

TEACHING READING AND TEXT PRODUCTION AT A SOCIAL WORK DEGREE COURSE: A STUDY FOCUSING ON ACADEMIC LITERACY

ENSINO DE LEITURA E PRODUÇÃO TEXTUAL EM UM CURSO DE SERVIÇO SOCIAL: UM ESTUDO COM FOCO NO LETRAMENTO ACADÊMICO

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Abstract. This paper analyses how academic literacy practices promoted by the subject Reading and Text Production Practice, offered at the Social Work degree course of the Tocantins State University (UNITINS), Campus of Palmas, support the education of readers. This study is based on the perspective of academic literacy. The research follows a qualitative approach, being characterized as an exploratory study and field research. The data has been collected over the months of September and October, 2021, by means of an online survey. The data set comprises valid answers from 42 participants, namely 01 professor and 41 students of the researched course. The results show that, despite fostering competences and skills in the academic and scientific field, the remote classes provided brought disadvantages to the teaching and learning process, due to various factors, such as: lack of an appropriate site for students to watch classes; interaction difficulties between the students and the professor; work overload; lacking boundaries between academic and family activities, among others. Thus, for some, the learning process provided by the researched subject was more significant for some, whereas for others it was medium, failing to fully cover the intended knowledge.

Keywords: literacy; academic literacy; social work; literacy practices; remote teaching.

Resumo. Este artigo analisa como as práticas de letramento acadêmico fomentadas pela disciplina Leitura e Prática de Produção Textual, ofertada no Curso de Serviço Social da Universidade Estadual do Tocantins (UNITINS), Campus de Palmas, contribuem para a formação de leitores. O estudo está fundamentado na perspectiva do letramento acadêmico. A pesquisa é de abordagem qualitativa e se caracteriza como um estudo exploratório e de campo. Os dados foram coletados nos meses de setembro e outubro de 2021 por meio de um questionário on-line. O conjunto de dados da pesquisa é constituído de respostas válidas de 42 participantes, sendo 01 docente e 41 discentes do curso pesquisado. Os resultados mostram que, mesmo promovendo competências e habilidades no âmbito acadêmico-científico, as aulas ofertadas remotamente trouxeram prejuízos ao processo de ensino e aprendizagem, em função de vários fatores, como: falta de local apropriado para os alunos assistirem às aulas; dificuldade de interação entre discentes e docente; excesso de trabalho; falta de limites entre atividades acadêmicas e familiares, entre outras. Logo, a aprendizagem promovida pela disciplina pesquisada ocorreu, para alguns, de forma mais acentuada, para outros, de forma mediana, não contemplando integralmente o conhecimento proposto.

Palavras-chave: letramento; letramento acadêmico; serviço social; práticas de letramento; ensino remoto.



1. INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study is part of a broader research work (see Amado, 2022) and covers a recurrent issue in the field of private and public higher education, namely, academic literacy. Getting into university, for most people entering higher education, means an accomplished dream, a step achieved by means of intense study and resilience. Nevertheless, this new education level does not always mean a peaceful, stimulating and pleasant time, given that “one of the difficulties that many students encounter as they shift into higher education involves writing and academic discourse” (Lea & Street, 2006, p. 229). Since this is a unique educational cycle, this time period is often marked by distress, struggles with the newness and difficulties in the teaching and learning process, sometimes leading to dropout and preventing the students from finishing their undergraduate course. One of the reasons jeopardizing the undergraduate student’s permanence and conclusion is academic literacy, the object of study of the present research.

Academic literacy “is concerned with meaning making, identity, power and authority and foregrounds the institutional nature of what ‘counts’ as knowledge in any particular academic context” (Lea & Street, 2006, p. 227). Being proficient in this type of literacy means much more than good academic writing, given that it encompasses specific social practices in higher education.

However, for these skills to be evoked in academic contexts, during the schooling process in basic education, the social reading and writing practices need to be meaningful and capable of providing the means to develop literacy skills, enhancing reading practices as well as the reading taste and/or pleasure, social usage of reading and writing in various spheres. This path opened during the school education supports academic literacy and, consequently, puts the student in a favorable position for the new reading practices in higher education.

