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RECEIVED 01 March 2025

ACCEPTED 31 July 2025

PUBLISHED 10 September 2025

## CITATION

Silva JVP, Quinaud RT, Grubertt GA, Costa FR  
and Figueiredo AJ (2025) Specific processes  
for admission of athletes to undergraduate  
programs at Brazilian federal universities.  
*Front. Educ.* 10:1585694.  
doi: 10.3389/feduc.2025.1585694

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# Specific processes for admission of athletes to undergraduate programs at Brazilian federal universities

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**Introduction:** University education for athletes is an important part of preparing them for their career transition. Therefore, specific selection processes for athletes can contribute to this process.

**Methods:** This is a qualitative-quantitative, cross-sectional, exploratory and documentary study, with content analysis.

**Results:** 68 Brazilian federal universities took part in the study. After completing the first stage of the research, it was possible to identify that only two higher education institutions (the Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul and the Federal University of Santa Maria) had specific public notices in 2023 for the admission of athletes to higher education. These institutions, therefore, constitute the object of analysis of this investigation. The Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul made 103 places available to athletes who won first, second or third place in regional, national or international competitions between 2021 and 2023, with no age or score limits, covering 46 sports, 65.21% of which are part of the Brazilian University Games and 63.04% of which are part of the Olympic Games. All paralympic sports are covered. Of the places on offer, 29.12% were sought after and 53.33% of applicants were admitted to higher education. At the Federal University of Santa Maria has allocated 66 places for junior athletes (16 to 23 years old) in futsal, handball, volleyball and athletics. For former athletes, there was no restriction on the number of sports. For the Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul, the ratio of enrolled athletes to places was 0.29, and the ratio of admitted athletes to places was 0.15. The ratio in the Federal University of Santa Maria enrolled athletes to places was 0.59, and the ratio of admitted athletes to places was 0.12. The conclusion is that the programs promoted are important initiatives but have limitations that need to be remedied.

## KEYWORDS

athletes, higher education, admission, university athletes, dual career

# 1 Introduction

During the process of sports training and development, athletes experience numerous challenges in their sporting career alongside their other duties outside the sporting environment (Evans et al., 2021; Pink et al., 2018), including academic activities. A critical moment in the careers of athletes who focus on both the sporting and educational contexts (Stambulova and Wylleman, 2019) is the transition from high school to college (Mateu et al., 2020). In addition to the new duties characteristic of higher education, these athletes tend to advance to more demanding levels of sporting and academic performance, since the peak of their sporting career occurs between the ages of 20 and 30 (Lopez de Subijana et al., 2014).

High-performance athletes with DC dedicate a large part of their time to sports training, which involves hours of technical, tactical and psychological development, as well as the need for rest and rehabilitation. At the same time, they need to dedicate themselves to the academic training process, which guarantees the necessary credentials for access to university. The international literature has produced knowledge on the subject, showing that the main barrier faced is precisely time management and the difficulty in organizing the training routine with the study routine (Guidotti et al., 2014). For high-performance athletes, i.e., those who perform at international level, these difficulties tend to be greater (Wanzeler, 2023). In view of this, understanding the importance of higher education for transition and entry into the job market, which demands academic degrees and certifications, is fundamental to the DC debate. There was a need to provide athletes with access to university, as well as organizing an environment that offers possibilities for maintaining and completing this educational stage (Mateu et al., 2020).

According to the latest census published by the Anísio Teixeira National Institute for Educational Studies and Research (Brasil, 2022), the total number of students entering higher education was 4,756,957, which 45.8% were in private universities (for-profit or not-for-profit) and only 5.31% were in federal universities (the other percentage are state and municipal universities, private university centers and private faculties). When checking the proportion of athletes in higher education, in a sample of 311 participants in the Brazilian University Games, it was found that 33% were from public institutions (including state and municipal universities) (Quinaud et al., 2020).

The educational private sector is very important, both in terms of the number of places available in higher education and the opportunities for athletes to study in higher education (Pires et al., 2024). In Brazil, the support offered to DC concern academic support related to absences, such as compensation or allowances (51% of universities) and the possibility of making up missed assessments (51%) (Silva, 2024). We recognize that this assistance, which is still limited and far from the real needs of university athletes, can help in the process of reconciling training with university education, but does not guarantee the formation of the student athlete in a holistic manner. There is also a need for athletes to be aware of these institutional arrangements so that they can plan with the institution how to proceed when necessary (Costa and Figueiredo, 2021; Costa et al., 2020; Figueiredo and Scremin, 2023).

When looking at the European Union Members States, there is already established a state-led approach supported by legislation, the state acting as a facilitator by promoting formal partnerships between educational and sports organizations and National Federations or Sports Institutes serving as intermediaries who negotiate directly with educational institutions on behalf of athletes (Aquilina and Henry, 2010). However, there is still, in some countries, a laissez-faire model characterized by the absence of formal structures. This laissez-faire model is how it is conducted in Brazil.

Thus, in Brazil, it is necessary to understand how education institutions are organizing themselves intervally to athletes admission and permanence. Additionally, we can see the need to consolidate this discussion in Brazil, especially because of the differentiated - and not facilitated - access to higher education for high-performance athletes. In Brazil, progress has been made in recent years, both in terms of knowledge production and in terms of the political and institutional actions that have been established. For example, the partnership between the higher education institutions involved in the debate and the federal government (Martins et al., 2020; Pires et al., 2024; Ricci et al., 2022; Wanzeler et al., 2023) and with the Technical Group on Transition and Dual Sporting Careers set up in 2024 by the Ministry of Sport to draw up an action plan for implementing the Program on Transition and Dual Sporting Careers being the most recent (Silva, 2025). However, the attendance and access of athletes at university are still urgent issues in our country.

Given the existing academic gap, the aim of this study was to investigate the existence of specific programs for athletes to enter higher education and their organizational structure. Specifically, it sought to identify the universities that adopt this policy; analyze the type of selection process and the criteria adopted; diagnose the target audience, modalities and academic backgrounds covered; and evaluate the demand/supply ratio.

## 2 Materials and methods

### 2.1 Design

This is an exploratory, mixed-methods, cross-sectional documentary study (Gil, 2010).

