturation of more than half a century of discussions around strategies to face contemporary challenges. It is one of the most comprehensive global agreements in recent history and represents the current global declaration to achieve sustainable development. It is also the greatest expression of international articulation to guarantee the full human development of international society (SILVEIRA; SOUSA, 2020).

Under the motto of "leaving no one behind", the document "Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" was approved during the United Nations Summit on Sustainable Development in September 2015. Composed of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), elaborated as an extension and continuity of the achievements of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and seek to achieve their unfinished goals of the agreement signed at the Millennium Summit in 2000.

The 2030 Agenda aims to promote sustainable development in an integrated and balanced manner, considering the social, environmental, economic, political and institutional dimensions, and respecting the particularities and contexts of countries and their regions. The 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda, see Figure 1, have a cross-cutting scope that includes multiple fields of action, such as the eradication of poverty and hunger, the promotion of gender equality, and the protection of natural resources and biodiversity (UN, 2015). The agenda also aims to ensure equitable access to quality education, physical, mental and social well-being, clean water and sanitation, safe and resilient human habitats, reliable and sustainable energy, decent work and the promotion of democracy, good governance and the rule of law. These are crucial aspects for the effective promotion of sustainable development.

Figure 1 - Sustainable Development Goals



Source: Adapted from UN (2015).

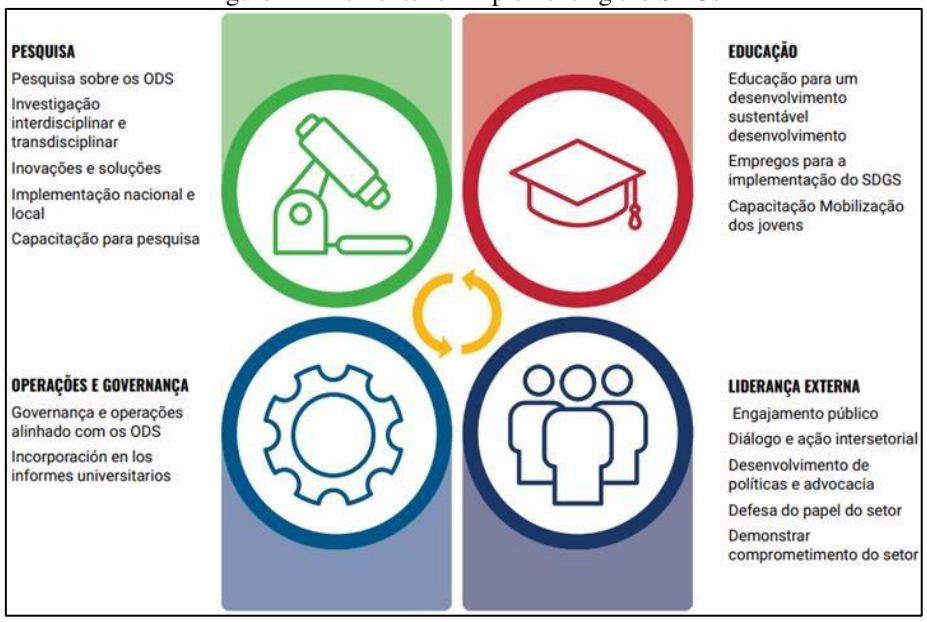
While many of the issues addressed by the 2030 Agenda have been addressed in previous multilateral declarations and agreements, what is new lies in the way these issues are organized and synthesized into quantifiable targets. This facilitates implementation, monitoring and review. Another novelty is that the Agenda is the result of a collective effort, with the active participation of various sectors of society, which makes it applicable globally in all countries, at different levels of development (BARBIERI, 2020).

CONTRIBUTION OF UNIVERSITIES TO THE DS

Universities, due to the intrinsic nature of their activities, constitute themselves as one of the protagonists in facing the challenges of the present that overlap with the problems of the past. The effort exerted around the construction of the 2030 Agenda aims to mitigate and eradicate these problems in global contexts.

