LUMEN ET VIRTUS

ASSESSMENT OF READING SKILLS: INSTRUMENTAL APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

Reading is a skill to be acquired by the student during the teaching-learning process. The article aims to present an experience report on the development of an instrument to assess the reading ability of high school students. The questionnaire with open and closed questions was developed addressing nine questions, such as: Text comprehension, Text interpretation, Vocabulary, Argumentation Analysis, Reading experience, Reading preferences, Self-assessment, Encouraging factors and Challenges in reading, to answer about the achievement of reading competence. It is concluded that the promotion of reading in high school is a crucial challenge for the educational and cultural formation of adolescents and young people, as well as for the development of a critical, participatory and transformative society.

Keywords: Reading. Evaluation. Skill.

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INTRODUCTION

Students who attend high school need to achieve numerous skills, competencies and knowledge provided for in the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC), to achieve their approval. In the school life of a student, numerous teachers develop strategies, in a joint effort, that enhance the development of the markers to be evaluated.

During the stages of education of children, adolescents and young people, it is the teachers who present the words, the teacher who is truly a reader - the one who maintains the habit of reading, who will awaken the habit of reading in the student (Moura and Lopes, 2020).

Reading comprises a skill to be achieved by the student during school life. Elementary and high school teachers develop reading strategies adapted to different situations and age groups, which favor comprehension and learning. The word strategy is used to point out an action in the public domain, criteria for eligible readers, and objectives defined in the teacher's school planning (Ribeiro *et al.,* 2021).

In the development of our actions in the daily routine to more complex learning, such as teaching-learning, we develop cognitive and metacognitive skills. In the development of the student's reading ability, cognitive ability helps in the decoding of linguistic symbols and in the elaboration of meanings, seeking to understand the information. Metacognitive ability, on the other hand, involves individual interaction procedures that awaken the student's awareness and processing as a reader (Ribeiro *et al.,* 2021).

Teachers consider the need to develop evaluative and creative instruments to understand the universe of student learning and provide answers to their concerns regarding the teaching of reading. Several publications, many from the academic world, point out the difficulties of high school students in achieving reading skills, despite the numerous efforts of teachers (Carvalho and Souza, 2023). At this stage of school education, a large number of students have a lag in terms of the habit of reading and a profound difficulty in interpreting the written text (Mochinski, 2022).

According to Assolini (2021) the low quality of reading among young Brazilians has influenced their insertion in the labor market, society marginalizes those who do not express themselves because they do not read. It is important that young people recognize themselves as members of a literate society, with discourses that require skilled readers.

The study by Souza and Gonçalves (2020) also corroborate Assolini's words. The school is the environment for teaching reading, offering students textual genres that bring them closer to their reality, encouraging the way they see and perceive the context around them. Another important aspect is the training of teachers adapted to the new needs

presented by society. Public policies are needed that require the development of continuing education for this professional by the educational segment (Moura and Lopes, 2020).

STEPS DEVELOPED IN THE PREPARATION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

During the Training-Action Program in Creative Schools Digital Inclusion, Assistive Technologies and Sustainability in the Development of Creative Eco-Formative Projects in Basic Education, the students of the course had as their final goal to develop an educational project. Our final proposal in the course was to investigate the influence of the cultural capital of high school students on their reading skills, recognizing the importance of the concept in the contemporary educational context.

It was decided to develop an instrument for the evaluation of reading by high school students, considering social issues such as cultural capital. The concept of cultural capital adopted by Pierre Bourdieu guides the proposed activity and then presented.

For Bourdieu (2007), cultural capital refers to the set of knowledge that the individual builds in the trajectory of his life and that which is passed on by his ancestors. There are three types of cultural capital: embodied cultural capital (ability to speak, think, act, etc.), objectified cultural capital (books, travel, works of art, etc.), and institutionalized cultural capital (title, certificates, diplomas, etc.) (Coelho and Silva, 2019). The amount of learning acquired by the student, including reading, in his school trajectory is called cultural capital.

In the elaboration of the instrument, it was decided to provide two selected and randomly adapted texts, followed by investigative questions. The first text is "Art of the Puppets" which presents the virtual page of Science Today of Children, Tiridá Space, of the Mamulengo Museum, located in the city of Olinda, state of Pernambuco. The second selected text is entitled "Is it true that açaí is one of the most caloric fruits that exist?", written in 2016 by educator Denise Lage Fonseca with the purpose of verifying the interpretation of texts by second-year high school students.

The texts available in the reading assessment instrument are found free of charge on the *internet.* The questions included in the questionnaire were elaborated with the priority of identifying the development of reading skills. The questions are based on the clarity, cohesion, objectivity of the ideas and information that the authors wish to convey to the reader, that is, the high school student.

