ORIGINAL ARTICLE

EDUCATION & TRAINING
Journal of the Graduate Program in Education
of the State University of Ceará (UECE)

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REVISTA EDUCAÇÃO & FORMAÇÃO

"Being a Student in the Integrated High School Program": School Fatigue at the Core of Students' Social Representations

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Abstract

Introduction. This article aimed to investigate the social representations of students at *the* Luzerna *campus* of the Federal Institute Catarinense regarding "being a student in the Integrated High School Program." **Methodology.** This is a qualitative study with an exploratory focus and a field research design. Data were collected using the free association of words with justification technique. The participants were 66 graduating students from the Integrated High School program at *the* Luzerna *campus*. **Results and discussion.** A prototypical analysis of the data was conducted, leading to the conclusion that the centrality of students' representations of "being a student in the Integrated High School program" consists solely of the element "fatigue." The meanings attributed to this element relate to the heavy course load in Integrated High School programs, the daily commutes most students must make to attend the institution, and the lack of adequate rest areas on *campus*.

Keywords

social representations; being a student; Integrated High School.

"Ser aluno do Ensino Médio Integrado": o cansaço escolar na centralidade das representações sociais dos estudantes

Resumo

Introdução. Neste artigo, teve-se como objetivo compreender as representações sociais dos estudantes do *campus* Luzerna do Instituto Federal Catarinense sobre o "ser aluno do Ensino Médio Integrado". **Metodologia.** A pesquisa é de abordagem qualitativa, com ênfase exploratória e delineamento de pesquisa de campo. Os dados foram produzidos por meio da técnica de associação livre de palavras com justificativa. Os participantes foram 66 estudantes concluintes do Ensino Médio Integrado do *campus* Luzerna. **Resultados e discussão.** Foi realizada uma análise prototípica dos dados, a qual permitiu a conclusão de que a centralidade das representações dos estudantes sobre o "ser aluno do Ensino Médio Integrado" é composta somente do elemento "cansaço". Os significados atribuídos ao referido elemento dizem respeito à carga horária elevada existente nos cursos de Ensino Médio Integrado, aos deslocamentos que a maioria dos estudantes precisa fazer diariamente para estudar na instituição e à falta de espaços adequados para descanso no *campus*.

"Ser estudiante del Enseño Secundario Integrado": el cansancio escolar en la centralidad de las representaciones sociales de los estudiantes

Resumen

Introducción. En este artículo, se tuvo como objetivo comprender las representaciones sociales de los estudiantes del *campus* Luzerna del Instituto Federal Catarinense sobre el "ser alumno de lo Enseño Secundario Integrado". **Metodología.** La pesquisa es de enfoque cualitativo, con énfasis exploratorio y diseño de pesquisa del campo. Los datos fueron producidos a través de la técnica de asociación libre de palabras con justificación. Los participantes fueron 66 estudiantes concluyentes del Enseño Secundario Integrado del *campus* Luzerna. **Resultados y discusión.** Fue realizada un análisis prototípico de los datos, que permitió la conclusión de que la centralidad de las representaciones de los estudiantes sobre el "ser alumno del Enseño Secundario Integrado" es compuesto solamente del elemento "cansancio". Los significados atribuidos al mencionado elemento se refieren a la carga horaria alta existente en los cursos del Enseño Secundario Integrado, a los desplazamientos que la mayoría de los estudiantes precisan hacer diariamente para estudiar en la institución y a la falta de los espacios adecuados para descanso en el *campus*.

Palabras clave

representaciones sociales; ser estudiante; Enseño Secundario Integrado.

1 Introduction

This paper aims to discuss the social representations constructed by students in the integrated high school programs at *the* Luzerna *campus* of the Federal Institute Catarinense (IFC) regarding "being a student in Integrated High School (ISTE)." These programs are part of Professional and Technological Education (EPT) and provide students with both preparatory (secondary) and technical training within the same curriculum.

ISTE was regulated by Decree No. 5,154, dated July 23, 2004 (Brazil, 2004), with a significant expansion of its offerings beginning in 2008, when the Federal Institutes of Education, Science, and Technology (IFs) were created through Law No. 11,892, of December 29 (Brazil, 2008). This law established that one of the objectives of the IFs must be to offer at least 50% of their enrollment slots for "[...] secondary-level technical vocational education, primarily in the form of integrated courses [...]" (Brazil, 2008, n.p.).