In this context, the engagement of universities is crucial for the implementation of the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda in the various contexts and realities, given the scope and inclusive character of its objectives. The particularities of university processes offer favorable conditions for the creation of synergetic states with the other agents of society (LEIVA, ENRIQUE; ALDERETE BARRIOS; GALEANO SÁNCHEZ, 2021). The critical function of universities is to guide society in the implementation of the SDGs, see Figure 2.

Figure 2 – Elements for implementing the SDGs



Fonte: Adapted from SDSN (2020).

The contribution of the university sector is essential for the full achievement of any SDG. The realization of these goals is intrinsically linked to the fundamental activities of universities, such as education, research, innovation, and their crucial role in civic, social, and community leadership (SDSN, 2017).

However, in order to achieve the effectiveness of a global agenda, it is essential to have broad dissemination and awareness among all actors involved. The university community, as a key agent, needs not only to be aware, but to internalize the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda. This appropriation is essential to allow the formulation of institutional strategies and the implementation of actions aligned with the SDG goals, at the various institutional levels (SAVEGNAGO; GOMEZ; DALLA CORTE, 2022).

In view of the crucial role of higher education institutions in promoting and achieving the SDGs, research has been conducted globally to highlight their importance in this process (SERAFINI; MOURA, 2021). This relevance is supported by the fundamental premise that, by being understood as public goods, universities can contribute effectively and significantly to the achievement of the SDGs (FIOREZE, 2022).

The active involvement of universities in the implementation of the SDGs is feasible, as they operate in four crucial dimensions: i) education and training; ii) investigation; iii) institutional management; and iv) social impact (SERAFINI; MOURA, 2021). These dimensions offer universities a comprehensive platform to play a vital role in achieving these goals.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This study was carried out at UNIFAP, in Macapá, Amapá. Created by Decree No. 98.977, of March 2, 1990, UNIFAP's mission is to build and share knowledge and practices in an innovative way, with quality, in teaching, research and extension actions, contributing to the sustainable development of the Amazon Region (UNIFAP, 2022). The said university has 52 undergraduate majors and 23 graduate programs, serving a student community of 11,340 students.

The object of study is the actions of the UNIFAP Administration Course. The approval of the Course occurred through the Resolution of the University Council (CONSU) No. 040, of November 22, 2013. Its implementation and effective operation took place in 2014 with the admission of 100 students in the first selection process. The course's mission is to graduate professional administrators to work in the organizational scenario with critical and transformative skills, to promote and participate in the improvement of management in the productive, process and development perspective of public and private organizations, using different administrative resources, new information technologies, communication and innovation. Among its objectives is the promotion and dissemination of values related to social responsibility, to contribute to the dissemination and application of knowledge and techniques that promote sustainable development (UNIFAP, 2012).

In view of this, this study becomes an analytical instrument to improve the actions of the UNIFAP Administration course, by analyzing the alignment of its guidelines and actions with the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda, in the social, economic, environmental and institutional dimensions.

This is a qualitative study of the exploratory and descriptive type. First, the phenomenon is outlined without crossing variables, offering descriptive clarity of characteristics that are not always readily available (VOLPATO, 2015). Secondly, the novelty of the theme in the context of UNIFAP and the Course is explored, requiring theoretical familiarization with the theme, providing the necessary prospects for further investigations (MARCONI; LAKATOS, 2003).

By addressing the trajectory of the Administration Course over its 10 years of existence (2014-2023) and relating its processes to the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda, this research highlights the amplified view of the interrelationship of the course's actions and practices with sustainable development. In short, it analyzes the teaching, research and extension activities, projecting the degree of absorption of the SDGs in their narratives. This critical analysis seeks to contribute to synchrony and synergy in the incorporation of the SDGs into the practices of the Course.

To achieve the objective of this study, data collection and analysis were organized in different channels, each directly linked to the desired information, organized in two stages: (1) documentary analysis and (2) analysis of the perception of the actors involved.