### 2.2 Population/sample

The study population comprised Brazil's federal universities. Two techniques were used for sample selection. The first was the Census (Silva, 2024), in which all 69 Brazilian federal universities were contacted regarding the existence of support for DC, with responses obtained from 68. Based on the analysis conducted in the first stage (Silva, 2024), two universities (Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul and Federal University of Santa Maria) were identified as having specific admission programs for athletes to higher education (selective process). These institutions were subsequently stratified for further analysis and for the application of the methodology described below.

## 2.3 Sources of information

The sources of information were documents related to academic support for athletes in Brazilian federal higher education institutions (Gil, 2010). The analysis of policy-related documents (Silva, 2024), such as regulations and DC plans, is considered a valuable methodological tool and is recommended in the specialized literature for identifying structural anchors within national contexts. These anchors can serve as a baseline and influence the phases of implementation projects that involve the collection of primary data (Capranica et al., 2021).

Document access was organized in two stages. In the first stage, the bylaws and statutes were analyzed, along with the undergraduate academic regulations and policies regarding financial aid for participation in events, as described in Silva (2024). The second stage involved identifying universities that included athletic performance as a criterion for admission to higher education. During this stage, official public notices related to the selection processes were analyzed, including calls for applications, registration guidelines, preliminary results, final results, and convocations for candidates approved in the first and second rounds.

The corpus of analysis for the second stage included the following public notices: N°. 412/2023-PROGRAD/UFMS, N°. 67/2024-PROGRAD/UFMS, N°. 107/2024-PROGRAD/UFMS, n°. 101/2024-PROGRAD/UFMS, N°. 133/2024-PROGRAD/UFMS), N°. 015/2024-PROGRAD/UFMS, N°. 15/2024 PROGRAD/UFMS (Preliminary list of registration approval; Notice N°. 15/2024 - Definitive list of registration approval), N°. 036/PROGRAD-UFMS (confirmation of vacancies for classified people, preliminary classification, final classification, and waiting list); Resolution N°. 928-COGRAD/UFMS and Resolution N°. 125/PROPLAN/UFMS, dated April 19, 2023.

## 2.4 Analysis technique

The analysis technique employed was documental analysis. Documents are written records that provide information for understanding facts and relationships, allowing researchers to contextualize actions within their historical and social frameworks and to reconstruct events and their underlying circumstances.

In conduction the research, the parameters proposed by Gil (2010) were adopted, organized into seven stages – (a) Definition of objectives (exploratory review of existing literature on DC to map previously formulated issues in the field); (b) identification of sources and collection of materials. This stage involved requesting access to relevant information sources during the first phase of data collection. Given the broad scope of the study, the general administrations of the universities were consulted regarding support for DC, including specific admission processes for athletes entering higher education. Additionally, access to regulatory documents was requested. The requests were submitted through the Brazil platform, a national mechanism for accessing public information. For data interpreting, specific content analysis procedures were applied, one of the most widely used technique for systematically and qualitatively objectifying and describing transcribed communications; (c) Development of

a structured reference framework: identification of the theoretical framework guiding the concepts related to DC; (d) Selection of documents (creating a database, downloading public notices for later analysis); (e) Construction of a system of categories and indicators: identification of variables to be analyzed in specific public notices related to the admission of athletes to Brazilian federal universities, including existence/type of access, entry criteria, target audience, sports disciplines, ratio of registered athletes per available spot, ratio of admitted athletes per spot, and courses in demand); (f) Definition of enumeration rules: absolute and relative frequency; (g) Data processing: organization of data into visual representations).

The objectives were defined in parallel with the formulation of the research questions. The analytical framework adopted was the Holistic Model of Sports Career Transition (Wylleman, 2019). However, this article focused exclusively on entry into higher education. The categories analyzed were: (a) existence and type of entry pathways for athletes into higher education; (b) admission criteria; (c) target audience; (d) modalities covered; (e) ratio of enrolled athletes per available spot and ratio of admitted athletes per available spot; (f) academic programs in demand.

The following formulas were used:

Ratio of enrolled athletes per vacancy = number of enrolled athletes/number of vacancies

Ratio of athletes admitted per vacancy = number of approved athletes/number of vacancies

## 3 Results

### (a) Existence/type of access

The census analysis showed that of the 68 universities that provided information, only two had specific selection processes for athletes, one in Mato Grosso do Sul (Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul) and the other in Rio Grande do Sul (Federal University of Santa Maria).

Access to higher education at both universities was through selection processes with supplementary places. The Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul implemented a special program for selecting athletes (Pró-Atleta). Established in August 2023 by Resolution N°. 928-COGRAD/UFMS on an experimental and temporary basis, applications for the first call were held between December 2023 and January 2024. At the Federal University of Santa Maria, access also took place through a specific selection process. Followed by the publication of Federal University of Santa Maria Resolution N°. 125-PROPLAN/UFMS, on April 19, 2023, with a call for applications in February 2024.

### (b) Entry criteria

The Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul adopted only athletic performance, measured by scores in accordance with the position achieved on podiums (gold, silver, bronze) in sporting competitions held by federations or confederations affiliated with the Brazilian Olympic Committee at state, national and international level in the 2021–2023 period (Table 1). However no minimum score was required as a cut-off point. For its part, Federal University of Santa Maria applied academic

**TABLE 1 Sports disciplines covered by specific calls for athletes to enter higher education at Brazilian federal universities.**

Sports disciplines	UFMS	UFMS	
		Former athletes	Athletes in training
Open water swimming		x	
Athletics	x	x	x
Badminton	x	x	
Basketball	x	x	
3 × 3 Basketball	x	x	
Beach hand	x		
Beach soccer	x		
Beach tennis	x		
Beach wrestling	x		
Boxing	x	x	
Breaking	x	x	
Speed canoeing		x	
Slalom canoeing		x	
BMX freestyle cycling		x	
BMX racing cycling		x	
Road cycling		x	
Track cycling		x	
Mountain bike cycling		x	
Cheerleading	x		
Cycling	x		
Cross training	x		
Sport climbing	x	x	
Fencing	x	x	
Soccer	x	x	
Footvolley	x		
Table foot	x		
Futsal	x		x
Gymnastics	x		
Artistic gymnastics	x	x	
Trampoline gymnastics		x	
Rhythmic gymnastics	x	x	
Golf		x	
Handball	x	x	x
Equestrian dressage		x	
Equestrian CCE		x	
Equestrian jumping		x	
Grass hockey		x	
Jiu jitsu	x		
Judo	x	x	
Weightlifting**	x	x	
Karate	x		