It is worth noting that, although this type of course is commonly mistaken for a simple combination of curricula (formal dimension), it presents a distinct educational proposal (conceptual dimension), which advocates the integration of all dimensions

inherent to human life through the inseparability of work, science, culture, and technology, aiming for the polytechnic, *omnidirectional*, and comprehensive education of students (Brazil, 2007; Ciavatta; Ramos, 2011; Ramos, 2014).

At *the* Luzerna *campus*, to enroll in ISTE courses, applicants take an admission examination administered by the IFC's General Coordination of Assessment and Admissions (CGI). This exam is held in the second semester of each calendar year—for admission of successful candidates in the first semester of the following year—and covers the main areas of knowledge in Basic Education: Languages and their Technologies; Mathematics and its Technologies; Natural Sciences and their Technologies; and Applied Humanities and Social Sciences.

After being selected in the admission examination and entering ISTE, students begin an intense study routine (involving teaching, research, and extension activities), as they must complete the course curriculum in three years. As a result of this "hectic" routine, students commonly find themselves enrolled in a large number of courses, having to remain on *campus* for two class periods: morning and afternoon.

Given this, it is common to hear negative comments from students in the integrated programs regarding the exhaustion caused by the academic routine. In this context, with the aim of better understanding the daily lives of these students, the following research question arose: how do students at *the* Luzerna *campus* represent "being an ISTE student"? To find answers to this guiding question, the objective was established to understand the social representations of IFC Luzerna *campus* students regarding "being an ISTE student."

To address the research problem and achieve the defined objective, Jean-Claude Abric's central core theory (CCT)—which belongs to the structural approach to social representations—was employed as a theoretical and methodological framework (Abric, 2000, 2001). According to this theory, "[...] every representation is organized around a central core [...]," which organizes and gives meaning to the representation (Abric, 2001, p. 162).

The elements outside the central core are part of the peripheral system and are more flexible and more susceptible to change than those belonging to the centrality of the

representation (Abric, 2000, 2001; Flament, 2001; Sá, 2002). The main characteristics of the central core and the peripheral system are described in Table 1.

Table 1 – Characteristics of the central system and the peripheral system

Central system	Peripheral system
Collective memory	Individual experiences
Defines the homogeneity of the group	Highlights the group's heterogeneity
Stable	Flexible
Resistant to change	Susceptible to change
Organizes and gives meaning to the representation	Serves as a "buffer," protecting the central core

Source: Prepared by the authors based on Abric (2000).

Finally, the rationale for this study lies in the importance of listening to students in integrated programs, who are unique in that they simultaneously receive both foundational and technical training (single enrollment). It is understood that understanding how they represent "being an ISTE student" is timely for devising actions that contribute to the academic success of students in this course modality, helping to reduce retention and dropout rates, which are high in the integrated courses of the Federal Network for Professional, Scientific, and Technological Education (RFEPCT), as pointed out by the studies of Cotrim-Guimarães (2022), Santos (2017), and Souza and Vieira (2025a).

2 Methodology

This research is characterized by a qualitative approach (Gil, 2002), in which certain elements of quantitative research were also employed (Pereira *et al.*, 2018). It is an exploratory study in terms of its objective and a field study in terms of its technical procedures (Gil, 2002).

The research context was the IFC's Luzerna *campus*, where three ISTE courses are offered: Industrial Automation (ISTEitai), Occupational Safety (ISTEtst), and Mechanics (ISTEmec). The study participants were 66 students currently enrolled in the third year of these courses ( ), comprising: 20 from ISTEtai (students 1 to 20), 25 from ISTEtst (students 21 to 45), and 21 from ISTEmec (students 46 to 66). We chose

to study graduating students because they have more academic experience in *the campus's* integrated programs, as they are nearing completion of the ISTE.

