


TUTORING PROGRAM IN DIGITAL LITERACY IN HIGHER EDUCATION: EMPOWERING STUDENTS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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ABSTRACT

This essay reports the experience of implementing a digital literacy tutoring program for university students, detailing the first seven meetings. Digital literacy emerges as an essential competence in contemporary society, driven by the ubiquity of information and communication technologies (ICT) (Araújo; Glotz, 2014). The program, structured in teaching units, covered everything from basic resources to advanced platforms, seeking to train students in the critical use of digital technologies. The teaching methodology, focused on active participation and collaboration, included dialogued presentations, debates and group exercises. The results demonstrate a significant increase in students' digital skills and a greater awareness of the ethical and responsible use of technologies. The experience reinforces the importance of digital literacy in the university context, preparing students for the challenges of the digital age and thus collaborating with digital inclusion.

Keywords: Digital Literacy. Tutoring. ICT. Higher Education. Active Methodologies.

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INTRODUCTION

The growing importance of technologies in contemporary society, especially in the academic context, underscores the need to develop skills that allow students to navigate safely and proficiently in the digital environment. Digital literacy can be defined as the ability to effectively use digital technologies to access, understand, analyze, and produce information in a critical and responsible manner. In today's society, in which communication and access to information occur mainly through digital devices, digital literacy becomes a fundamental skill for full participation in social, economic and political life. (Araújo; Glotz, 2014).).

According to Buzato (2009 apud Ribeiro; Freitas, 2011), digital literacy enables participation in literate practices mediated by computers and electronic devices. This implies not only the mastery of technologies, but also the understanding and use of the different digital genres present in online communication. However, it is important to emphasize that digital literacy is not restricted to a static set of skills. Buzato (2009 apud Ribeiro; Freitas, 2011), conceives literacies as complex and heterogeneous networks, in constant interaction and transformation. Thus, being literate in the digital age is not limited to mastering technological tools, but rather to socially practicing information and communication technologies (ICT), understanding and adapting to the new emerging digital genres.

In this context, teacher training plays a crucial role. Buzato (2006 apud Ribeiro; Freitas, 2011), highlights the need to integrate new technological knowledge with existing pedagogical practices, continuously transforming the set of skills and meanings related to literacies. (Ribeiro; Freitas, 2011).

On the other hand, despite the benefits provided by digital literacy, the digital age also presents a number of challenges in this field. Unequal access to networked digital technologies is one of the main obstacles, resulting in the digital exclusion of marginalized social groups. The digital divide between those who have access to technology and those who do not creates disparities in access to information and opportunities, thus perpetuating socioeconomic inequalities. Digital illiteracy, misinformation, and a lack of media literacy emerge as significant barriers that perpetuate the marginalization and exclusion of entire communities. Digital illiteracy is more than just a lack of technical skill; It is a gap in access to the resources and opportunities available online. (Soares, 2002).

The inability to effectively navigate digital technologies limits not only participation in the digital economy, but also access to information crucial to everyday life. Misinformation and a lack of media literacy further exacerbate this exclusion, making it difficult for individuals to discern between accurate and false information. In a landscape saturated with fake news and misleading content, the ability to critically evaluate information becomes a vital skill for full participation in the digital society.

It is a mistake to consider disinformation as a recent tactic; What has changed is the scale of its dissemination, driven by contemporary digital technologies. Currently, disinformation spreads in massive volumes, configuring the phenomenon of the infodemic, which is intrinsically linked to the technological apparatus of today's society, such as the internet, mobile devices, social networks, and messaging applications. This technological change has significantly altered the way we produce and consume information. (Lima; Schnitman, 2024).

In addition, language and cultural barriers add another layer of obstacle, making it difficult for those who do not share the dominant language of the internet or are unfamiliar with digital norms to access and understand online information. (Soares, 2002).

In contemporary times, the term "literacy" transcends the domain of reading and writing, encompassing a sociocultural and technological complexity. (Soares, 2002). In this context, the present experience report describes the academic experience in the implementation and results of a tutoring program in digital literacy within the scope of UFSB, whose curriculum was designed and adapted with the objective of training university students in the critical and effective use of digital technologies.

METHODOLOGY

This text proposes to report the experience lived in a Tutoring program in digital literacy. In methodological terms, this work is configured as an academic-scientific essay. The narrative unfolds in four distinct descriptive modalities: informative, referenced, dialogued and critical. Each of them, guided by specific elements and guiding questions, contributed to the construction and presentation of knowledge. (Mussi; Flowers; Almeida, 2021).