Step 1: in-depth document analysis. It was based on the Pedagogical Project of the Administration Course (PPC), Research Project Reports, electronic file of the Course Coordination, websites and the Academic Activities Management System (SIGAA). In the teaching activities, the Curricular Components of the current PPC were analyzed. In the extension, the formalized projects were examined, while in the research, the formalized projects and the students' TCC were considered. The classification of the actions in each activity group was carried out using as a reference the list of keywords created by IPEA in collaboration with the CNJ. This requires examining each process, establishing connections with the objectives of the 2030 Agenda. This method allowed us to statistically identify which development objectives are more or less addressed in the context studied.

Step 2: Analysis of the perception of the actors involved. At this stage, students and teachers were asked by filling out a *Google Forms questionnaire*. The online questionnaire, composed of objective and subjective questions, addressed crucial elements to understand the perspective of the participants of the UNIFAP Administration course on sustainable development, following specific types of questions and levels of responses, based on the recommendation of Miranda (2020). The answers were classified by semester, allowing us to analyze whether more advanced students are more aware of the topic. At the end of data collection and treatment, the following scenario was obtained, as shown in Chart 1:

Chart 1 – Amount of data collected in the survey

Niche	Number of Actions Analyzed
Curricular Component	47
Extension projects	6
Research projects	11
Course Completion Papers	15
Faculty Respondents	3
Student Respondents	37

Source: Prepared by the authors (2024).

The analysis of teaching, research and extension data followed Bardin's (2011) content analysis method, involving the following steps: (1) initial pre-analysis of reading, a more detailed exploration through in-depth reading; (2) treatment of the results, with interpretation and grouping of the terms. This was done by considering the relevance and frequency of the keywords.

The discussion considered the group of actions in each dimension of the university tripod, by year and by SDGs. Graphical representations were used to illustrate the frequency of actions in the interstice studied, allowing the identification of the periods with the highest and lowest number of actions. In addition, the SDGs were identified with greater and lesser frequency in each activity group. The answers to the form were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively, enabling a subjective understanding of the context in the researched location and its consequences. After measuring the results, graphs were created referring to the number of each response, in order to identify the respondents' tendency in relation to the theme.

Content analysis emerges as a methodological research approach used to describe and interpret the content present in various forms of communication (BARDIN, 2011). This analysis conducted in a systematic way, whether qualitative or quantitative, provides a reconstruction of the messages, enabling a deeper understanding of their meanings (MORAES, 1999).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