Regarding the participants' characteristics, it was found that, of the 66 students, 33 are male and 33 are female. In terms of age, two are 16 years old, 59 are 17, and five are 18. Regarding the municipalities where they reside, the following data are available: Capinzal (12), Joaçaba (11), Herval d'Oeste (10), Luzerna (8), Ouro (8), Catanduvas (6), Erval Velho (2), Ibicaré (2), Lacerdópolis (2), Treze Tílias (2), Água Doce (1), Salto Veloso (1), and Zortéa (1). This profile of the participants is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2 – Participant Profile

Characteristic	Variable	Quantity
Course	ISTEtai	20
	ISTEtst	25
	ISTEmec	21
Gender	Male	33
	Female	33
Age	16 years	2
	17 years	59
	18 years	5
City of residence	Capinzal	12
	Joaçaba	11
	Herval d'Oeste	10
	Luzerna	8
	Gold	8
	Catanduvas	6
	Erval Velho	2
	Ibicaré	2
	Lacerdópolis	2
	Treze Tílias	2
	Água Doce	1
	Salto Veloso	1
	Zortéa	1

Source: Prepared by the authors (2025).

To collect the data, the technique of free word association (TALP) with justification was used, which was administered between March 20 and April 3, 2025. The instrument in question was provided to students in physical format (A4 paper) in their respective classrooms.

TALP consists of evoking words or expressions based on a trigger term (Nóbrega; Coutinho, 2003). The term used was: “being a student at ISTE.” Students were asked to write down the first five words or expressions that came to mind when reading the cue word; after listing their responses, they ranked them in ascending order of importance, with 1 being the most important and 5 the least important; in addition, they had to justify their choice of the two most important responses.

To analyze the data produced, the process of lemmatization of the associations (reduced to their root form) was initially performed, as suggested by Wachelke and Wolter (2011). They were then subjected to prototypical analysis using *the software* Interface de R pour les Analyses Multidimensionnelles de Textes et de Questionnaires (IRaMuTeQ), version 0.7 alpha 2.

In this analysis, the evocations are classified as central and peripheral according to their respective frequencies (F) and average mean order of importance (MOI)), as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 – Prototype analysis diagram

Frequency cutoff average	**MOI cutoff average**	
	Central core – 1st quadrant	**First periphery – 2nd quadrant**
	High-frequency, low- MOI evocations (considered most important).	Recall items with high frequency and high MOI (less important). Intermediate items.
	Contrast area – 3rd quadrant	**Second periphery – 4th quadrant**
	Evocations with low frequency and low MOI. Intermediate elements.	Evocations with low frequency and high MOI. Distant from the central core.

Source: Prepared by the authors based on Wachelke and Wolter (2011).

Regarding ethical aspects, the study was approved by the IFC Research Ethics Committee (CEP) through Opinion No. 6,922,216 (Certificate of Submission for Ethical Review [CAAE]: 79469924.2.0000.8049). Throughout the study, the guidelines of the regulations governing research involving human subjects were followed — including the signing of the informed consent form (ICF) and/or the informed assent form (IAF) — to ensure the integrity and well-being of the participants.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Identification of the core concept: prototypical analysis

Participants generated 330 words for the prompt “being an ISTE student” (all mentioned five words), which were organized according to the order of importance assigned by the students in a LibreOffice 7.0 spreadsheet and then subjected to prototypical analysis using *the* IRaMuTeQ *software* (version 0.7 alpha 2).

Due to low representativeness (Souza; Vieira, 2025b; Teixeira; Balão; Settembre, 2008; Wachelke; Wolter, 2011), evocations with a frequency (F) of 4 or less were not considered; that is, the minimum frequency adopted for the prototypical analysis was 5. Upon conducting this analysis, it was found that 15 words were evoked at least five times by the participants. Furthermore, it was observed that their average MOI was 2.94 and the average frequency was 9.33. Given this, the *software* defined the following cutoff points: words with MOI <=2.94 were defined as having low MOI, and those with MOI >2.94 as having high MOI; words with frequency >=9.33 were defined as having high frequency, and those with <9.33 as having low frequency.

The 15 evoked words that had a minimum frequency of 5, as well as their respective MOI and frequencies, in addition to the quadrants in which they were distributed, are shown in Table 4.

Table 4 – Prototypical analysis of the inducer term “being a student at ISTE ”

	<= 2.94 MOI > 2.94					
	Central elements			**First periphery**		
	Word	F	MOI	Word	F	MOI
< 9.33 Frequency >= 9.33	Fatigue	37	2.4	Study	14	3.7
	Contrast area			**Second Periphery**		
	Word	F	MOI	Word	F	MOI
	Responsibility	9	2.9	Difficult	9	3.9
	Friends	8	2.6	Sleep	6	3.7
	Dedication	8	2.5	Different	6	4.5
	Time	8	1.9	Enjoyable	6	4
	Learning	7	2.6	Effort	5	3.8
	Exhaustion	6	2.8			
	Stressful	6	2.3			
	Important	5	2.6			

Source: Prepared by the authors (2025).