(Continued)

**TABLE 1 (Continued)**

Sports disciplines	UFMS	UFMS	
		Former athletes	Athletes in training
Kickboxing	x		
Water marathon		x	
Muaythai	x		
Artistic swimming	x	x	
Swimming	x	x	
Modern pentathlon		x	
Water polo		x	
Rowing		x	
Rugby 7	x	x	
Ornamental jumping	x	x	
Skateboarding	x	x	
Surfing	x	x	
Taekwondo	x	x	
Tennis	x	x	
Table tennis	x	x	
Archery*	x	x	
Shooting sports*	x	x	
Triathlon*	x	x	
Sailing		x	
Volleyball	x	x	x
Beach volleyball	x	x	
Mixed 4 × 4 volleyball	x		
Wrestling	x	x	
Chess	x		
All para-sport disciplines	x		

\*UFMS used only the generic term shooting; \*\*UFMS used the term weightlifting.

(50%) and athletic (50%) performance criteria, setting the ENEM score for academic performance and a minimum score of 300 points in the essay. Sports performance was analyzed using the indicators of level (70%) and performance (30%). Level referred to the highest results achieved by training athletes (international, national, or state level) obtained as of 2021 and former high-performance athletes (Olympic medalists, non-Olympic medalists, international medalists) who had international prominence recognized by the Brazilian Olympic Committee, regardless of the period. No minimum score was established for classification in the two categories, with any classification at the level being considered for scoring.

#### (c) Target audience

The target audience for Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul was athletes and para-athletes, with no minimum or maximum age requirements. Federal University of Santa Maria, on the other hand, chose athletes in training (16–23 years old) and former

athletes, without setting minimum or maximum age limits and without explicitly including athletes with disabilities.

#### (d) Sports disciplines

The Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul call for proposals covered 46 disciplines and adhered to legal requirements for quotas for people with disabilities in all paralympic disciplines. Of the disciplines, 65.21% (30) are part of the Brazilian University Games (JUBS), 63.04% (29) are part of the Olympic Games and 41.30% (19) are part of both competitions.

The Federal University of Santa Maria notice limited places for junior athletes to four sports part of the Brazilian University Games (athletics, futsal, volleyball, handball), of which three are Olympic. In the case of former athletes, it only offered spots in the Olympic disciplines.

#### (e) Ratio of enrolled athletes per vacancy and ratio of admitted athletes per vacancy

In the form of extra places, Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul (FUMS) offered 103 spots (Figure 1), one for each course that included the announcement: 48.54% (50) were allocated to athletes in the University City (Campo Grande) and 51.45% (53) were distributed among the institution's nine campuses. The number of enrolled athletes was 30, of which 33.33% (10) were quota students. Of the athletes who enrolled, 53.33% (16) were admitted into undergraduate programs. A total of 30 candidates applied for the exam, 10 (33%) of whom were quota candidates. Of those who applied, 16 (53.33%) were admitted into undergraduate programs. For this university, the ratio of enrolled athletes to spots was 0.29, and the ratio of admitted athletes to spots was 0.15.

The Federal University of Santa Maria (FUSM) offered 66 spots, of which 39 (59%) were for the main campus (University City) and 27 (41%) for the other three campuses, covering 49 courses. It is worth noting that: (a) some courses offered more than one spot; (b) only at the main campus were sports offered for volleyball, handball and futsal. Only 10 (15%) candidates enrolled, and 8 of them were filled. The ratio of enrolled athletes to spots was 0.59, and the ratio of admitted athletes to spots was 0.12.

Of the 16 sports awarded at Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul, 81.25% (13) were open competition and 18.75% (3) were quota spots - LI\_PP (self-declared black or brown candidate), LI\_EP (candidate who, regardless of income, attended public

secondary schools) and LI\_PCD (candidate with a disability, who, regardless of income, attended public secondary schools). At Federal University of Santa Maria, the 8 awarded spots were allocated only to the open competition system and only athletes in training applied and were accepted.

#### (f) Courses in demand

With regard to the courses sought by candidates, at Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul the predominant ones were Physical Education – bachelor's degree (23.33%) - and Physiotherapy (23.33%), while at Federal University of Santa Maria it was Physical Education – Bachelor's degree (20.00%) (Figure 2).

## 4 Discussion

Despite growing international recognition of DC policies that support athletes, there remains a significant gap in the academic literature regarding how such policies are structured and implemented in the context of Brazilian federal universities. So, the aim of this study was to investigate the existence of specific programs for athletes to access higher education and the academic structure offered. The following subsections are organized to deepen the analysis of key themes: (i) the flexibility of admission processes, (ii) admission criteria, (iii) target audience, sports profile, and policy direction, (iv) types of sports covered, and (v) athletes demand and field concentration.

### 4.1 Flexibilization of entry into higher education

The opportunity of admission processes for athletes in Brazilian federal universities represents a recent but significant shift in national higher education policy. Historically, Brazil relied exclusively on traditional entrance exams; however, the 1996 Law on Guidelines and Foundations of Education (Brasil, 1996) enabled universities to adopt alternative selection methods aligned with institutional and social demands. Despite this legal provision, the

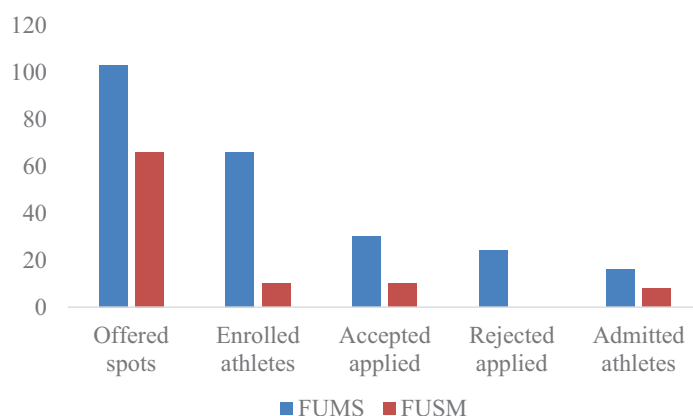


FIGURE 1  
Ratio of places offered to places filled.