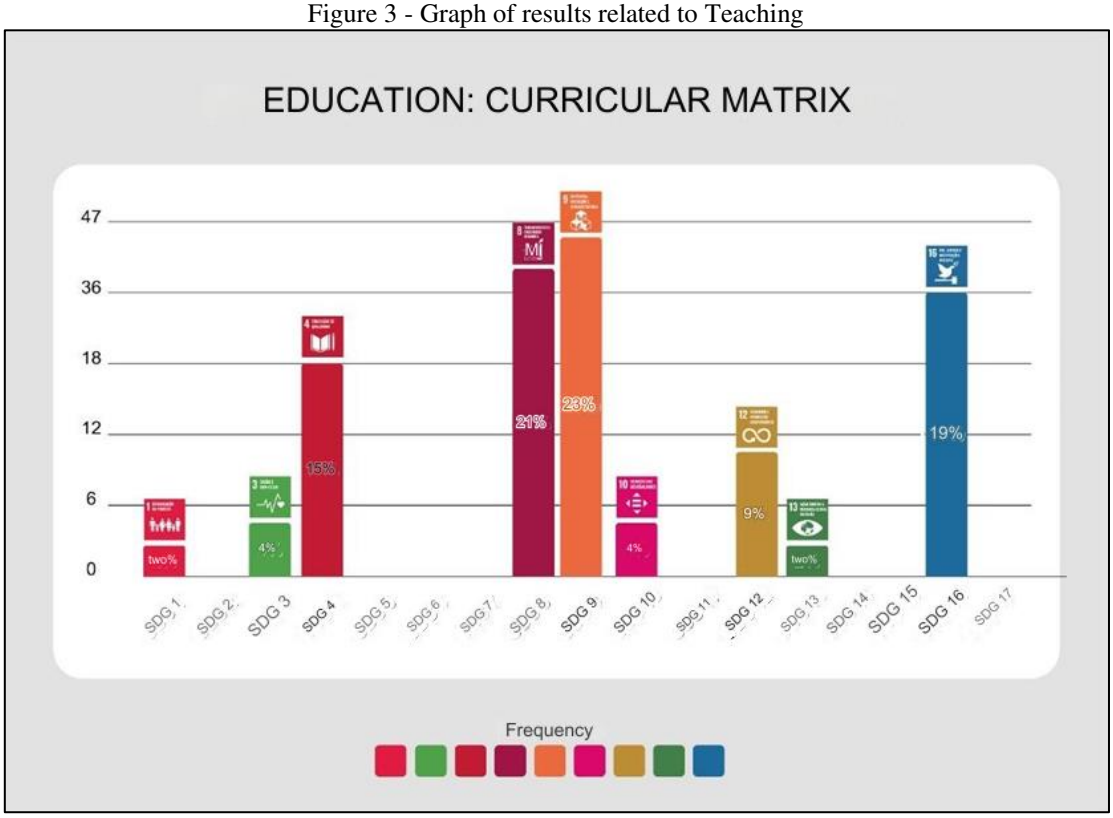
The results are presented below, following a logic of discussion based on the tripod of teaching, research and extension, as well as on the perception of the interviewed actors.

EDUCATION

47 curricular components (CC) that make up the curricular matrix of the Administration course were analyzed. After classifying the CC in relation to the 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda, it was possible to make the observation represented in Figure 3.

Among the SDGs analyzed, the most addressed in this group of activities were SDG 9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, with 23%, followed by SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth, with 21%, and SDG 16, Peace, Justice and Effective Institutions, with 19%. SDG 4, Quality Education also appears in the analysis, with an approach rate of 15%. This distribution shows the recognition of multiple dimensions of sustainable development. The analysis also identified low frequency of SDGs 12 (9%), SDG 3 (4%), SDG 9 (4%), followed by SDGs 1 (2%), 13 (2%), in which the sum does not exceed 22% of the CCs analyzed, indicating a lack of emphasis or attention to these specific areas.

Figure 3 - Graph of results related to Teaching



Source: Prepared by the authors (2024).

On the other hand, the analysis found the absence of CC corresponding to Goal 2, 5, 6, 7, 11, 14, 15, 17, respectively, Zero Hunger, Gender Equality, Clean Water and Sanitation, Affordable and Clean Energy, Sustainable Cities and Communities, Life Below Water, Life on Land, and Partnerships and Means of Implementation.