The relevance of publishing an experience report lies in its ability to address a specific problem and, at the same time, offer resolutions that can be generalized and applied in similar contexts. The experience report contributes to the methodological practice

of the area by sharing procedures, results and reflections on a particular intervention, enriching the practical and theoretical knowledge of the field.

In this context, there is a gap in the literature regarding reports of experience in the field of tutoring. The publication of such reports would play a crucial role in fostering the exchange of ideas, the analysis of positive and negative points, and the understanding of the benefits for both tutors and tutors in similar programs, both nationally and internationally.

Procedurally, together with the coordination of the digital literacy tutoring program and two other tutors, it was sought to establish a curriculum for the digital literacy tutoring program. Subsequently, through an electronic form, an assessment of the level and needs of the students was carried out. In it, participants provided information about their current skills in various programs, applications, and digital platforms and expressed their difficulties and expectations regarding the mentoring program, indicating the specific areas in which they would like to improve their knowledge, such as digital communication, audiovisual production, data organization, and the use of academic resources.

The answers revealed different levels of familiarity with the digital world and pointed to the need for a mentoring program that would meet the various demands of the participants, from the basics to more advanced topics, with the aim of promoting greater inclusion and autonomy in the use of digital technologies. Thus, the tutoring program was structured in teaching units, ranging from basic communication programs such as: WhatsApp, Google Meet, Google for Education, Google Classroom and Google Forms, to the exploration of navigation and research environments, such as SIGAA, the UFSB Digital Collection and Google Scholar. In this report, we will detail the first seven meetings, which illustrate this progression in the development of digital literacy of four participants.

The teaching methodology used sought to promote active and meaningful learning, combining dialogued expositions, reading and discussion of texts, case analysis, group dynamics, group tasks, research on official websites and debates.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The inaugural session of the tutoring in digital literacy was successful in its objectives, evidenced by the active participation of the students and the fulfillment of the planned steps. The structure of the session, which included both the practice of digital skills with programs such as Google Forms, Google Meet and WhatsApp, as well as the

exploration of institutional platforms such as SIGAA and the virtual tutoring environment, provided a dynamic and relevant learning environment for the academic context of the participants.

The discussion initiated in the virtual forum demonstrated the potential of the interface to foster interaction and the collaborative construction of knowledge, crucial aspects for the development of digital literacy. The absence of one of the tutors, although regrettable, highlights the importance of implementing strategies that ensure the inclusion and monitoring of all students, such as the offer of complementary resources and individualized contact. (Moran, 2015).

The 2nd tutoring session showed low adherence, with the presence of only two tutors. Despite the reduced participation, it was possible to resolve remaining doubts from the previous session and collect suggestions for the next meetings. In consensus with the tutors present, the theme "E-mail" and the proposition of requesting the e-mail from the GFE (Google for Education) were postponed to the next meeting, due to the unavailability of students for meetings during the week. The situation highlights the need for flexibility in the organization of activities and strategies to encourage participation, such as the provision of asynchronous resources and individualized monitoring of tutors. (Moran, 2015).

The flexibility provided by asynchronous resources in digital literacy tutoring reflects the need for personalization and adaptation to the different rhythms and needs of students, in line with the principles of hybrid education defended by Moran: "Hybrid education easily adapts to each student, at their pace, their interests and needs". (2015, p. 35). The personalization of teaching, respect for individual rhythm and the combination of active methodologies³ with moments of autonomous study are key principles of hybrid education that are reflected in the proposal to offer asynchronous resources in tutoring. (Moran, 2015, p. 29).

The 3rd tutoring meeting faced the challenge of low adherence, with the presence of only one tutor. Despite this, flexibility and adaptation to the asynchronous format were provided, providing resources such as step-by-step activity and email glossary via WhatsApp, ensuring that everyone could request the GFE email independently. This posture is in line with Soares' (2002) perspective on the need to adapt to the new practices of reading and writing in cyberculture: "Digital literacy is the social practices of reading and

³ "Active methodologies put the student at the center of the learning process, encouraging their participation, autonomy and protagonism." (Bacich; Moran, 2020, p. 23).

writing in digital environments, that is, the practices of language use, mediated by digital communication and information technologies". (p. 146).