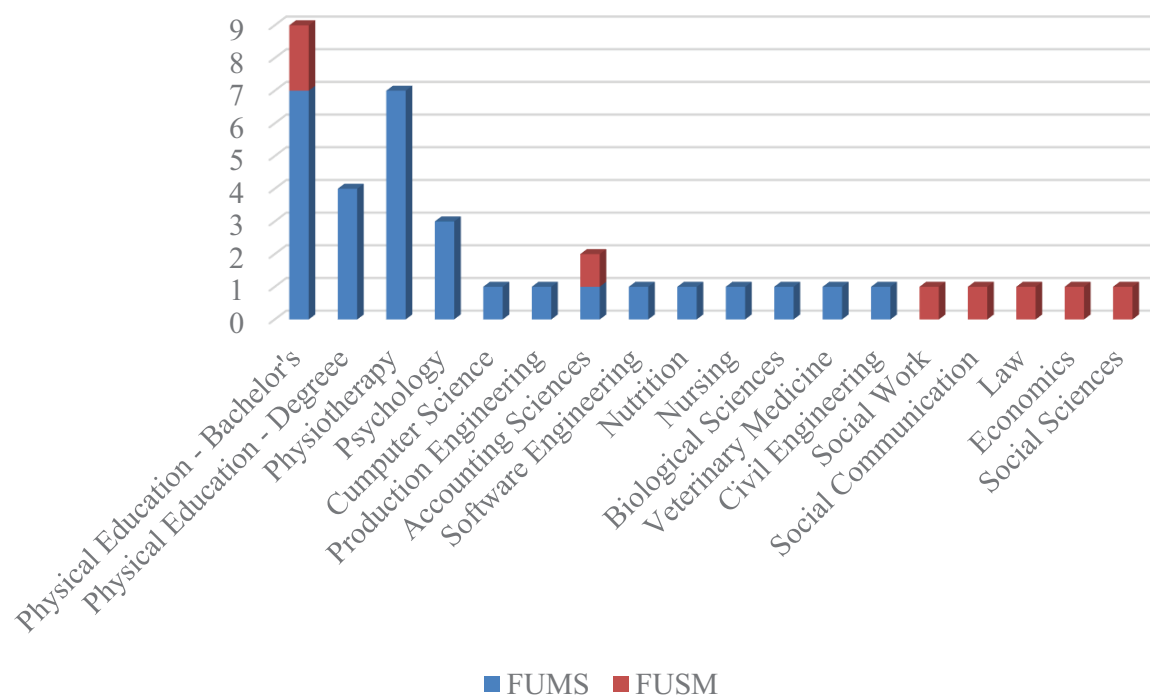


FIGURE 2

Undergraduate courses sought by candidates enrolled in flexible admission processes for athletes in higher education at Brazilian federal universities.

inclusion of athletes through specific entry programs remains an exception rather than the norm, with only Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul and Federal University of Santa Maria implementing such initiatives among the 68 institutions surveyed.

In Brazil, the traditional entrance exam has historically been the only form of selection - in general, a written test and a multiple-choice test that covers the content learned during basic education. However, since 1996, institutions have had the prerogative to create and implement new methods and models of selection and admission, adjusting to the specificities and interests of the population (Brasil, 1996), which justifies the diversity of entry methods at the institutions analyzed, including the one aimed at athletes through a special process. This approach was strengthened with the advent of the quota system, which currently serves the black population, indigenous people, the elderly and other groups depending on the initiatives of each university.

The mechanisms for athletes to enter higher education adopted by Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul and UFMS are related to policies aimed at DC. It partly follows the international trend of valuing DC athletes and is an unprecedented action in the context of Brazilian federal universities. Despite its novelty and relevance, it is a late policy. This is because since the 1990s and early 2000s, countries such as Portugal, Spain, Hungary and Greece have already had legal provisions covering places in higher education for athletes (Henry, 2013; Portugal, 1993; Portugal, 1999). In the same period, the provision of specific places for athletes at the end of their careers or former professional athletes in Europe was also present in Germany, France, Finland and the United Kingdom (Henry, 2013).

In Portugal, current legislation stipulates clear criteria for access to higher education, starting with the recognition of the athlete who will be entitled to this provision. In Brazil, the Federal University of

Santa Maria and UFMS athlete selection notices show a difference in the target public to be covered. High-level athletes recognized by the authorities have specific places available, varying from course to course, to access higher education. In Spain, 3% of places were allocated to elite athletes and 5% to high-performance athletes on Physical Education courses. In Hungary, Olympic medalists could enter any university without having to take entrance exams. In Poland, athletes with exceptional sporting results were able to access higher education without exams, with the federations simply having to apply to the Ministry of Education and Sport for the athletes' sporting qualifications (Aquilina and Henry, 2010; Henry, 2013). In Latvia, members of the national Olympic and Paralympic teams and athletes ranked in the top twelve at world and European junior championships were admitted without exams. In Denmark and Sweden, specific distance learning courses were created to cater for DC athletes (Aquilina and Henry, 2010). Later, through the Career Support Program aimed at elite athletes, Spain included special conditions for entry to higher education (Lopez de Subijana et al., 2015).

The late implementation of public policies aimed at making access to higher education more flexible for athletes at Brazilian federal universities may, *a priori*, be related to two aspects: (a) the first of a cultural nature; (b) the second of a legal nature. Considering that the systematic discussion on DC in Brazil is a developing theme, with growing academic production, we can see the need for and importance of encouraging this debate. We can recall the whole movement surrounding the debate on racial quotas, initiated by the University of Brasilia, which went beyond the walls of the institution and generated intense debate in society (Maio and Santos, 2005) and here we highlight the difficulty in establishing objective criteria for selecting candidates. The legal

system is another important issue in the debate on selection processes - in anybody. In this sense, it is essential to know the legal and regulatory principles surrounding the organization of a public university (federal, in this case) in order to propose and carry out a call for applications to the university that recognizes sporting merit.<sup>1</sup>

This is because the use of general course places could be subject to legal action by students who feel they have been disadvantaged, since athletes are not covered by the Law on Quotas for admission to higher education or any other federal regulation. Therefore, the offer of additional places is a pertinent alternative, in which universities and university centers, making use of their autonomy, promote policies aimed at the admission of athletes by supplementing vacancies, and only have to inform the competent bodies of the Ministry of Education of such changes. Exceptions are the Medicine and Law courses, which depend on the Ministry of Education issuing a prior act, which explains the lack of vacancies for these two courses in the Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul and Federal University of Santa Maria notices. However, it is important to consider that since 1996 universities have had the autonomy to create alternative selection processes, which reinforces the influence of cultural aspects surrounding sport in federal universities.

