

Psychological Assessment Syllabi: Analyzing Public and Private HEIs in Northeastern Brazil

Ementários de Avaliação Psicológica: Analisando IES Públicas e Privadas do Nordeste Brasileiro

Libro Guía de Evaluación Psicológica: Analizando IES Públicas y Privadas del Nordeste Brasileño

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Ulisses Izidorio da Silva Neto  

Clinical psychologist. Specialist in Health Psychology. Content-development instructor. Volunteer at the Ezequias Rocha Rego Care Center (CAERR).

Leogildo Alves Freires  

PhD in Social Psychology, Universidade Federal da Paraíba (UFPB). Professor, Institute of Psychology, Federal University of Alagoas (UFAL).

Gleidson Diego Lopes Loureto  

PhD in Social Psychology, UFPB. Professor, Psychology Program, Federal University of Roraima (UFRR).

Julio Cezar Albuquerque da Costa  

Undergraduate student, Psychology, UFAL. Member of Alagoas Laboratory of Psychometrics and Psychological Assessment (LAPAP), UFAL.

Cleane Lacerda do Nascimento  

Undergraduate student, Psychology, UFAL. CNPq Scientific Initiation fellow at LAPAP, UFAL.

Angélica Maria Ferreira de Melo Castro  

PhD in Cognitive Psychology, Federal University of Pernambuco. Researcher at LAPAP, UFAL.

Abstract

This study analyzed the syllabi of psychological assessment (PA) courses from undergraduate psychology programs at public and private higher education institutions (HEIs) in Northeastern Brazil, with the aim of reflecting on PA training in the region. A total of 17 public and nine private institutions made their syllabi available online; we analyzed these materials using IRaMuTeQ. The results indicate predominantly technique-driven approaches to PA instruction, with an emphasis on psychodiagnostics — features that were more prominent in private HEIs. Advances aligned with PA teaching guidelines were more evident in public HEIs, including the revision of course nomenclature, stronger integration with other psychological domains, treatment of PA as a process, and more sustained attention to ethical issues. Overall, PA training in public HEIs appears to align more closely with established teaching guidelines. Nevertheless, progress is still needed in both settings to ensure high-quality professional training, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has challenged psychology to revisit its practices and adapt to new contexts without compromising ethical standards or the quality of teaching and training.

Keywords: psychological assessment, university, psychology training, public, private.

Resumo

Este estudo objetivou realizar uma análise dos ementários das disciplinas de avaliação psicológica (AP) dos cursos de graduação em psicologia de instituições de ensino superior (IES) públicas e privadas do Nordeste brasileiro, com fins a refletir sobre a formação em AP na região. Desse modo, 17 instituições públicas e nove privadas disponibilizaram essas informações on-line, as quais foram analisadas no Iramuteq. Os resultados demonstram a presença de abordagens de ensino tecnicistas sobre a AP, com ênfase no psicodiagnóstico, sendo esses aspectos mais preponderantes nas IES privadas. Os avanços nas diretrizes para o ensino da AP foram mais perceptíveis em IES públicas, tais como: reformulação de nomenclaturas; maior articulação com outros saberes psicológicos; compreensão de AP enquanto processo; e a discussão sobre questões éticas. Conclui-se que a formação em AP nas IES públicas converge em maior medida com as diretrizes de ensino da disciplina, embora avanços em ambos os contextos sejam ainda necessários para uma formação profissional de qualidade, principalmente no contexto da pandemia do novo coronavírus, em que a psicologia em geral, tem sido desafiada a revisar suas práticas e adaptar-se aos novos contextos, sem prejuízos de ordem ética e de qualidade do ensino e formação.

Palavras-chave: avaliação psicológica, universidade, ensino em psicologia, públicas, privadas.

Resumen

Este estudio objetivó investigar la formación en evaluación psicológica (AP) de los cursos de Psicología en el Nordeste brasileño. Para tanto, fueron utilizados libros guía de las asignaturas de AP de Instituciones de Enseñanza Superior (IES) públicas y privadas. Diecisiete instituciones públicas y nueve privadas pusieron a disposición estas informaciones en línea, las cuales fueron analizadas en el Iramuteq. Los resultados demostraron la presencia de enfoques de enseñanza tecnicista sobre la AP, con énfasis en el psicodiagnóstico, siendo estos aspectos más preponderantes en las IES privadas. Los avances en las directrices para la enseñanza de la AP fueron más perceptibles en IES públicas, tales como: reformulación de nomenclaturas; mayor articulación con otros saberes psicológicos; comprensión de AP como proceso; y la discusión sobre cuestiones éticas. Se concluye que la formación en AP en las IES públicas converge en mayor medida con directrices de enseñanza de la asignatura, aunque avances en ambos los contextos sean aún necesarios para una formación profesional de calidad, principalmente en el contexto de la pandemia del nuevo Coronavirus, donde la Psicología en general, viene siendo retada a revisar sus prácticas y adaptarse a los nuevos contextos, sin perjuicios de orden ética y de calidad de la enseñanza y formación.

Palabras-chave: evaluación psicológica, universidad, enseñanza en psicología, públicas, privadas.