The instrumental approach attends to the training and recognition of the language, reading, interpretation and textual production by the students, helping in their communication in society. Communicating orally and in writing requires objectivity, clarity and cohesion of the Portuguese language.

Explanation of the questions:

1. Text Comprehension: The question aims to assess the students' ability to understand and extract information from written texts, identifying the central theme and the highlights of the text.
2. Text Interpretation: Students are challenged to interpret a specific piece of text demonstrating their ability to understand and analyze text.
3. Vocabulary: The choice of the word that best completes the meaning of the text allows us to assess the students' mastery of the vocabulary and their ability to infer the meaning based on the context.
4. Argumentation Analysis: The question proposes a reflection on an argument related to the importance of reading, encouraging students to express their opinions and arguments in a reasoned way.
5. Reading Experience: It seeks to understand the frequency with which students engage in reading outside the school environment, providing *insights* into their reading habits.
6. Reading Preferences: When we ask about the favorite literary genre, it is intended to identify the preferences of students in relation to the types of text that interest them the most.
7. Self-assessment: Allows students to reflect on their own reading skills by offering a self-critical view of their performance.
8. Encouraging Factors: The question investigates the reasons that encourage students to read, offering important information about the external and internal stimuli that influence their reading practice.
9. Reading Challenges: Provides an understanding of the main obstacles faced by students when reading, helping them to identify areas of difficulty that need to be addressed.

Questionnaire – includes open-ended questions seeking to know the degree of reading and interpretation of paragraphs of the texts. As for closed questions, containing questions about the habit of reading, students should mark with X the answers they consider assertive.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Reading is a fundamental skill for the academic and personal development of individuals, being essential for understanding texts, acquiring knowledge and improving the ability to express themselves in writing and speaking.

To assess the reading of high school students, the instrument developed includes nine items

In item 1 - **Comprehension of the Text** , we present two paragraphs of the manuscript "Art of the puppets". Next, we asked two questions about the theme and main points discussed in the text.

In item 2 - **Text Interpretation** , we transcribe a short text, extract a paragraph, ask the reader what the author was referring to.

In item 3 - **Vocabulary**, we elaborate a sentence with empty space, asking the reader to fill in the correct word that allows the meaning.

In item 4 - **Argumentation Analysis** , we brought an argument asking the reader to choose whether to agree (totally or partially) or disagree (totally or partially).

In item 5 - **Reading Experience,** we questioned the time interval of the reading exercise by the reader outside of school.

In item 6 - **Reading Preferences,** we present reading genres for the reader to choose their preference.

In item 7 - **Self-assessment**, we offer options for the reader to assess their reading skills.

In item 8 - **Encouraging Factors** we list options that motivate the reader to read.

In item 9 - **Challenges in Reading** , we list alternatives for the reader to choose up to two that encourage him to practice reading.

In item 10 **- Additional Comments** , the reader can list something he wants to add to the questionnaire or theme.

Reading Skills Assessment Questionnaire

Instructions: This quiz is intended to assess your reading skills. Please answer the questions carefully and based on your reading experiences.

Text Comprehension

a) Read the following text and answer the questions:

Puppet art

Do you know what a mamulengo is? If you are from the Northeast of the country you should know; if you are from other regions, you should know him as a puppet. Mamulengo is a puppet, usually made of cloth and wood, which can be worn by hand to make little theaters. In Pernambuco, it is very traditional and is part of popular culture – so much so that it has won a special museum!

Espaço Tiridá – Museu do Mamulengo, in Olinda, brings together a huge collection of typically northeastern puppets from various eras. There, you will find a lot of curious characters from popular theaters. There is, of course, Lampião and Maria Bonita; the priest; the mourners (who are paid to cry at the funerals of others) and Tiridá, a funny boy, who always speaks in rhyme, and gives the museum its name. There are so many interesting and colorful dolls that you leave there wanting to play!

Source: Children's Science Today (2024).

b) What is the main theme of the text? [Space for open response]

c) What are the main points discussed in the text? [Space for open response]

Text Interpretation

a) Read the following excerpt and answer the question:

Is it true that açaí is one of the most caloric fruits that exist?

It is not, no. Just to compare, 100 grams of the fruit have an average of 65 calories. It is the same as 100 grams of mango or apple, and much less than 100 grams of banana (105 calories), avocado (162 calories) or super-caloric tamarind (230 calories). But where does the bad reputation of açaí come from? "What makes the açaí consumed in snack bars very caloric is the addition of other ingredients in the preparation of the pulp, such as sugar and guarana syrup," explains chemist Hervé Rogez, from the Federal University of Pará (UFPA) and author of the book Sabor Açaí. The famous açaí "in the bowl", popular in the Southeast Region, is prepared precisely with this turbocharged pulp. And with an aggravating factor: açaí is often accompanied by other delicacies, such as banana and granola, which greatly increase the total calories [...].