The prototypical analysis provides strong evidence that the centrality of participants’ representations of “being an ISTE student” consists of a single element, which occurs frequently and to which students attribute great importance (low MOI): fatigue (F=37 and MOI =2.4).

The first periphery also consists of a single element: study (F=14 and MOI =3.7). The contrast area consists of eight evocations: “responsibility” (F=9 and MOI =2.9), “friends” (F=8 and MOI =2.6), “dedication” (F=8 and MOI=2.5), “time” (F=8 and MOI =1.9), “learning” (F=7 and MOI =2.6), “exhaustion” (F=6 and MOI =2.8), “stressful” (F=6 and MOI =2.3), and “important” (F=5 and MOI =2.6). Finally, the second periphery consists of the following elements: “difficult” (F=9 and MOI =3.9), “sleep” (F=6 and MOI =3.7), “different” (F=6 and MOI =4.5), “cool” (F=6 and MOI =4), and “effort” (F=5 and MOI =3.8).

Having identified the centrality of students’ social representations regarding “being an ISTE student” and its peripheral system, we will now analyze the meanings attributed to the central element (which is associated with the collective): “fatigue.”

3.2 Meanings attributed to the central element of the social representations of "being an ISTE student"

As seen in the prototypical analysis, the centrality of students' representations of "being an ISTE student" consists solely of the element "fatigue" (F=37), mentioned by 37 of the 66 students, representing 56% of the total study participants.

The meanings attributed to this element mainly concern the heavy course load in this program and the fact that classes are full-time, resulting in an exhausting school routine due to the excess of activities to be performed. By way of example, we selected the following justifications given by students for the evocation "fatigue":

> *Fatigue is what happens most often on a daily basis, not so much physical but mental, because the course load is extensive and there are days when we feel overwhelmed by everything we need and have to do* (Student 1).
>
> *Since I spend more time here at school than at home, the routine becomes exhausting* […] (Student 24).
>
> *Attending Integrated High School is tiring in and of itself: spending the whole day away from home, the heavy course load, tests, assignments, many subjects, etc. Balancing this with life at home, social life, sometimes work, and other commitments is even harder and becomes even more tiring* (Student 27).
>
> *Being a student in the Integrated High School program is extremely tiring due to the heavy course load and the complete change in routine* (Student 32).
>
> *With the demanding study routine in Integrated High School, plus studying for the Enem* [National High School Exam]*, it becomes exhausting, especially when it comes to technical subjects (I won't be pursuing that field)* (Student 46).
>
> *Exhausting, because, in fact, staying at school in the morning and afternoon studying is a bit exhausting* (Student 55).
>
> *Exhaustion, because the subjects and the course load are much heavier* (Student 58).

Because they cover both foundational and technical areas within the same curriculum, the three ISTE programs surveyed have a high course load: ISTEtai: 3,360 hours, ISTEtst: 3,330 hours, and ISTEmec: 3,390 hours. Consequently, to ensure that students can complete the program within the expected timeframe (three years), classes are offered in both morning and afternoon sessions.

As a result, students are simultaneously enrolled in a significant number of required courses. For example: 17 components in the 2nd year of ISTEtai; 16 components in the 1st year of ISTEtst; and 15 mandatory components in the 1st and 2nd years of ISTEmec. Table 5 summarizes this information regarding the courses.

Table 5 – Curricular aspects of the surveyed programs[1]

Aspect	ISTEtai	ISTEtst	ISTEmec
Course load	3,360 hours	3,330 hours	3,390 hours
Shift	Full-time (morning and afternoon)	Full-time (morning and afternoon)	Full-time (morning and afternoon)
Grade with the most students	2nd year 17 components	1st year 16 components	1st and 2nd years 15 components

Source: Prepared by the authors (2025).

It is worth noting that, in addition to having to simultaneously take this large number of required courses, students also take elective courses, engage in complementary academic activities, and participate in teaching, research, and outreach projects (paid scholarship recipients must dedicate up to ten hours per week to these projects). Thus, given all these demands to be met, the element of "fatigue" becomes central to what it means to be an "ISTE student."