Résumé

Cette étude visait à enquêter sur la formation en évaluation psychologique (EP) dans les cursus de psychologie du nord-est du Brésil. À cette fin, nous avons consulté les plans des cours des disciplines des EP des Établissements d'Enseignement Supérieur (EES) publics et privés. Dix-sept institutions publiques et neuf institutions privées ont mis ces informations en ligne, lesquelles ont été analysées dans Iramuteq. Les résultats montrent la présence d'approches technicistes dans l'enseignement de l'EP, mettant l'accent sur le psychodiagnostic, ces aspects étant plus répandus dans les EES privés. Les progrès dans les directives pour l'enseignement de l'EP étaient plus perceptibles dans les EES publics, notamment : la reformulation des nomenclatures ; une meilleure articulation avec d'autres connaissances psychologiques ; la compréhension de l'EP comme un processus; et la discussion des questions éthiques. Il est conclu que la formation en EP dans les EES publics est mieux alignée avec les orientations pédagogiques de la discipline, bien que des avancées dans les deux contextes soient encore nécessaires pour une formation professionnelle de qualité. Cela est particulièrement vrai dans le contexte de la pandémie de COVID-19, qui a contraint la psychologie à revisiter ses pratiques et à s'adapter à de nouveaux contextes, tout en préservant l'éthique et la qualité de l'enseignement et de la formation.

Mots-clés : évaluation psychologique, université, enseignement de la psychologie, public, privé.

Throughout the 20th century, psychological assessment (PA) faced significant challenges in building and implementing knowledge in the field. The main problems stemmed from tensions around its very definition and from the psychometric fragility of psychological measures, leading to a period of crisis between 1970 and 1990 that contributed to the trivialization of test study and practice in Brazil (Alchieri & Cruz, 2003). In response to the marginalization of this field within Brazilian psychological science, a process to rebuild PA began in the 1990s, aiming to overcome the lack of scientific criteria in the area (Cardoso & Silva, 2018). During this period, faculty and researchers organized several scientific events to discuss, among other topics, ongoing research, the role of PA courses in psychologists' training, and policies for the field's development (Bueno & Peixoto, 2018).

In parallel, the field's leading organizations were founded: the Brazilian Association of Rorschach and Projective Methods (ASBRo) in 1993 and the Brazilian Institute of Psychological Assessment (IBAP) in 1997 (Cardoso & Silva, 2018). Oversight and regulation of psychological tests, however, began only in 2003, when the Brazilian Federal Council of Psychology (CFP) created the Psychological Test Assessment System (SATEPSI) through Resolution No. 002 (CFP, 2003). The creation of SATEPSI is regarded as a historical milestone, having contributed significantly to advances in PA in Brazil (CFP, 2013). Its functions include regulating PA, reviewing the minimum requirements that psychological tests must meet, and maintaining a list of tests deemed favorable or unfavorable for use, among others (Reppold & Noronha, 2018).

On the eve of SATEPSI's 20th anniversary, the CFP issued Resolution No. 31 (CFP, 2022), which repealed Resolution No. 09/2018. The new measure better organizes concepts related to PA and SATEPSI, updates aspects of their roles, and strengthens the ethical-political dimensions that should guide PA conducted by psychology professionals in the post-COVID-19 context (CFP, 2022). It also reiterates that PA is a broad, structured investigative process focused on psychological variables and composed of methods, techniques, and instruments designed to collect information that supports decision-making at different levels (i.e., individual, group, or institutional), based on specific demands, conditions, and purposes.

Thus, unlike the latter half of the 20th century, PA is now more clearly defined, and psychological testing is better regulated. Nevertheless, according to Gouveia (2018), there is still no consensus — either within the CFP or among the leading PA institutions — on the competencies psychologists need to work in the field, or even on the basic skills expected of a psychologist. In 2012, with support from IBAP, Nunes et al. (2012), already concerned with professional training, published the Guidelines for Teaching Psychological Assessment. These guidelines emphasize objective criteria regarding: the competencies students should achieve in PA training; the courses and syllabi aligned with those competencies; the teaching structure; and recommended references for course design.

By way of example from Nunes et al. (2012), the competencies to be achieved through PA training include: knowing PA's historical background, relevant legislation, and ethical aspects; understanding PA as a process; knowing the properties a test must have; selecting tests appropriately and interpreting their normative tables; mastering theoretical foundations in psychometrics; understanding the psychological constructs measured by tests; planning PA in line with objectives, target population, and context; comparing and integrating information obtained through different assessment techniques; writing psychological reports and professional documents; communicating assessment results; and making appropriate referrals.

Another section of the guidelines directly relates to this article's central aim, as it concerns the adequacy and planning of PA course syllabi so that the full set of competencies listed above can be developed in undergraduate psychology programs through integrated theoretical-practical experiences (Nunes et al., 2012). In a more up-to-date discussion of competencies relevant to psychology professionals, Zanini et al. (2022) add training in information and communication digital technologies (TICs) as a direct and increasingly important requirement for PA practice, especially after the pandemic.

However, data from recent editions of the National Student Performance Exam (ENADE) indicate that psychology students' performance on items involving measurement has been insufficient (Travassos & Mourão, 2017). According to Noronha et al. (2008), who analyzed 39 syllabi from 14 universities across Brazil's five regions, a technicist orientation persists in Northeastern universities. This mirrors another study by the same author, conducted in 2006 with 41 syllabi from 38 psychology programs sampled from all five regions — 71.7% at private higher education institutions (IES) and 28.3% at public ones — which highlighted wide variation in course nomenclature and a prioritization of instruction in techniques of psychological assessment, application, and measurement (Noronha, 2006).

In Brazil's North, analyzing 56 syllabi from 28 programs (six at public institutions and 22 at private ones), Freires et al. (2017) found that 19.1% of institutions still prioritize textual content related to psychodiagnostics, 17.2% focus on the application and interpretation of psychological instruments, and only 11% emphasize structuring PA. The authors concluded that these syllabi do not meet the recommendations proposed by Nunes et al. (2012) and that they overemphasize conducting PA in specific contexts, such as clinical settings.