In addition, specific external transfer notices for athletes in DC are relevant possibilities as an inductive policy, which could strengthen representative university sport and create space for the academic training of high-performance athletes. This is because, for external transfers to courses with available places, the LDB only requires approval in a selection process regulated by each institution. A broader understanding of DC is needed, so that it is not restricted to those who reach international heights at the Olympic Games or World Games. This understanding is corroborated by Bastianon and Greco (2018). When analyzing Italy's Career Development Programs and Training for the Future Programs, the authors found that they are aimed exclusively at elite athletes, when they should be aimed at all students who are deeply involved in sports activities at a competitive level.

According to Stambulova et al. (2009), "Depending on the highest level of sporting competition achieved by the athlete, an athletic career can be local, regional, national or international; and depending on the status of the athlete, the career can be amateur or professional. International careers, whether amateur or professional, are often also classified as elite careers" (p. 397). Furthermore, the different stages that make up a sports career (initiation, specialization, improvement, maintenance and retirement) are reached according to specific requirements, age, gender, type of sport and the singularities of the athletes.

In this sense, an athlete who achieves sporting results in state and/or national competitions could qualify by representing the university, finding in university sport another space to practice. It should also be noted that the peak of performance in many sports, according to Lopez de Subijana et al. (2014), can be reached between the ages of 20 and 30, i.e., during university education. In this sense, the athlete who enters university from the sport of representation can advance in their sporting performance

throughout their DC and reach performance sport (and the pinnacle of their career) during higher education. Data from the Brazilian Olympic Committee highlights this scenario, showing an average age of 29.5 in artistic gymnastics, 27.5 in women's soccer, 27.7 in boxing, 27.8 in judo, 29.5 in athletics and volleyball in the national teams that took part in the Paris Olympic Games (Comitê Olímpico Brasileiro, 2024).

Considering that the time dedicated to sports is the main complicating factor for those who dedicate themselves to studies and sports training, for Bastianon and Greco (2018) the parameter to be adopted in university policies aimed at DC should be the time dedicated and participation in official training systems. The problem of reconciling education and sport is the same for those who qualify for the Olympic Games as for those who, by a small margin, have not obtained favorable results.

It is precisely during the transition period from high school to higher education that the sporting transition from junior to senior level takes place, a time of new educational, sporting and social demands, which can compromise the young athlete's maintenance in sport or academic training (Álvarez et al., 2014a; Álvarez Pérez et al., 2019; Costa et al., 2022; Gallardo Fuentes et al., 2019; Mateu et al., 2020; Miranda et al., 2018; Quinaud et al., 2020; Stambulova et al., 2009). In other words, those who manage to make the transition from the junior to the senior elite category are a smaller subset, since the majority end up following the sport of representation or giving up the sport.

The difficulty of transitioning between categories is a reality for athletes in Brazilian regions that don't have the club structure to continue their sporting career, requiring them to migrate to larger centers. The possibility of dedicating themselves to representative sport at universities in the official events of the Brazilian Confederation of University Sport, and its affiliates, could be an opportunity to: (a) access higher education; (b) maintain their sporting career with the opportunity to obtain an athlete scholarship; (c) reconcile quality with the implementation of institutional policies that meet the demands of the athlete in a holistic way. Adopting such an academic stance in the Brazilian historical, cultural and political context is of great importance, especially since the professional outcome in the sporting sphere does not only occur from the adult sporting elite to retirement. We need to consider that athletes who perform at a high level in the junior ranks will not necessarily continue at the same level in the adult ranks, and their results are also influenced by the support conditions provided for conciliation.

Although specific selection processes for athletes are of great value, since they make it possible to engage in professional training, academic development and preparation for career transition, it is necessary to consider prior to (or in parallel with) this policy the implementation of a program to monitor athlete, ensuring their permanence and performance in academic activities, in other words, guaranteeing their student status. The existence of unfavorable conditions, such as incompatible schedules (Abelkals et al., 2021) have resulted in a lack of time to study (Mateu et al., 2020), delays, failures, changes of shift or academic abandonment (Pedroza Júnior et al., 2020) or abandonment of the sports career (Andres and Goellner, 2018). Furthermore, on occasions when students are forced to make a choice, they opt to maintain their sporting career to the detriment of their academic training (Buhás et al., 2023).

<sup>1</sup> See the technical opinion of the Brazilian Association on Dual Sports Careers regarding bill 2493/2019.

Therefore, the implementation of selection processes for athletes must include academic support (compensating for absences and guaranteeing curricular content, adapting the assessment process and academic tutoring) and, in the case of dedication to representation, offering access and adequate training spaces (gyms, weight rooms, athletics tracks, guided training sessions), as well as medical, health and social support (Costa and Figueiredo, 2021). In addition, it is essential that the support provided in the context of each university is holistically integrated (Wylleman and Lavallee, 2004; Wylleman et al., 2013), since academic and sporting success is a reflection of reciprocal multifactorial action.

## 4.2 Admission criteria

Adopting only sports results as a parameter for classifying candidates is at odds with the legal requirements in force in the country. Despite university autonomy (Brasil, 1988) and the Education Guidelines and Bases Law (Brasil, 1996), even on an experimental basis and with supplementary places. By standardizing the entry process specifically for athletes and limiting the access criteria to sporting performance, the Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul notice distances itself from the legal requirement, because although higher education institutions accredited as universities have the prerogative to create the criteria and rules for selecting and admitting students (Brasil, 1996), these notices are subordinate to laws and other infra-constitutional regulations that follow the hierarchy of Kelsen's pyramid. In this sense, one must follow what the law expressly and previously authorizes (Hironaka, 2020) and the National Education Council (Brasil, 1999) has already established that selection processes must consider not only the ability of students to enter, but also the minimum conditions to attend and continue in further education. "In terms of content, it is essential that the mechanism adopted assesses not only the ability of students to enter, but also to take courses and continue their training throughout their lives, in a manner compatible with the demands of the modern world in continuous transformation" (Brasil, 1999, p. 3).