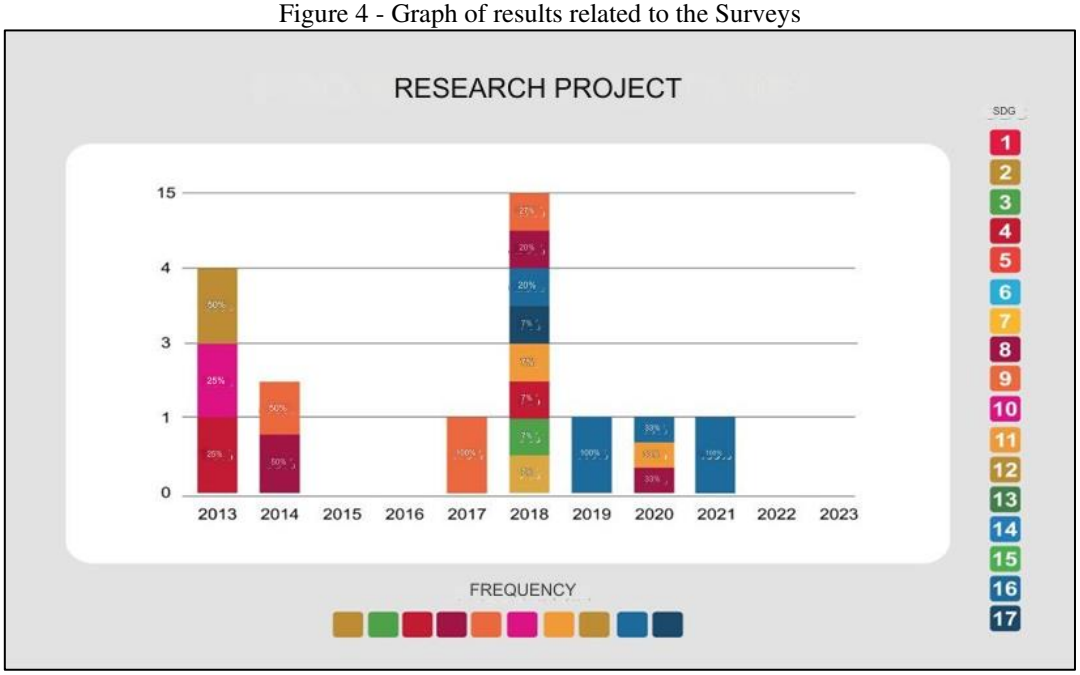
In this analysis, the need for a comprehensive framework to guide education and action towards a sustainable and inclusive future is recognized. The effectiveness of the SDGs requires collective and comprehensive commitment, going beyond a punctual and isolated approach in the disciplines offered (CANEZIN; ARAÚJO, 2024) and that requires the articulation between various disciplines of the Course. In this context, it is imperative to build a university that fully fulfills its role, extending beyond professional training to engage professionals in their local realities (ASSIS; BONIFÁCIO, 2011).

RESEARCH

Research plays a crucial role in transforming social and economic interactions to achieve the SDGs by consolidating knowledge, empirical basis, and innovative solutions (SDSN, 2017). It is the responsibility of the university to cultivate the awareness, skills and values essential for a just and sustainable world, using its academic freedom, critical mass and diversity of skills to face the challenges of society, promoting bold actions in search of solutions (CORTESE, 2003).

This dimension of analysis included two categories of activities: research projects and course completion works (TCC) prepared in the 2014-2023 interstice, both of which were inserted in a single category called Research Projects, as shown in Figure 4. The data were obtained according to the availability of the records provided by UNIFAP.

Figure 4 - Graph of results related to the Surveys



Source: Prepared by the authors (2024).

Among the period covered, it is possible to analyze that no research was related to SDGs 1, 5, 6, 7, 13, 14 and 15. These goals concern poverty eradication, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, action against global climate change, life below water and life on land, respectively.

The SDGs most contemplated in the surveys, according to the methodology, were 4, 8, 9, 11 and 5. They refer to the themes, quality education, decent work and economic growth, industry, innovation and infrastructure, sustainable cities and communities, and gender equality. The sustainable development goals of the 2030 Agenda contemplated less frequently were 2, 3, 10, 12 and 17, which refer to the themes of zero hunger and sustainable agriculture, health and well-being, reduction of inequalities, responsible consumption and production, and partnerships and means of implementation, respectively.

The Administration course should not only stimulate research on the SDGs, but also promote innovation for sustainable development. This includes focusing on areas considered to be priorities, aligned with the Administrator's competencies. It is therefore crucial that the course does not neglect research in other areas that are equally relevant to research activities.