More recently, Ambiel et al. (2019), analyzing 478 syllabi from 133 institutions (public and private) in Brazil's Southeast, South, and North, observed that categories encompassing content on psychological tests and on the process, aims, and practice of PA totaled 34.2%, whereas the sum of the categories history, foundations of psychometrics, other PA techniques, feedback, referrals, and documentation reached only 29%. Once again, the findings point to inconsistencies in professional training that fall short of the guidelines proposed by Nunes et al. (2012), a recurring concern in the literature regarding the qualification of psychologists who conduct assessment processes (Reppold & Serafini, 2010).

In the Northeast — specifically in the state of Ceará — Cardoso and Gomes (2019) reported that more than 75% of participating faculty considered psychological testing the most relevant content for PA instruction, and that test administration remains the most commonly used methodology in the area. This corroborates other studies showing that PA training in the Northeast tends to sideline topics such as ethics and assessment contexts (Ambiel et al., 2019; Bardagi et al., 2015). Freires et al. (2022) also highlight the urgent need for training that incorporates sociocultural competencies to support PA practice better equipped to address human and regional diversity.

In contrast to these trends, Viana-Meireles et al. (2021) described a PA teaching experience with positive results at a federal university in the Northeast. Their report detailed a hands-on activity in courses on psychological testing techniques. They concluded that, although the content retained a theoretical and technicist orientation, students came to recognize that tests alone are insufficient to encompass PA as a process and were encouraged to adopt an ethical-political-critical stance for their future professional practice.

Taken together, these findings show divergences between the competencies currently being developed in psychology programs and those proposed by Nunes et al. (2012) and by Resolution No. 31 (CFP, 2022). As a result, many professionals graduate needing to invest heavily in continuing education in PA to acquire process-oriented knowledge — from initial planning to final referral — without distancing themselves from subjectivity and with firm grounding in ethics and human rights (CFP, 2022; Nunes et al., 2012; Primi, 2018).

Against this backdrop, the present study set out to analyze the syllabi of PA courses in undergraduate psychology programs at public and private IES in Northeastern Brazil, with the aim of reflecting on PA training in the region in line with PA's ongoing evolution in Brazil (CFP, 2019; Nakano & Roama-Alves, 2019). In short, we focused on syllabi because their content plays a central role in professional training (Ambiel et al., 2019; Freires et al., 2017). Our goal is to expand available data on PA training in Brazil by providing an overview for the Northeast and, additionally, by offering a comparative analysis between public and private IES.

Method

Material Selection

We first consulted the Ministry of Education's website (e-MEC) (<http://emec.mec.gov.br/>) to identify undergraduate psychology programs in Brazil's Northeast, across public and private institutions. This investigation involved five researchers and was conducted from August to December 2018.

On e-MEC, each researcher independently applied the following filters: higher education institutions (IES); by state in the Northeast region; municipal public; state public; federal public; private not-for-profit; and private for-profit. As an inclusion criterion, we selected IES with an active psychology program and a working institutional website. This yielded access to 18 public institutions and 23 private institutions. As an exclusion criterion, we removed IES whose websites did not provide access to the curriculum grid or to the political-pedagogical projects (PPPs) containing course syllabi. In the end, we obtained 17 sets of syllabi from public IES and 16 from private IES.

For this study, we considered as PA courses those whose syllabi included terms aligned with the assessment process, consistent with CFP resolutions and the scientific literature cited above, namely: "assessment processes," "interview," "report," "test," "psychometrics," "examination," "assessment," "psychodiagnostics," "neuroassessment," "diagnosis," "behavioral assessment," "behavior analysis," "statistics," "instruments," "measures," "selection," "vocational guidance," and "testing." In addition, these courses needed to address assessment conducted by psychologists in their practice settings, such as clinics, schools, traffic contexts, organizations, and the legal domain, among others. To that end, all syllabi were examined in full, one by one.

Data Organization and Analysis

This study analyzed syllabi from approximately 20% of public and private IES, representing a substantial volume of data. Analyses were carried out using IRaMuTeQ (Ratinaud, 2009). For the descending hierarchical classification (DHC) analyses, each institution constituted an initial context unit (ICU). DHC enables the creation of classes of elementary context units (ECU), which are lexical classes defined by vocabularies and text segments within a given corpus (Camargo, 2005). This procedure categorizes text segments according to their terms using frequency data and the chi-square test (χ^2).

Results

Corpus 1: Syllabi of PA Courses at Private IES in the Northeast

Based on descriptive statistics from the corpus of courses offered by private IES, there was wide variation in course titles (Table 1). Across the 16 IES, 66 PA courses were analyzed. The most frequent title was "Psychological Assessment" (12.1%, $n=8$), followed by "Psychodiagnostics" (4.5%, $n=3$), and the courses "Psychological Diagnosis," "Psychological Testing Techniques I," "Psychological Testing Techniques II," "Psychological Assessment I," "Psychological Assessment

II,” “Legal Psychology,” and “Psychological Tests” (3.0%, n=2). On average, there were approximately four PA courses per institution. First exposure to PA ranged from the 1st term (36.36%, n=6) to the 5th term (18.18%, n=3), with the 4th term showing the lowest percentage for the start of PA courses (9.09%, n=1). Notably, only five (31.25%) of the private IES analyzed made their PPP available — three drafted before 2011, the reference year for the most recent National Curriculum Guidelines (NCG) for undergraduate psychology at the time of this study, and two drafted after the 2011 DCN. The remaining institutions provided access only to curriculum grids containing syllabus content.