From this perspective, Zimmermann and Socorro (2020), while researching the academic trajectories of ISTE students at *the* Coxim *campus* of the Federal Institute of Mato Grosso do Sul (IFMS), concluded that the fatigue generated by excessive academic demands in integrated high school programs is a factor commonly cited by students in this type of program. A similar finding is also described in other studies, such as those by Carmo (2022), Grisi, Barros, and Rodrigues (2017), Oliveira (2019), and Risso *et al.* (2022).

In addition to citing the ISTE curriculum as a cause of "fatigue," several students mentioned the commute from their homes (located in neighboring cities) to *the campus* as another factor contributing to the school routine becoming "exhausting." To illustrate this observation, we selected the following comments:

[1] The information regarding the courses was obtained from the courses' educational plans, available at: ISTEai: https://luzerna.ifc.edu.br/emitai/; ISTEtst: https://luzerna.ifc.edu.br/emitst/; and ISTEmec: https://luzerna.ifc.edu.br/emimec/. Accessed on: Nov. 26, 2025.

> *Because I have to wake up early to catch the bus* [from Herval d'Oeste]*, get here, attend class, stay until late, and then get home and have to worry about various assignments. When it's the end of the quarter, it ends up being even more tiring* (Student 4).
>
> *Because of the distance from the town where I live* [Capinzal]*, daily life becomes tiring* (Student 23).
>
> *Leaving early* [Joaçaba]*, arriving late, and still having assignments to do, lunch to prepare for the next day, personal errands, etc.* (Student 29).
>
> *Being a student in the Integrated High School program is exhausting, because commuting to the school* [in Erval Velho] *is quite a journey; and you have to study a lot* (Student 49).

It is worth noting that, of the 66 study participants, only eight live in the city where *the campus* is located; in other words, most commute from other municipalities to attend the ISTE program at the institution. Some of these municipalities, such as Capinzal, Salto Veloso, Ouro, and Zortéa, are located more than 40 kilometers away from *the campus*. To make this trip using school transportation, students spend two to three hours daily traveling to the institution and back home.

On this subject, Carmo (2022) notes that, regarding the ISTE programs offered by IFs, it is common for students to travel from one municipality to another to attend this type of program at these institutes, which requires dedicating several hours daily to travel[2] .

Risso *et al*. (2022) state that the difficulties faced by students in ISTE courses regarding commuting between home and school are among the factors that interfere with academic performance. Oliveira, R., Oliveira, É., and Tiago (2023), based on a study conducted at the Federal Center for Vocational and Technological Education of Minas Gerais (Cefet-MG), add that daily commute time and travel discomfort cause significant strain on students in integrated programs, leading to losses in academic performance, overall health, and quality of life.

Still on this subject, Cassimiro (2024, p. 67) highlights that, for students residing in locations farther from *the campuses*, the challenges of staying in school and achieving

[2] It is worth noting that this fact is related to the process of decentralization of the IFs, which enabled these institutes to become "[…] closer to new students, especially those who previously could not travel to major urban centers to obtain qualifications" (Corrêa Filho; Paixão; Nogueira, 2022, p. 1015). In other words, although there are challenges regarding daily commutes, the process of moving IFs to rural areas has enabled these students to have access to this type of program.

academic success are even greater, since "[…] factors such as fatigue, resulting from longer commute times and high transportation costs, can pose obstacles that are difficult to overcome". In light of this, the author emphasizes the need for ongoing support and scholarships/financial aid to contribute to these students' academic success.

In addition to the ISTE curriculum requiring simultaneous enrollment in a significant number of courses and the considerable daily commute most students must make to study at the institution—which makes the school routine of ISTE students exhausting— Student 54's comment stands out: when explaining the feeling of "exhaustion," they highlighted the lack of adequate spaces for students to rest during their free time on *the* Luzerna *campus*: *"Spending the day at IFC is exhausting because, during lunch breaks, for example, we can't go home; the institute offers little space for rest or entertainment, leaving students exhausted*."

Regarding this issue, it was empirically observed that many students who spend their lunch break at the institution—a situation exemplified by Student 54—remain in classrooms sitting or, not infrequently, lying on the floor, due to the lack of adequate spaces to enjoy their free time.