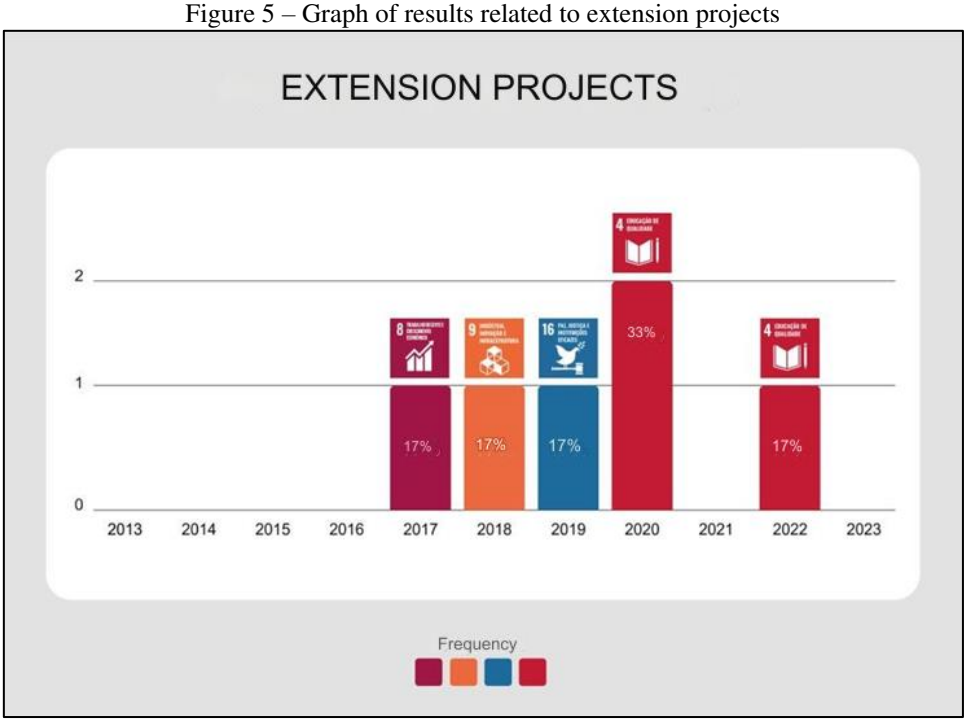
EXTENSION

University Extension, integrated into the curriculum and research, is an interdisciplinary process that promotes transformative interaction between higher education institutions and society (BRASIL 2018). At UNIFAP, it is inseparable from teaching and research, materializing in courses, programs, projects, and complementary activities that integrate the institution with the local community (UNIFAP, 2020).

In this group of activities, 6 extension projects registered in the 2013-2023 period were analyzed. After classifying the CC in relation to the 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda, it was possible to make the observation represented in Figure 5.

Among the SDGs analyzed, the most addressed in this activity group were SDG 4, with a highlight of 33% in 2020 and 17% in 2022, followed by SDG 16 and SDG 9, both with 17%. SDG 8 was also noted in the analysis, with an approach rate of 17%. The absence of proposals corresponding to goals 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 was identified, and a low frequency of SDGs 8 (17%), SDG 9 (17%), SDG 16 (17%) and SDG 4 (17%).

Figure 5 – Graph of results related to extension projects



Source: Prepared by the authors (2024).

Effective implementation of the SDGs requires universities to take social leadership, initiate and facilitate intersectoral dialogue and action, design policies based on the 2030 Agenda, and strengthen public commitment to it (SDSN, 2017). Strategically positioned in society, both individually and collectively, they can play a crucial role in guiding, guiding and supporting local, national and international responses to the SDGs. Success in achieving the SDGs will depend on the action and collaboration of these institutions with other sectors.

The analysis of the priorities of the courses in UNIFAP's extension activities revealed the need to reflect on the extension policy of the Course, with initiatives to strengthen the number of projects, foster projects in areas not covered and strengthen the projects and programs in the SDGs with the highest occurrence.