Table 1

Frequency of PA courses in private IES in Brazil's Northeast

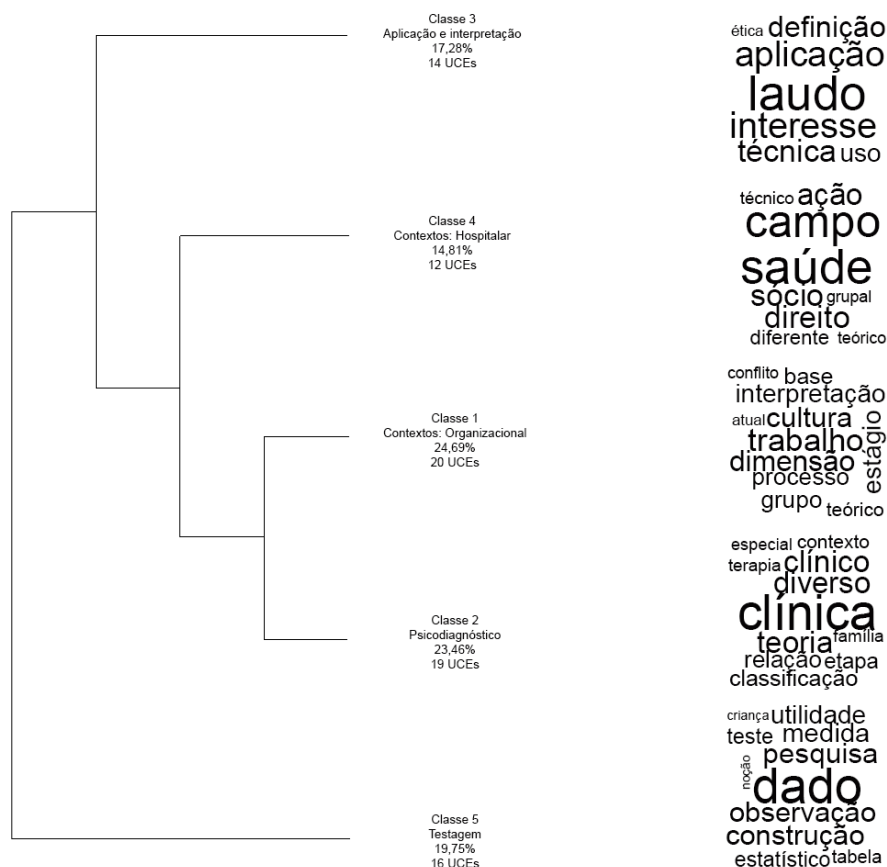
Course title	F	Course title	F
PA	8	Health and Hospital Psychology	1
Psychodiagnostics	3	Analytic-Behavioral Psychotherapy: Theories and Techniques	1
Psychological Diagnosis	2	Techniques and Psychological Exams I	1
Psychological Testing Techniques I	2	Psychopathology and Mental Health	1
Psychological Testing Techniques II	2	Basic Supervised Internship in Psychology and Management Processes	1
PA I	2	Techniques and Psychological Exams II	1
PA II	2	Neuropsychology	1
Legal Psychology	2	Biostatistics	1
Psychological Tests	2	Psychological Observation Techniques	1
Applied Statistics in Psychology	1	Psychopathology I	1
General Psychopathology	1	Specific Internship I	1
Psychology and Health	1	Psychopathology II	1
Techniques in PA I	1	Specific Internship II	1
Techniques in PA II	1	Statistics and Informatics Applied to Health	1
Group Processes	1	Group Psychological Processes	1
Basic Statistics	1	Expressive Projective Techniques	1
Vocational Guidance	1	Dimensions of Organizational Processes	1
Basic Supervised Internship II in Psychology	1	Statistics	1
School Psychology	1	Applied Statistics in Psychology	1
Psychology in Organizations	1	Research in Psychology	1
Hospital Psychology	1	Psychopathology	1
Special Supervised Internship A in Psychology and Clinical Processes	1	PA III	1
Integrated Seminars in Psychology	1	Integrated Basic Supervised Internship	1
Organizational and Work Psychology	1	Social Psychology and Health	1
Special Supervised Internship B in Psychology and Clinical Processes	1	Child Psychotherapy	1
Phenomenological Psychopathology	1	ST in Psychology II	1
Behavioral Psychopathology	1	Measurement in Psychology	1
General Psychopathology	1	PA Processes I	1
Psychology, Society, and Culture	1	PA Processes II	1
Psychology and Work Relations	1	Psychology and Mental Health	1
Experimental Analysis of Behavior	1	Organizational and Work Psychology and Management Processes	1

Note. F = Frequency. AP = Psychological Assessment; ST = Special Topics.

Regarding the DHC for private IES, the corpus was divided into five classes of text segments. We report only the words whose χ^2 values were at least twice the minimum acceptable threshold ($\chi^2 \geq 7.68$). The DHC of Corpus 1 comprised 81 ECUs with a 99.99% retention rate and revealed two main partitions. In the first, Class 3 is separated from Class 4; Class 4 then splits again, yielding Classes 1 and 2 on a subsequent branch. Class 5 stands alone in the second main partition (Figure 1).

Figure 1.

Dendrogram of PA course syllabi from private IES in Northeastern Brazil



Class 1 — “Contexts of Psychological Assessment: Organizational” (24.69% of ECUs, n=20). This class covers aspects of organizational practice, addressing topics such as recruitment and personnel selection and organizational settings. Most frequent words: “behavior” ($f = 6$; $\chi^2 = 25.30$), “organizational” ($f = 11$; $\chi^2 = 21.30$), “communication” ($f = 4$; $\chi^2 = 16.49$), “work” ($f = 17$; $\chi^2 = 13.78$), “culture” ($f = 3$; $\chi^2 = 12.23$). Illustrative excerpts include: “Recruitment, selection, socialization, benefits, incentives, performance evaluation, observation, and analysis of how the psychologist integrates organizational and work-process dimensions into professional practice”; and “Job analysis, recruitment and selection, training and development, organizational culture and climate, performance evaluation, leadership, motivation, job and career planning, quality of work life, and worker health.”