This position is ratified by Ordinance N<sup>o</sup>. 391, of February 7, 2000, which in its article 2, establishes that all selection processes must have a Portuguese language writing test as an eliminatory test, including determining the failure of those who obtain a score of zero (Brasil, 2000), and its content is ratified by MEC Ordinance N<sup>o</sup>. 2,941, of December 17, 2001 (Brasil, 2001). On the other hand, the establishment of sports performance from 2021 for athletes at both universities and validation from state, national and international competitions proves to be adequate in terms of the scope of the policy. However, a broad public debate on the sports training process in Brazil is suggested, especially in states outside the South-Southeast axis, which need to develop and consolidate policies that guarantee the athlete's entire training process - from initiation to post-career transition. In this regard, the Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul process was more demanding, requiring only podium results (first, second and third place).

The fact that no minimum score was set for approval meant that athletes with 40 points were considered at Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul, which again suggests the search for athletes

who represent the university rather than high-performance. There has been a transition process in the athlete profile demanded by the university sports policy at the Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul since 2013 [Silva, 2025; Initially (2013–2016)], the promotion of scholarships for athletes had a recreational focus and from 2017 onward included the perspective of representative sport and service to high-performance athletes - also a student at the institution.

In Brazil, historically, the traditional entrance exam was the only form of selection. However, since 1996, institutions have had the prerogative to create and implement new selection and admission methods and models, adjusting to the specificities and interests of the population (Brasil, 1996). This allowed for the creation of a unified selection process for all universities through the National High School Exam and for universities to create alternative selection methods, such as entrance exams, serial selection based on grades obtained in the 3 years of high school, and selection of students who have won academic competitions. In this sense, the selection processes of the Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul and the Federal University of Santa Maria differ from those of other federal universities in that they create the possibility of competing for a place in higher education only among athletes.

## 4.3 Target audience, sports profile, and policy direction

The limited age range for candidates in the athletes-in-training category suggests that the Federal University of Santa Maria policy should be geared toward the Brazilian University Games (JUBS), given that this is the main competition in national university sport and the age range for participants set by the Brazilian University Sports Confederation is 16–25 years (Confederação Brasileira do Desporto Universitário, 2024) - with the average age of JUBS participants was 22.8 years (Quinaud et al., 2020). The age range set for candidates is pertinent when the objectives of the policy is to achieve high performance, which occurs between 20 and 30 years (Lopez de Subijana et al., 2014).

The restriction of places to three team sports (futsal, handball and volleyball) and one individual sport (athletics) at Federal University of Santa Maria strengthens the hypothesis of an institutional strategy aimed at achieving results in specific sports, which managers want to target more precisely. When we talk about institutional action to improve results in those specific team sports, it is necessary to consider the continuous entry of athletes to make up the team. Therefore, invitations to tender with vacancies for various sports and with fewer players available than necessary to build the team can make it difficult to achieve the expected results. By not specifying an age group, the UFMS notice allowed a greater number of athletes to be included - both those who meet the age regulated by the Brazilian University Sports Confederation (Confederação Brasileira do Desporto Universitário, 2024), and athletes over 26 years.

The criteria adopted by Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul and Federal University of Santa Maria to make it more flexible for athletes include those who representing institutions in university games, making both the double journey (Miranda et al., 2018) and the DC (Maquiaveli et al., 2021; Reyes-Bossio et al., 2023) possible. In relation to Federal University of Mato Grosso



do Sul, a previous study indicated that there was a transition in the university sports policy. Predominantly aimed for recreational athletes, since 2017 the institution has expanded the space for performance athletes actions aimed at university sport (Silva and Albuquerque, 2023).

It is important to highlight that while countries such as Spain and Portugal follow national guidelines to formulate services for athletes and their access to higher education, in Brazil the scenario develops in a very different way (Portugal, 2009; Portugal, 2013; Portugal, 2019). Brazil's higher education institutions often operate without national regulatory guidance on DC, particularly following the repeal of supportive policies in 1993 and 2019 (Brasil, 1993; Brasil, 2019). This legislative vacuum limits the scope for institutional coordination and strategic alignment, diverging from European practices where DC is a governmental priority with dedicated regulations (European Commission, 2012; Portugal, 2019).

Despite the autonomy granted to Brazilian universities, the current landscape is marked by fragmented and sporadic initiatives. Studies highlight a lack of systemic support for athletes, with policies often limited to isolated actions rather than comprehensive frameworks grounded in holistic models of development (Silva, 2024; Wylleman and Lavalée, 2004). Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul stands out for incorporating social inclusion measures aligned with Law No. 12.711/2012 (Brasil, 2012b), including quotas for minority groups and para-athletes. These measures ensure broader access and facilitate DC participation for marginalized populations, particularly in para-sport disciplines (Patatas et al., 2018). Guaranteeing access for athletes with disabilities serves both educational equity and athletic development. The presence of para-athletes in the selection process of Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul exemplifies how such measures can foster social inclusion and promote Brazil's leadership in Paralympic sport, as evidenced in the 2024 Paralympic Games, Brazil was the second largest delegation and the fifth largest power in the medals table (Olympics, 2024).

Finally, while the creation of dedicated entry opportunities for former athletes at Federal University of Santa Maria is conceptually valuable, the absence of applicants raises concerns about outreach, awareness, and potential disincentives. One hypothesis relates to the 2023 legal provision allowing experienced former athletes to become certified coaches without a university degree (Brasil, 2023), which may have reduced the perceived value of pursuing higher education. This underscores the importance of aligning institutional offerings with the realities of athlete transitions and labor market incentives.