But don't get into the nerve of counting calories like crazy. It's worth eating acai berries once in a while because they're super nutritious. "First, açaí has antioxidant action – it is as good as wine for delaying aging. Second, its fat is healthy, similar to that of olive oil, and is good for the cardiovascular system", says nutritionist Cynthia Antonaccio [...]. Not to mention that the fruit is rich in fiber, manganese, copper, calcium, magnesium, protein and potassium. One last curiosity about the fruit is that its mode of consumption in the North and Northeast of the country is very different. In these regions, açaí juice is mixed with cassava flour or tapioca. The final product is a semi-sweet porridge, which northerners love to eat with fried fish.

Source: Fonseca (2016).

b) Question: What did the author mean by "It's worth eating açaí once in a while, because it's super nutritious"? [Space for open response]

Vocabulary

a) Read the following sentence and choose the word that best completes the meaning of the text: "The author used a very _____ language in his book." Options:

- Complex
- Simple
- Confused
- Difficult

Argumentation Analysis

a) Read the following argument and answer whether you agree or disagree: "Reading is fundamental for the intellectual and emotional development of individuals." Options:

- I totally agree
- I partially agree
- I partially disagree
- I totally disagree

Reading Experience

a) How often do you read outside of school (e.g., books, magazines, newspapers, etc.)?

Options:

- Every day
- A few times a week
- Once a week
- Less than once a week
- Never

Reading Preferences

a) What is your favorite literary genre? Options:

- Romance
- Science fiction
- Mystery/suspense
- Fantasy
- I have no preference

Self-assessment

a) How do you consider yourself in relation to your reading skills? Options:

- Excellent
- Good
- Regular
- Needs to improve

Encouraging Factors

a) What motivates you the most to read? (Choose up to two options) Options:

- Interest in the topic
- Recommendation from friends or family
- Influence from teachers or mentors
- Curiosity to explore new ideas
- Need for studies or work
- Other (specify): [Open-ended response space]

Challenges in Reading

a) What are the main challenges you face when reading? (Choose up to two options)
Options:

- Difficulty in understanding the text
- Lack of time to dedicate to reading
- Little interest in the topics covered
- Difficulty finding interesting reading materials
- Other (specify): [Open-ended response space]

Additional Comments

Is there anything else you'd like to share about your reading-related experiences or challenges? [Space for open response]

The assessment of students' reading skills is extremely relevant to identify the strengths and areas that require attention by the teacher, both at the individual and institutional levels. By understanding the reading profile of students, teachers can adapt their teaching practices and offer personalized support to promote the development of reading skills.

In addition, conducting the questionnaire will allow for a comprehensive analysis of the factors that influence students' reading, such as their reading habits, literary preferences, motivations, and challenges faced. This information will be valuable to guide the development of more effective pedagogical strategies, encouraging a taste for reading and improving the skills of understanding and interpreting texts.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The promotion of reading in high school is a crucial challenge for the educational and cultural formation of adolescents and young people, as well as for the development of a critical, participatory and transformative society. In the elaboration of an evaluative instrument of reading by high school students, we sought to contribute to reading skills, recognizing the importance of reading skills for the educational and social context.

Popular and traditional literature, as well as texts found on the *internet,* music lyrics (*rap, hip hop, pop,* etc.) bring adolescents and young people closer to their reality, motivating them to practice reading (Leopoldino, 2022). Studies suggest that high school students are more likely to be interested in reading topics that express their interests as individuals and social groups (Costa Júnior *et al.,* 2023).

Adolescents and young people who like to read find it easier to learn and express themselves. A cultured society guarantees better economic, political and social performance for the individual who is more prepared to argue and negotiate. It is up to the school to ensure that students are introduced to literate discursive practices, students who do not develop such a skill may be doomed to be socially marginalized (Assolin, 2021).

We observed that social inequalities significantly impact the distribution of cultural capital among students, highlighting the need for more inclusive and equitable educational policies (Nascimento *et al,* 2018). Thus, it is important to involve families and society so that reading is present in all oral and written communication.

Therefore, it emerges that the promotion of reading in high school must be accompanied by measures aimed at democratizing access to cultural capital, ensuring that all students can fully develop their reading skills and actively participate in society. Thus, it is possible to build a fairer, more inclusive and democratic educational environment, where the potential of each student is recognized and valued.

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