Class 2 — “Psychodiagnostics” (23.46% of ECUs, n=19). This class refers to PA in clinical practice, where some courses emphasize assessment outcomes, psychopathology, and diagnosis. Most frequent terms: “clinical setting” ($f = 8$; $\chi^2 = 33.37$), “theory” ($f = 12$; $\chi^2 = 18.42$), “diverse” ($f = 7$; $\chi^2 = 17.35$), “clinical” ($f = 7$; $\chi^2 = 17.35$), and “relationship” ($f = 12$; $\chi^2 = 11.89$). Illustrative fragments: “Major nosographic frameworks in general psychopathology and their foundations; practical principles of psychopathological diagnosis”; and “Conceptualization and importance of projective techniques and their diagnostic function; basic principles of projection and their use in psychological testing.”

Class 3 — “Application and Interpretation” (17.28% of ECUs, n=14). This class addresses technical procedures in PA. Most frequent words: “projective” ($f = 8$; $\chi^2 = 20.04$), “report” ($f = 8$; $\chi^2 = 20.04$), “aptitude” ($f = 5$; $\chi^2 = 17.28$), “personality” ($f = 9$; $\chi^2 = 16.41$), “psychopathology” ($f = 7$; $\chi^2 = 16.38$). Courses emphasize documentation, interviewing, and examiner

technique. Examples: “Techniques and assessment using a set of projective tests: characterization, principles, and modes of application”; and “Assessment of human aptitudes — intelligence, attention, and personality. Administration and scoring of instruments or tests R-1, concentrated attention (CA), palographic test, and psychological interview; preparation of psychological reports and professional opinions.”

Class 4 — “Contexts of Psychological Assessment: Hospital” (14.81% of ECUs, $n=12$). This class focuses on health psychology. Most salient terms: “health” ($f = 13$; $\chi^2 = 22.48$), “practice/performance” ($f = 7$; $\chi^2 = 20.12$), “field” ($f = 7$; $\chi^2 = 20.12$), “psychologist” ($f = 8$; $\chi^2 = 16.27$), “foundations” ($f = 6$; $\chi^2 = 15.83$). It emphasizes the psychologist’s role and strategies. Illustrative excerpts: “History of hospital psychology in Brazil; outpatient psychology services in general hospitals; hospital psychology versus health psychology”; and “Psychosomatics in health contexts; the psychologist’s work in psychiatric hospitals; the psychologist’s role in issues of living and dying in the hospital.”

Class 5 — “Testing” (19.75% of ECUs, $n=16$). This class clusters technical aspects of PA with an emphasis on psychometrics, test construction, and psychological examination. Most frequent words: “data” ($f = 14$; $\chi^2 = 53.83$), “research” ($f = 12$; $\chi^2 = 25.60$), “observation” ($f = 10$; $\chi^2 = 24.80$), “construction” ($f = 10$; $\chi^2 = 24.80$), “measurement” ($f = 13$; $\chi^2 = 22.48$). Examples: “The examiner and their relationship with the examinee and family; classification of psychological examination techniques”; and “Measurement in psychology — history, concepts, and problems of assessment measures; measurement theory; analysis of processes for constructing, standardizing, and validating measures using classical test theory and item response theory.”

Corpus 2: Syllabi of PA Courses at Public IES in the Northeast

As in the descriptive analysis of the private IES corpus, public IES also showed wide variation in course titles, totaling 218 distinct PA courses (Table 2), counting repeated titles even when the syllabi differ. This number is roughly three times that found for private IES. Offerings also varied substantially: some programs offer 20 courses that directly or indirectly address PA, while others offer only seven. The most frequent courses were Applied Statistics in Psychology (3.67%, $n=8$), Psychopathology (2.75%, $n=6$), Emphasis I Internship I (2.75%, $n=6$), Emphasis I Internship II (2.75%, $n=6$), Psychometrics (1.83%, $n=4$), Processes and Psychological Assessment I (1.84%, $n=4$), and Processes and Psychological Assessment (1.84%, $n=4$). On average, there are 13 PA courses per program. First exposure to PA typically occurs between the 2nd term (41.17%, $n=7$) and the 4th term (11.76%, $n=2$), with the 4th term showing the lowest proportion of course starts in PA. Notably, only six (35.29%) of the public IES analyzed made their PPPs available — three drafted before 2011, the reference year for the most recent DCN at the time of data collection, and three drafted after the 2011 DCN. The remaining institutions provided access only to curriculum grids containing syllabus content.

Table 2.

Frequency of PA courses in public IES in Brazil’s Northeast

Course title	F	Course title	F	Course title	F
Applied Statistics in Psychology	8	PA Theories and Techniques II	2	Psychopathology: Psychological Distress	1
Emphasis I Internship I	6	Neuropsychological Assessment	2	PA Processes II	1
Emphasis II Internship II	6	CBT Theory and Technique	2	Specific Internship I	1
Psychopathology	6	PTT II – Psychoanalysis	2		
Introduction to Psychopathology	4	PTT II – Behavioral	2	Psychometric Techniques in PA	1
Psychometrics	4	Projective Assessment Methods	1	Neuropsychology	1
Processes and Psychological Assessment I	4	Behavior Analysis II	1	Projective Techniques in PA	1
Processes and Psychological Assessment I	4	Organizational and Work Psychology I	1	Experimental Analysis of Behavior	1
Basic Supervised Internship IV	3	Instruments and Techniques in PA	1	Child Therapy	1
Introduction to PA Processes	3	ST in PA	1	Professional Ethics	1
Basic Supervised Internship III	3	Career Guidance	1	Neuropsychology I	1
Institutional Development I	3	ST in Clinical Psychology	1	Neuropsychology II	1
Neuropsychology of Aging I	3	Psychopedagogical Assessment	1	Advanced Studies in PA I	1
Neuropsychology of Aging II	3	ST in Health Psychology	1	Advanced Studies in PA II	1
Psychocorpology I	3	Psychology and Special Needs	1	Behavior Analysis and Cinema	1