This situation may be related to the fact that DC is still poorly institutionalized in the Brazilian context, especially in federal universities, given the lack of normative guidelines at the federal level, either within the scope of the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Sport. As evidenced by Silva (2024), regulations for actions aimed at DC in Brazil, such as the allowance of absences when students participate in sports competitions with institutional or national representation, were revoked in 1993 and 2019 by Law N°. 8,672 (Brasil, 1993) and Decree N°. 9,917 (Brasil, 2019). Therefore, the Brazilian legislature has moved in the opposite direction to that observed in Europe, where DC is a strategic and political priority for sport (European Parliament, 2017), with specific guidelines for this purpose (European Commission, 2012;

European Parliament, 2017). In Portugal, several legal provisions at the federal level govern how to ensure support for athletes in DC - Decree-Law N°. 272/2009 (Portugal, 2009), Decree-Law N°. 45/2013 (Portugal, 2013), Assembly of the Republic Resolution N°. 128/2017 (Portugal, 2017), Decree-Law N°. 55/2019 - Statute of the student athlete in higher education (Portugal, 2019) - from basic education to higher education.

The extinction of rules that recognized the condition of athletes in DC in Brazil and guaranteed academic support, coupled with the distancing of legislators from the knowledge produced by researchers in the country, reflects directly on the model, content and consistency of the policies implemented in the context of Brazilian federal universities. University autonomy could enable the development of important institutional policies, implementing specific, one-off actions, articulated with robust theoretical proposals, such as the holistic model, which recognizes the reciprocal interaction between the athletic, psychosocial, academic and vocational development aspects (Wylleman and Lavalée, 2004; Wylleman et al., 2013). What can be seen, on the other hand, is that institutions develop insufficient support, limited to the implementation of isolated and punctual actions, as evidenced by Silva (2024) in Brazilian federal universities.

In the selection promoted by Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul, the inclusion of people who make up the group of social minorities required by Law N°. 12.711/2012 (Brasil, 2012b) regulated by Decree N°. 7.824/2012 (Brasil, 2012a), was ensured. On the other hand, UFSM's failure to comply with this rule is at odds with the legislation. The inclusion of all para-sport disciplines and the guarantee of quotas at Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul ensured the presence of a para-sportswoman, making it a positive difference between the calls for proposals. In addition to guaranteeing the provisions of Law N°. 12.711/2012 (Brasil, 2012b), the reservation of quotas ensures that athletes linked to the 22 disciplines recognized as paralympic (International Paralympic Committee, 2024) have additional conditions to enter higher education, prepare professionally for their post-career and optimize their personal development.

The inclusion of people with disabilities in the policy through the provision of quotas for places is an important policy, because in addition to the exclusive aspects of para-sport being associated with negative social behavior toward people with disabilities, the lack of specific programs and trained personnel to serve this public, there is still a lack of awareness and interest in para-sport (Patatas et al., 2018). By providing para-athletes with access to education, Brazil's higher education institutions can strengthen the development of para-sports DC, promoting social inclusion and greater recognition of the skills and talents of parathletes, since in 2024, at the Paralympic Games in Paris, Brazil was the second largest delegation and the fifth largest power in the medals table (Olympics, 2024).

Furthermore, guaranteeing places for people covered by the aforementioned law is essential for democratizing access to higher education through sport, as well as for promoting social justice, given that socio-cultural conditions are conditioning factors and mean that those who belong to minority groups have better educational conditions. The inclusion of parathletes in public university entrance exams can have a double impact. On the one hand, valuing their sporting achievements and, on the other, offering them the opportunity to combine sport with higher education.

Public universities, as a space for academic training and the development of critical skills, can provide athletes with a platform to become not only sporting references, but also leaders in their fields. In this way, calls for proposals for the inclusion of athletes in higher education contribute to the holistic development of these athletes, allowing them to achieve an integrated vision of the sports DC of this population (sporting, psychological, psychosocial, academic, legal and financial levels).

The opening of specific vacancies for ex-athletes (Federal University of Santa Maria) appeared to be a relevant alternative, providing opportunities for those who no longer have the performance required for competitions, so that they can use their sporting capital for career transition. However, no candidates applied for this program. There are a number of hypotheses that deserve further investigation to clarify the reason for this “lack of demand.” The first concerns access to information, i.e., knowing the public notice. Another possibility is that the former athlete is interested in studying at university. However, national studies have shown that Brazilian athletes are interested in pursuing higher education. In this sense, a recent change in legislation may have had a negative effect on ex-athletes’ demand for higher education, as there is a guarantee that ex-athletes can work as sports coaches without needing a diploma. According to [Brasil \(2023\)](#), former athletes who can prove that they were athletes for more than three consecutive years or five alternating years and who take part in a training course for coaches recognized by the organization that administers and regulates the sport are entitled to technical and tactical sports guidance. This is yet another gap to be investigated, not least because law N°. 9.696/1998, which requires a diploma to work as a sports coach, is still in force.

## 4.4 Types of sports covered

The predominance of sports in the JUBS and Olympic Games is internally consistent, as a previous study on athlete grants at Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul indicated that only eight (athletics, swimming, handball, basketball, beach volleyball, court volleyball, judo, taekwondo) and 14 of the JUBS (athletics, basketball, futsal, handball, judo, jiu-jitsu, karate, swimming, tennis, table tennis, court volleyball, beach volleyball, taekwondo, chess) ([Albuquerque et al., 2023](#)) were covered.

The limitation of vacancies to four sports at Federal University of Santa Maria, including three team sports (futsal, volleyball and handball) restricted to the Santa Maria campus, indicates a policy geared toward the institutional interest of strengthening its representation teams rather than offering adequate career transition opportunities, since the restriction to the headquarters campus was related to training requirements. In other words, the managers focused on just three team sports in order to select players to represent the institution in representative competitions. This greatly reduced the chances of being considered for the vacancies made available, as those interested had to be in the desired age group, perform in one of the three team sports and choose the Santa Maria Campus, reducing the likelihood of them entering higher education through the notice in question. The format of the notice may have put applicants in doubt,

due to the increased competition, so that candidates with good sporting performance could compete for the same place, preventing the composition of a team with several athletes entering via selection processes. It is no coincidence that of the 66 places on offer, only 10 applied and 8 were approved. This impact needs to be analyzed in order to qualify the offer of places, avoiding the low demand in the Federal University of Santa Maria public notice.

## 4.5 Courses offered in higher education selection processes by universities and courses sought by athletes

The results showed that supply exceeded demand at both universities, leaving a significant number of vacancies unfilled. Specifically at Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul, demand was over 50%. In turn, there was a high demand for the Physical Education course, which had only three places available. The link between athletes and this course was evidenced among university scholarship holders in a study carried out by [Rodrigues \(2021\)](#) in Mato Grosso do Sul. Experience with sport during childhood, at school and in sports schools was the main factor for students at a university in southern Brazil choosing to study for a bachelor’s degree in Physical Education ([Milan et al., 2022](#)).