The asynchronous activity, which consisted of requesting the creation of the GFE institutional email, invited the tutors to gather their data and follow a step-by-step process to send an email to the academic secretariat. This practical proposal reinforces the objective of the meeting: to promote digital literacy, encouraging the autonomous use of technologies and interaction with the institution through digital channels. The use of WhatsApp to provide materials and support underscores the importance of integrating digital technologies into education, recognizing their crucial role in building contemporary literacy. (Ribeiro; Freitas, 2011). The attention to offering individualized support and creating a welcoming environment demonstrates that digital literacy goes beyond the technical domain, encompassing the construction of a meaningful and inclusive learning space, where each student feels supported in their journey. (Freire, 1996).

The 4th session of tutoring corroborates Vygotsky's (1991) perspective on the importance of social interaction in the construction of knowledge. By providing a collaborative learning environment, where the tutors could actively explore the tools of Google Workspace for Education and exchange experiences, the session fostered the zone of proximal development (ibid. p. 95), boosting the learning and autonomy of the participants. The emphasis on practice, with the creation of a virtual classroom in Google Classroom, and the proposal of an asynchronous activity, reinforce the idea that learning takes place in a more meaningful way when individuals are actively involved in the construction of their own knowledge, mediated by tools and social interactions that challenge them and help them overcome their current limits. The absence of some tutors, although registered, does not diminish the value of the experience, which remained rich in learning and collaboration opportunities, evidencing the potential of digital technologies to create spaces for the collective construction of knowledge.

The 5th tutoring session, focusing on Google Scholar, exemplified the effectiveness of the active and participatory methodology adopted in the program. The practical exploration of the platform's functionalities, combined with the discussion about the importance of careful selection of sources, fostered significant learning and the autonomy of the tutors. (Moran, 2015, p. 35).

The 6th session reported in this article, focusing on the university's digital collection, exemplifies the importance of technological mediation in the construction of knowledge and

the active role of the student in this process. By exploring the digital platforms Pergamum and My Library, the tutors not only acquired technical skills in navigation and access to resources, but also actively engaged in building their own knowledge, seeking information, clarifying doubts and interacting with digital tools. This experience corroborates the perspective of Castells (2010), who points out that ICTs have the potential to transform the way knowledge is constructed and shared, promoting greater autonomy and active participation of individuals. The high participation and interest shown by the tutors show the potential of tutoring in digital literacy to create a meaningful and collaborative learning environment, where technology acts as a mediator in the construction of knowledge and in the empowerment of students.

The 7th and last session, on the production of audio and video by cell phone, although practical and objective, reflects concepts widely discussed by theorists of digital literacy. According to Lévy (1999), digital literacy involves not only the technical use of tools, but also the adaptation to new forms of interaction mediated by technology. During the session, the only participant in attendance had the opportunity to apply concepts such as lighting, audio and video capture, and mobile device settings, illustrating the importance of empowering individuals to create digital content.

This practical approach is in line with the active methodologies proposed by Valente (2003), which emphasize meaningful learning through the use of technologies and the personalization of teaching. In addition, by providing autonomy in the use of digital tools, the meeting exemplifies the importance of empowering tutors to navigate and produce in the digital environment, according to Vygotsky's (1991) ideas about social interaction and technological mediation in cognitive development.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the sessions, there was an evolution in the participation and mastery of digital interfaces by students. From the inaugural session, in which they became familiar with basic applications and programs such as Google Forms and WhatsApp, to the penultimate and final session, in which they explored the university's digital collection and the production of videos and audios via cell phone, the tutors demonstrated increasing autonomy and ability to use technology for academic and research purposes.

Practical activities, such as the creation of virtual classrooms and the search for scientific articles, provided meaningful learning experiences, in which students were able to

apply the knowledge acquired and develop essential skills for success in the digital world. The flexibility of the program, with the offer of asynchronous resources and individualized monitoring, allowed each student to advance at their own pace, respecting their needs and potential, in line with the principles of hybrid education defended by Moran (2015, p. 35).

Despite the challenges faced, such as low adherence in some sessions, digital literacy tutoring demonstrated its potential to create a collaborative and inclusive learning environment, where technology acts as a mediator in the construction of knowledge and in the empowerment of students, corroborating Vygotsky's (1991) perspective on learning. The positive results observed throughout the program reinforce the importance of initiatives like this to prepare young people for the challenges of the digital society, enabling them to use technologies critically, ethically and responsibly, as highlighted by Ribeiro and Freitas (2011).

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