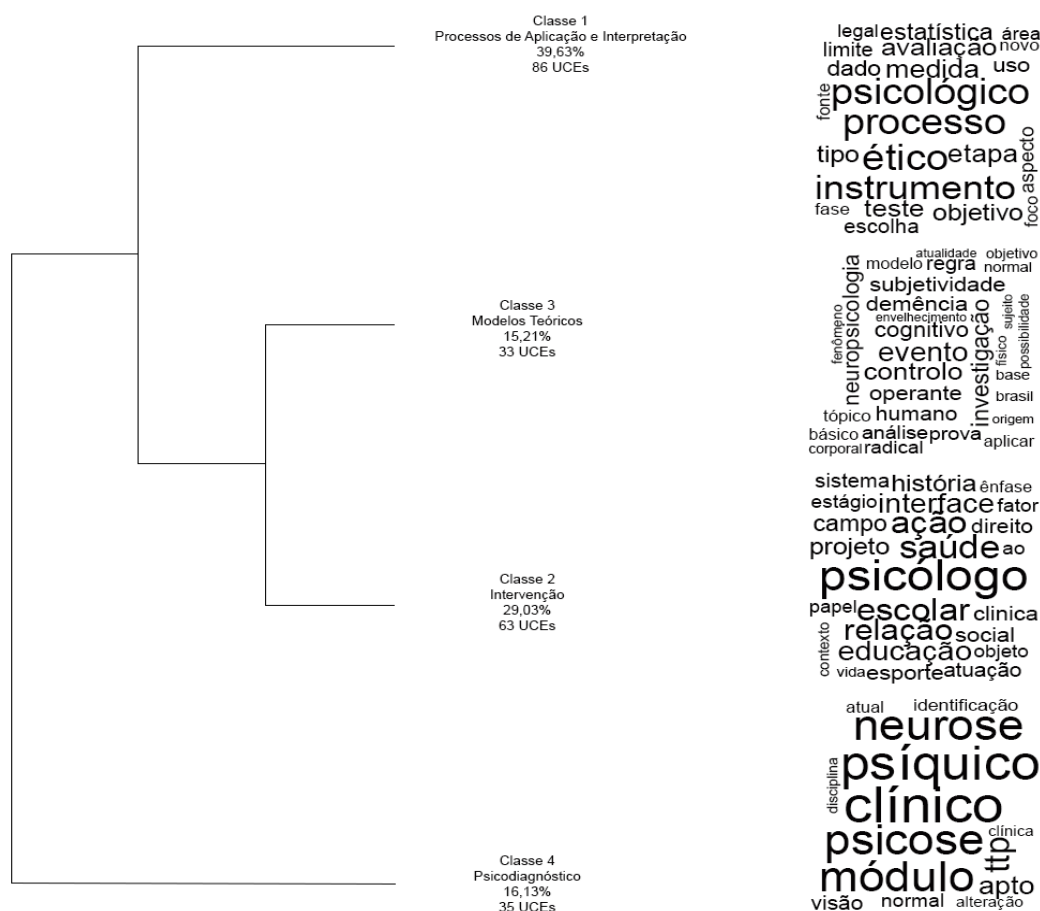
Course title	F	Course title	F	Course title	F
Psychocorpology II	3	Environmental Psychology	1	Human Genetics	1
Introduction to Neuropsychology	3	Traffic Psychology	1	Quantitative Methods in Psychology	1
Sports Psychology	3	ST in Behavior Analysis	1	Psychology of Exceptional Individuals	1
Psychological Interview	3	Basic Supervised Internship in Developmental Psychology	1	Psychotherapeutic Theories and Techniques II	1
Theoretical–Practical Activity in Psychology II	3	Basic Supervised Internship in Social Psychology	1	Methods and Techniques in PA II	1
Educational Psychology	3	Basic Supervised Internship in School Psychology	1	Psychopedagogy	1
Theoretical–Practical Activity III	3	Basic Supervised Internship in Work Psychology	1	Phenomenological–Existential Psychology II	1
Play Therapy	3	Basic Supervised Internship in Health Psychology	1	Statistics and Psychology I	1
Brief Intervention Techniques	3	Specific Internship III	1	Elective Component III: Psychology of Image	1
Selection and Career Guidance	3	Psychology and Teaching–Learning Processes II	1	People Management	1
Family Psychology	3	Basic Supervised Internship in Psychology II	1	Educational Psychology and Society	1
Foundations of Psychopathology	3	Experimental Psychology	1	Psychology and the Aging Process	1
Psychodiagnostics	3	Work Relations II	1	Statistics and Psychology II	1
Psychomotricity	3	Foundations of Psychiatry	1	General Psychiatry and Foundations of Psychopharmacology	1
PA	3	Foundations of Family Therapy	1	Psychosomatics	1
ST in Behavior Analysis I	3	Professional Internship II	1	History and Future of PA	1
Legal Psychology	3	Psychology and Mental Health	1	Systemic Theories and Techniques	1
Quantitative Research Methods and Techniques	2	Psychological Assessment III	1	Child Psychodiagnostics	1
Theories of Subjectivity III	2	Psychology and People Management	1	School Psychology and Learning Problems	1
Brief Psychotherapy	2	Methods and Techniques in PA I	1	ST in Methods, Procedures, and Techniques in Psychology	1
Psychological Examination Techniques I	2	Learning Difficulties and Assessment	1	Psychosocial Intervention	1
Psychological Examination Techniques II	2	Educational Psychology and Career Guidance	1	Basic Supervised Internship in Adolescence	1
Psychopathology	2	Analytic–Existential Theories and Interventions	1	Basic Supervised Internship in Mental Health	1
General Psychopathology	2	PA and Psychodiagnostics	1	Verbal Behavior	1
Construction of Instruments in PA	2	Measurement in Psychology	1	Psychology Applied to Administration	1
PA Theories and Techniques I	2	Basic Supervised Internship in Psychodiagnostics	1	Medical Psychology	1

Nota. F = Frequency; CBT = Cognitive Behavioral Therapy; PA = Psychological Assessment; PTT = Psychotherapeutic Theories and Techniques; ST = Special Topics.