Study of elite athletes at the University of La Laguna showed that their professional dedication was linked to the world of sport (66.70%) ([Álvarez et al., 2014b](#)). It is no coincidence that, on the international stage, the proximal relationship between sports performance and Physical Education training is found in countries such as Poland and Colombia. In Poland, there are physical education training programs and grants ([Kuettela et al., 2016](#)). In Colombia, the most frequent support occurs in universities that offer academic training in the field of physical culture, sport, recreation, sports science or similar (70%) and in public universities (75%), and measures can be taken to contribute to the insertion of high-performance athletes during or after their careers in higher education by reserving additional places in faculties of physical education and sports and exempting academic requirements in careers related to physical education and sport ([Lagos Cortés, 2014](#)).

In addition, the choice of a degree course in Physical Education can be explained by various factors, many of which are rooted in their personal experiences, interests and professional aspirations. Athletes generally have a strong identification with sport and physical activity, as this practice is part of their routine and personal identity ([Stokowski et al., 2019](#)), making the transition out of the role of athlete a major challenge ([Corr et al., 2024](#)). The difficulties faced in transitioning out of athlete can be mitigated by opportunities to remain in activities that value sport ([Cote and Fraser-Thomas, 2007](#)), facilitating employability in the sports environment ([Wylleman et al., 2019](#)). We can also infer that the lack of guidance and limited social network would have hindered the understanding of other employment possibilities beyond sport.

Any athletes sees Physical Education as a natural extension of their sporting careers. Internationally, there is already concern about the barriers and facilitators of this direct transition to coaching ([Blackett et al., 2020](#); [Chroni and Dieffenbach, 2022](#)).

Thus, graduating in Physical Education can lead to careers as coaches, physical trainers or sports managers. According to Vallerand et al. (2007), intrinsic motivation, such as love of sport, is a strong predictor of career choices in sports.

Despite the strong demand for physical education courses in the present study, former athletes can maintain their connection to sport through various academic training programs. As evidenced by Stokowski et al. (2019), the retention of former athletes in sports-related professional activities was found to be a positive factor in the career transition of several NCAA affiliates. Therefore, the courses demanded by athletes participating in higher education entrance programs developed by the Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul and the Federal University of Santa Maria should be constantly monitored so that the number of places can be adjusted according to existing demand.

## 5 Conclusion

This study identified the federal universities that adopt a specific admission policy in the athletes for higher education; it analyzed the type of selection process, and the criteria adopted, diagnosed the target public, the academic disciplines and backgrounds covered, and assessed the demand/supply ratio. Only two federal universities, out of a total of 69, presented mechanisms for athletes to enter higher education based on sporting merit. The criteria adopted in the selection processes of the Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul were solely sports results, while at the Federal University of Santa Maria, sports and educational results were considered. The number of offered spots exceeded the number of enrolled athletes in selected process at the two universities analyzed, with the Physical Education course having the highest number of enrolled athletes. However, both universities had a low percentage of places filled.

The lack of understanding among managers of Brazilian Federal Universities of the need for support mechanisms for athletes to enter higher education is evidenced by the low number of institutions that have adopted this strategy. This may be due to the lack of national policies on athlete DC, which does not encourage federal universities to adopt this strategy. In addition, the lack of clear and well-defined policies means that the universities that pioneered the process adopt particular strategies, and as we have seen, without following the legislation in force in some respects, such as the absence of academic criteria (Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul) and without places available for people with disabilities (Federal University of Santa Maria). In addition, the places offered were in low demand, with a high concentration of candidates interested in training in Physical Education.

It can be concluded that although the selection processes implemented are unprecedented and relevant for sports career transition, the policy of specific selection processes for athletes to enter higher education at Brazilian federal universities is still in its infancy, as it is restricted to two institutions. Furthermore, the universities analyzed have limitations in their selection criteria, and it is necessary that future calls for applications from the Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul include some type of academic evaluation among the evaluation criteria and that the

reservation of places for specific populations be included in the calls for applications from the Federal University of Santa Maria. In addition, it is important that courses in high demand, such as Physical Education, have a greater number of places available at both universities.

In addition to the adjustments mentioned above, it is important that public policies aimed at the academic training of athletes be accompanied by academic support (compensating for absences, second calls for assessments and assignments, tutoring) and sports support (financial aid for participation in competitions; free use of sports facilities; medical, nutritional, physiotherapeutic and psychological assistance in extension projects). This is because, as well as differentiated entry, maintenance mechanisms are needed.

The evidence produced by this study may contribute to political agents linked to the universities analyzed reformulating the selection criteria used until now, once they gain access to the results and analyses undertaken. In addition, the dissemination of the results produced may encourage other Brazilian or international universities to implement specific selection processes for athletes who wish to enter higher education, thereby contributing to a more frequent career transition among athletes. As a practical implication, this study will help universities build these support mechanisms for athletes, since it presents the current panorama of federal universities, as well as indications of what these mechanisms include.

Despite its contributions to literature on transition and DC and public policies, this study is limited by its cross-sectional design, what is related to the announcements regarding the admission of athletes to federal universities only took place in 2023. The limitation to documentary analysis also prevented in-depth analyses from being carried out and data cross-referencing using statistics from being performed. It is recommended that future studies carry out longitudinal monitoring of these athletes entering through special selection processes in order to gain a better understanding of the university policies adopted. In addition, although this study covered a wide range of topics, it was limited to federal universities. Therefore, it is also recommended that this same analysis be carried out with state, municipal, community and private universities for a better understanding of the different contexts as well as compare than based on statistical analysis.

## Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in this study are included in this article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

## Author contributions

JS: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Resources, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. RQ: Formal analysis, Methodology, Visualization, Writing – review & editing, Investigation. GG: Formal analysis, Methodology, Writing – review & editing, Investigation, Resources, Visualization. FC: Methodology, Resources, Visualization, Writing – review & editing, Formal

analysis, Investigation. AF: Supervision, Writing – review & editing, Formal analysis, Investigation, Resources.

## Funding

The author(s) declare that no financial support was received for the research and/or publication of this article.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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