PERCEPTION OF PROFESSORS AND STUDENTS

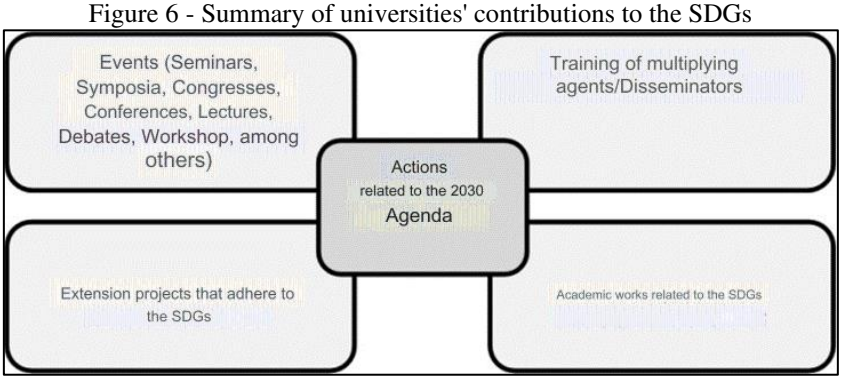
The results of the survey reveal that the majority (57%) of respondents consider the incorporation of sustainable practices important in their daily lives. However, 52.5% are skeptical about the course's initiatives aligned with the SDs and SDGs of the 2030 Agenda. 40% believe that the Administration Course plays an important role in the promotion of sustainable development, but 25% consider that the Course has contributed little to this purpose.

The results show barriers such as lack of awareness about SD and SDGs, limited resources, resistance to change, poor curriculum integration and institutional challenges. Overcoming such obstacles will require coordinated efforts from diverse stakeholders for a more holistic and effective approach to sustainable development. Universities, through their courses and processes, play a vital role in SDG implementation. To strengthen public commitment, they should organize events, conferences and forums, promoting awareness and interactive dialogue on the actions needed to achieve the SDGs.

Facilitating intersectoral dialogue is also important, using the university as a neutral platform for discussions and collaboration in the search for solutions. In addition, they should take a leading role in policy development and promotion of sustainable development by working with policy makers, identifying problems and providing guidance. To demonstrate the importance of the university sector, it is essential to lead debates, create alliances with other institutions, and develop tools to support national and regional efforts.

Savegnago, Gomez, and Dalla (2022) highlight, as shown in Figure 6, the central contributions of universities to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The authors observe that higher education institutions have adopted practices and services from the perspective of SD.

Figure 6 - Summary of universities' contributions to the SDGs



Source: Adaptado de Savegnago, Gomez and Dalla (2022).

Given the urgency and challenging scale of meeting the SDGs by 2030, it is imperative to scale up and engage all actors in the university context. This means accelerating sustainable development through concrete and shared actions across diverse sectors. Ultimately, to make this commitment effective, universities need to integrate the principles of the SDGs into their activities, make their commitments public, and actively participate in prominent initiatives in support of the SDGs (SDSN, 2017).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The SDGs outlined in the 2030 Agenda present significant challenges, requiring substantial transformations. In this context, the university, through its courses and the university triad, emerges as an essential agent to address these challenges.

The analysis of the contributions of the UNIFAP Administration Course over 13 years in the promotion of the SDGs reveals that the course plays, albeit in an incipient way, a crucial role in this process. Its processes, however, show imbalance and low coordination, focusing predominantly on SDGs 8, 9 and 16 to the detriment of SDGs 1, 5, 6, 7, 13, 14 and 15, which receive less prominence and, according to the technique used, remain practically non-existent.

This study provides an opportunity for the course to rethink the incorporation of the 2030 Agenda in a planned, coordinated, and transversal manner in its guidelines and actions. It is important that the course management dialogues with its members, exploring new perspectives for integrating the Agenda. This instrument can become a guide for policies and strategies, embracing the contemporary challenges of the Administration professional. Reflection on the integration of the 2030 Agenda into strategic planning instruments, pedagogical design, research and extension guidelines, and administrative processes is essential for the implementation of a more sustainable philosophy among the main actors.

These considerations go beyond the scope of UNIFAP's Administration course, and are applicable to the entire institution and other organizations that face the challenge of implementing and promoting the SDGs of the Agenda. They underline the pressing need for more effective

planning, management and control to meet current challenges, aiming to improve the quality of life and promote a more just and equitable society.

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