Regarding the DHC for public IES, the corpus was divided into four classes of text segments. We report only the words whose χ^2 values were at least twice the minimum acceptable threshold ($\chi^2 \geq 7.68$). The DHC of Corpus 2 comprised 217 ECUs with an 81.74% retention rate. In the first partition, Class 1 is separated, leaving Classes 3 and 2 together; the second partition then isolates Class 4 (Figure 2).

Figure 2.

Dendrogram of PA course syllabi from public IES in Northeastern Brazil



Class 1 — “Application and Interpretation Processes” (39.63% of ECUs, $n = 86$). Most important terms: “psychological assessment” ($f = 52$; $\chi^2 = 35.76$), “process” ($f = 45$; $\chi^2 = 23.52$), “psychological” ($f = 27$; $\chi^2 = 22.57$), “ethical” ($f = 27$; $\chi^2 = 22.57$), “instrument” ($f = 29$; $\chi^2 = 22.03$). This class concerns the use of instruments within PA processes. Illustrative syllabus excerpt: “Selecting instruments and procedures in the assessment process. The psychologist’s relationship with the client/patient during the assessment. Integrating results obtained at different stages of the assessment process.”

Class 2 — “Intervention” (29.03% of ECUs, $n = 63$). Most frequent terms: “behavior” ($f = 25$; $\chi^2 = 80.98$), “neuropsychological assessment” ($f = 6$; $\chi^2 = 34.41$), “event” ($f = 6$; $\chi^2 = 34.41$), “control” ($f = 6$; $\chi^2 = 34.41$), “research” ($f = 12$; $\chi^2 = 26.09$). This class addresses the psychologist’s practice across contexts — schools, health, society, and other institutions — as framed by CFP Resolution No. 18 (CFP, 2019). Example excerpt: “Promoting actions in treatment, prevention, and health promotion within organizational, institutional, and community settings; diagnosing and intervening in teaching–learning processes; and implementing psychoeducational programs in public and private institutions.”

Class 3 — “Theoretical Models” (15.21% of ECUs, $n = 33$). Most frequent terms: “psychology” ($f = 82$; $\chi^2 = 38.80$), “psychologist” ($f = 22$; $\chi^2 = 33.11$), “development” ($f = 30$; $\chi^2 = 28.36$), “educational” ($f = 11$; $\chi^2 = 28.32$), “school” ($f = 13$; $\chi^2 = 20.74$). These terms point to the theoretical–epistemological diversity that can ground psychological analysis/research/assessment. Example excerpt: “Complex human behavior. Verbal behavior, rule-governed behavior, stimulus equivalence, and subjectivity. Metacontingency and the analysis of social phenomena. Applications of behavior analysis. Psychometrics: history and foundations. Taxonomy of psychological instruments.”

Class 4 — “Psychodiagnostics” (16.13% of ECUs, $n = 35$). Most salient terms: “clinical” ($f = 25$; $\chi^2 = 40.20$), “normality” ($f = 7$; $\chi^2 = 37.61$), “psychic” ($f = 11$; $\chi^2 = 36.96$), “psychopathological” ($f = 11$; $\chi^2 = 36.96$), “psychosis” ($f = 6$; $\chi^2 = 32.09$). This class concerns PA in clinical settings. Example excerpt: “General intelligence, specific aptitudes, scales, and inventories. Foundations of psychopathology. The emergence of psychopathological knowledge: historical, epistemological, and clinical aspects. Major currents in psychopathology and current trends. Diagnostic perspectives. Clinical methods of cognitive assessment.”

Discussion

This study set out to analyze the syllabi of PA courses in undergraduate psychology programs at public and private IES in Northeastern Brazil, with the aim of reflecting on PA training in the region. In brief, the analyses showed that PA courses are offered early in psychology programs and that course titles vary widely, consistent with previous studies in other regions of the country (Freires et al., 2017; Noronha et al., 2008). In comparative terms, we observed curricular components aligned with a technicist perspective — centered on tests, measurement, and techniques — even in courses that addressed diverse practice contexts, and these aspects were more prominent in private IES.

Descriptive statistics for both private and public IES point to a lack of standardization and curricular systematization in PA training in the Northeast. These concerns were already raised by Gouveia (2018) in discussing PA's status, challenges, and guidelines in Brazil and have been empirically observed in studies of this kind (Ambiel et al., 2019; Freires et al., 2017; Noronha, 2006). It is noteworthy that programs within the same federal university (UF), but on different campuses, offered distinct curricular components. In some cases, programs explicitly indicated differences in training emphases; in others, they did not. Even within a single UF, PA courses with identical titles could have different syllabi across campuses.

Although the DCN encourage universities to design their own curricula, this variability in titles and content can weaken PA training in the region. These issues have practical implications. As Hazboun and Alchieri (2013) reported, psychologists often justify not using PA due to gaps in their training. The authors also found varied conceptions of PA in their sample, converging toward negative attitudes about assessment practices — especially psychological tests.