This obstacle is not unique to IFC Luzerna, as Rosa (2023, p. 62), while researching the school routine of students in the ISTE program at the Federal Institute of Goiás (IFGoiano), highlighted that the "[…] lack of a place to rest during the lunch break […]" is one of the challenges faced by students regarding their retention in integrated courses; therefore, this is an issue to which institutions must give due attention so as not to negatively impact the school life of ISTE students at Federal Institutes.

Considering the assumptions of TNC, that central elements are the most stable and resistant to change (Abric, 2000, 2001; Flament, 2001; Sá, 2002)—since they are "[…] the very identity of the representation […]" (Flament, 2001, p. 184) – it is understood that promoting changes in the core of students' representations of "being an ISTE student" is a challenging task, since the centrality of these representations, composed solely of the "fatigue" element, is associated with the group's collective memory and history; furthermore, it is this element that organizes and gives meaning to the representation, being stable and resistant to change (Abric, 2000, 2001; Flament, 2001; Sá, 2002).

Given this, and considering that changes in a representation occur first in the peripheral elements and only later eventually expand to the central ones (Abric, 2000, 2001), it is deemed pertinent to analyze the elements that protect the stability of the representation—that is, the peripheral elements that ensure the stability of the core element "fatigue."

3.3 Periphery of representations: the "bumper" of the central core

Taking into account the assumptions of TNC (structural approach)—namely, that elements belonging to the peripheral system act as a "buffer" for the central core, as they absorb the discrepancies between the centrality of representation and reality (Abric, 2000, 2001; Flament, 2001; Sá, 2002)—we chose to analyze the peripheral elements that, in the researchers' view, protect the stability of the central element "fatigue": "time," "exhaustion," "stressful," "difficult," and "sleep."

To present the meanings attributed by the students to these evocations, the analysis began with those closest to the central core, which, in the case of this study, are those belonging to the contrast area.

The meanings attributed to the element "time," which had the lowest MOI (1.9) among all the evocations in the prototypical analysis (i.e., it was classified as very important by the participants), are related to the fact that students have little "time" to devote to other activities due to the school routine in the ISTE courses at the (excess of activities, double-shift classes, commuting, etc.), as observed in the following comments:

> *Time, because we spend most of our day at the IF, and even when we're not here, we're on the bus coming to the IF or at home studying and doing research—in other words, we have little time for other activities, and those with more responsibilities outside the IF have even less time. So every minute is very precious* (Student 12).
>
> *Since the coursework is a bit more demanding, you have to dedicate yourself more, leaving you with less free time* (Student 18).
>
> *In the integrated technical program, you have to manage your time very well. Sometimes, we leave the IFC to go home thinking we'll have some 'peace,' but then there's a project to work on, a report to finish, and four more exams that week* (Student 19).

> *Because we're at the school from 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., the free time for college entrance exam prep, schoolwork, leisure, and helping with household chores ends up being short, which becomes a downside of the integrated technical program* (Student 45).
>
> *There are a lot of subjects, which requires a lot of studying and dedication. We end up with no time for other things. I wish it were 'lighter' so we'd have time to do other things* (Student 50).

Therefore, from the students' accounts, it is clear that excessive academic demands and daily commuting leave students with little free "time." This factor leads them to experience a "tiring" academic routine in integrated programs.

Commenting on the subject, Duarte, Kawanami, and Rodrigues (2023) state, based on a study conducted at a federal university *campus* located in Vale do Ribeira, São Paulo, that the limited time available to ISTE students is one of the factors that "[…] prevents them from engaging in cultural and sports activities, or from spending time with family and friends […]." In this regard, Santos (2021) adds that, in the context of integrated courses, lack of time is seen as a limiting factor by students who wish to engage in other activities outside the school setting.

From this perspective, the peripheral element of "exhaustion" emerges in students' representations of "being an ISTE student," justified by the students as follows: *"It's exhausting because we spend so much time away from home—in my case, almost 12* hours" (Student 9); *"I believe that being a student at the Integrated High School is exhausting because we spend more time at school than at home* […]" (Student 30). In other words, the "exhaustion" mentioned by some students stems from this school environment that causes "fatigue," resulting from the peculiarities already mentioned. This reality limits students' "time" for other activities, leading them to "exhaustion."

Given this context, it is worth mentioning the peripheral "stressful" element, explained by Student 7 as follows: *"The stress is very high* [in Integrated High School]." Duarte, Kawanami, and Rodrigues (2023) warn about this issue, as factors such as fatigue (a central element in the participants' accounts in our study) and the lack of time to devote to other activities outside the ISTE school environment act as stressors (among other psycho-emotional reactions) for students in this type of program. From this perspective, the authors highlight the need for institutions to offer activities such as "[…] theme weeks, trips, parties, cultural gatherings, friendly sports matches, events open to

the public […],” in order to redefine the school environment (Duarte; Kawanami; Rodrigues, 2023, p. 403).

Moving on to the second periphery, there is the “difficult” element, which Student 9 explained as follows: *“There are more subjects that are harder than those in regular high school*.” Regarding this issue—“difficult” curricular components in integrated courses—Oliveira (2019), in a study conducted at the Federal Institute of Pernambuco (IFPE), found that some teachers make the classroom teaching level more difficult in ISTE courses, hindering students’ ability to keep up with the educational process. Based on Student 9’s comment and the frequency of the term “difficult” (F=9), this also appears to occur at *the* Luzerna *campus*.

A final peripheral element worth highlighting is the word “sleep,” explained by Student 5 as follows: *“I’m sleepy because the IFC is exhausting, the trip home takes a long time, and after I get home, there are more tasks to do. I cited sleep as the most important because the rest period is very short*.”

In her account, we see that she links “sleep” to the short rest period available due to the school routine experienced at the institution. In this sense, based on Student 5’s comment and the frequency of the mention of “sleep” (; F=6), we can deduce that—due to the demands of daily school life—some students face difficulties in getting an adequate amount of sleep.

Therefore, based on the assumptions of TNC (Abric, 2000, 2001; Flament, 2001; Sá, 2002), if there is an ambition to shift the centrality of students’ representations of “being an ISTE student,” so that “fatigue” ceases to be a central element, it is necessary, initially, to promote changes in the peripheral elements mentioned in this subsection, as they are what protect the stability of the central core.

4 Final Considerations

The objective of this manuscript was to understand the social representations of students at the IFC’s Luzerna *campus* regarding “being an ISTE student.” To conduct the study, Jean-Claude Abric’s TNC was employed. Upon analyzing the data, it was found

that the centrality of participants' representations of "being an ISTE student" consists solely of the element "fatigue."

The meanings attributed by students to this element relate to the heavy course load in ISTE programs (generating excessive academic demands), the daily commutes most students must make to attend classes at the institution (since they predominantly reside in municipalities neighboring Luzerna), and the lack of adequate spaces on *campus* for rest during free periods, such as the lunch break.

Among the peripheral elements, which support the stability of the central core, the following stand out: "time" (students mention the lack of time to carry out other tasks), "exhaustion" (the "fatigue" combined with other factors leaves certain students "exhausted"), "stressful" (some students view the ISTE school routine as a source of "stress"), "difficult" (some students state that the curricular components in this context are more "difficult"), and "sleep" (very short rest periods).

The fact that the core of the representations of "being an ISTE student" consists of the element "tiredness" and the periphery is made up of elements such as "time" (absences), "exhaustion," "stressful," "difficult," and "sleep" highlights the need to rethink the issues inherent in ISTE courses that lead to the construction of such social representations.

As examples of issues to be considered, we cite the possibility of discussing the offering of four-year ISTE courses with classes in a single session; the development of interdisciplinary projects and integrated assessment practices, enabling integration among curricular components and reducing the number of academic demands; and the creation of adequate spaces for students to rest and entertain themselves during their free time at the institution.

Finally, given our understanding of the participants' social representations of "being an ISTE student," we highlight the need for studies that seek to understand whether the elements present in students' representations of "being an ISTE student"—especially "fatigue," as it is central—impact retention and academic success in this educational context.

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Editor-in-Chief: Lia Machado Fiuza Fialho

***Ad hoc* reviewers:** Deivid Alex dos Santos and Maria Amália de A. Cunha

Translated by: Thiago Alves Moreira

Data availability: The research data are available in the body of the document.

How to cite this article (ABNT):
SOUZA, Everton de; VIEIRA, Marilandi Maria Mascarello. "Being a Student in Integrated High School": School Fatigue at the Center of Students' Social Representations. *Education & Training*, Fortaleza, vol. 11, e16967, 2026. Available at: https://revistas.uece.br/index.php/redufor/article/view/e16967

TQRCG

Received on December 29th, 2025.

Accepted on May 1st, 2026.

Published on Juny 3 st, 2026.