The most frequent courses in private IES (e.g., Psychodiagnostics, Psychological Diagnosis, Psychological Testing Techniques I and II) and in public IES (e.g., Applied Statistics in Psychology, Psychopathology, Emphasis I Internship I and Emphasis I Internship II) represent progress in PA training and are partially consistent with the guidelines proposed by Nunes et al. (2012), compared with earlier data from the Northeast (Noronha, 2006; Noronha et al., 2008). Although these courses address important tools—such as psychometrics, statistics, psychopathology, and psychodiagnostics — there is still limited emphasis on PA's historical dimension. Many courses also retain outdated technicist terms (e.g., “examination”), underscoring the need to advance toward a critical–reflective training model (Nunes et al., 2012). The pursuit of coherence in PA instruction has been a longstanding issue in the field (Noronha et al., 2010).

In the DHC results for private IES, themes such as “application and interpretation” and “testing” were frequent, suggesting a curriculum still restricted to the handling of psychological tests. Despite existing guidelines for PA instruction (Nunes et al., 2012), private IES in the Northeast continue to anchor training in a technicist perspective on test use, reproducing a less reflective practice regarding its underlying rationale (Noronha, 2006). Siqueira and Oliveira (2011) distinguish PA from psychological testing, dispelling the notion that they are equivalent and emphasizing that testing is only one strategy for obtaining information. From this perspective, tests are tools for specific actions, whereas PA should result from a broader, complex investigative process (Andrade & Sales, 2017).

At the same time, within private institutions we also observed the application of guidelines proposed by Nunes et al. (2012). Syllabi addressed several PA contexts — health/hospital, organizational, and clinical — and emphasized training grounded in the administration of psychological tests. This pattern indicates the value placed on psychometrics and on item and test construction as essential knowledge for psychologists in training. It also encourages future professionals to reflect on psychological tests — what they are for and when they should be used — and signals concern with ethical aspects and with how such instruments contribute to assessment processes.

The DHC findings for public IES point to the persistence of a traditional approach: PA closely associated with clinical practice. Terms such as “psychodiagnostics,” “neurosis,” and “psychosis” appeared, reinforcing results reported by Bardagi et al. (2015) and showing that PA training still emphasizes this context. On the other hand, Classes 2 (Intervention) and 3 (Theoretical Models) in public IES suggest that PA instruction in the Northeast has begun to include content on the foundations of psychometrics — still insufficient, but present — stronger integration with other theoretical and practical domains that supports understanding PA as a process, and practice in contexts beyond the clinic (e.g., school and sport settings).

Overall, analyses of PA course syllabi showed, especially in public IES, notable convergence with the DCN (ME, 2011) and with guidelines proposed by Nunes et al. (2012), indicating curricular updates in some programs. This does not mean PA training in the region is adequate. The focus on psychodiagnostics remains evident, and syllabi still do not promote critical–reflective teaching and learning processes aligned with sociocultural and political issues—particularly given PA's history of difficulties and controversies in Brazil (Bueno & Peixoto, 2018; Freires et al., 2022). It is also worth noting the absence of content on digital TICs, which is likely explained by the study's timeframe predating the pandemic.

Final Considerations

There is still much to investigate about the teaching–learning process of PA in Northeastern Brazil. One path — already suggested by Freires et al. (2017) in their analysis of the North and applicable to the Northeast — would be to evaluate faculty members’ command of PA and its specific content areas. Even so, as those authors note, most psychology programs in Brazil are likely far from meeting the minimum requirements for adequate PA instruction (Borsa, 2016), which includes the Northeast. Our results appear to reinforce these findings. Many questions, however, still need examination, including data from other Brazilian regions — especially the North and Center-West, which likewise lack empirical evidence in the PA literature.

This study has limitations. We could not analyze all psychology programs in the Northeast, only those that made their syllabi available online. We also did not distinguish between required and elective courses, which may differ in workload and theoretical scope, for example. Another limitation is that we did not analyze the PPP where available to verify alignment with the most up-to-date curriculum guidelines during our data-collection period — this would constitute a separate research problem. Future studies could update PPP data in light of the latest DCN from Opinion CNE/CES No. 179 (ME, 2022). There is also a need for further investigations that expand the syllabi sample, particularly after COVID-19, when the use of digital TICs was formalized for psychologists’ professional practice. Much remains to be discussed regarding training in these technologies — especially ethical, technical, and security issues in remote PA (American Psychological Association [APA], 2020; CFP, 2024; Marasca et al., 2020; Zanini et al., 2022).

In short, beyond essential advances in PA instruction in the Northeast — or, more precisely, the need for a common curricular structure that provides coherence and logical solidity to psychology training (Freires et al., 2017; Noronha, 2006; Nunes et al., 2012) — the post-pandemic context points to the urgency of discussing remote professional practices, including within the DCN. In other words, given the varied work settings future psychologists will face, programs must cultivate professional competencies for dealing with TICs and address these throughout students’ training. These discussions reflect the ongoing demands on psychological science to adapt its practices while upholding ethical principles and the quality of services provided to the population (CFP, 2024). We hope these considerations add useful insights to the national discussion and complement substantial findings from studies conducted in other regions of Brazil.

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Correspondence address:

Ulisses Izidorio da Silva Neto
E-mail: ulissesizidoriosn@gmail.com

Leogildo Alves Freires
E-mail: leogildo.freires@ip.ufal.br

Gleidson Diego Lopes Loureto
E-mail: diegoloureto.dl@gmail.com

Julio Cezar Albuquerque da Costa
E-mail: julio.costa@ip.ufal.br

Cleane Lacerda do Nascimento
E-mail: cleanelacerda@outlook.com

Angélica Maria Ferreira de Melo Castro
E-mail: angelicamfmcastro@gmail.com



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