Despite having been an intense discussion field for the past few years, with a vast production in that area, academic literacy deserves theoretical and thoughtful attention, in particular due to the fact that it is a socio-educational issue. Many undergraduate students feel lost among the “hidden realms” involving academic writing, some do not understand why they study certain subjects or, as they do not see any logic in their theoretical contents, they eventually raise questions and doubts. Concomitantly, professors in higher education courses notice writing and reading difficulties in academic genres among their students. Therefore, these difficulties lead to significant losses in the education of students attending public and private universities in Brazil.

Based on this reality experienced in higher education, this work is developed and sets out to reflect about the teaching practices aimed at the development of reading competences and skills, including: the ability to read different texts, interpret and produce texts in line with the logic of academic and scientific knowledge, and disseminating schooling and literacy.

Reading practices and their strengthening are noted by Solé (1998) as an interaction process between the reader and the text, whose procedure is guided by the reader’s goals concerning reading, i.e. he/she is the one building the text’s meaning. In other words, this pursuit of meanings for the intended reading discloses the countless possibilities that it can elicit from the one appreciating it.

The overall aim of this study is to analyze how academic literacy practices promoted by the subject *Reading and Text Production Practice*, offered at the Social Work degree course of the Tocantins State University (UNITINS), support the education of readers. The research follows a qualitative approach, being characterized as an exploratory study

and field research, performed in the above-mentioned course in 2021. Throughout the discussion, we emphasize academic literacy.

The paper¹ is divided into four parts: the first addresses the theoretical framework: approaches to literacy, theoretical foundations in the field of the learning process of reading and writing, and the discussion about using academic practices which are intrinsic to its constitution; the second presents how the research was conducted methodologically; the third is devoted to the research data analysis; and, finally, the conclusion lists the investigation outcomes.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the great concerns in the field of academic practices in the context of teachers' training is writing, reading and interpretation of academic genres, in particular for those who are going to work with language and literature teaching in basic education (Amado, Silva & Melo, 2020). Thus, the need to discuss that matter arises from various factors, including the fact that: 1) the academic environment requires unique literacy practices and expects a specific kind of academic writing production; 2) the literacy practices absorbed in undergraduate course will be used in the future to teach writing and reading in basic education classes; and 3) the academically literate professor provides a contribution to teaching and learning, leveraging educational actions to awaken the student's interest in reading.

It would be considerably remarkable if the student, upon entering higher education, arrived with a "proper" proficiency in academic literacy, i.e. he/she knew the rules involving academic discourses and genres, and additionally were experienced in academic writing (summary, review, paper, etc.). However, unfortunately, studies show a different reality upon the student's entrance in the academic world, pointing out scientific reading and writing difficulties (Stephani & Alves, 2017).

In order to understand the inherent particularities of academic literacy, we must define literacy, which can be generally understood as "... what people do with the reading and writing abilities, in a specific context, and how these abilities relate to social needs, values and practices" (Soares, 2006, p. 72). From this perspective, it can be stated that, when speaking of academic literacy, we are referring to the specific writing and reading skills in the scientific context, mainly in higher education.

In view of such complexity, which comprises the act of reading and writing, there is not one single concept of literacy, but various concepts and types. Thus, we can speak of literacies. In this respect, based on Street (1995), Silva (2018, p. 83), recalls that "... literacy is neither unambiguous nor neutral, but instead displays a plural dimension (literacies) and is not restricted only to writing. In other words, it covers the various usages of orality, writing and their technologies in social practices." Hence, the discussions about the above-mentioned phenomenon are very vast, covering various areas or disciplines. According to Silva and Gonçalves (2021), the main fields of literacy studies in Brazil are: school literacy, teacher's literacy, digital, literary, scientific and academic literacy. We ought to highlight that, in this paper, our focus lies in academic literacy.

Given that it is a phenomenon which "covers a wide range of knowledge, skills, abilities, values, uses and social roles; ... subtleties and complexities which are difficult to encompass in a single definition" (Soares, 2009, p. 65), the materialization of literacy

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takes place through school/academic events which permeate it, as well as multiple social practices differing in terms of the socio-cultural reality and goals to be achieved (Tinoco, 2008).

Thus, the concept of literacy refers to social processes, which are not restricted to the school environment, as Kleiman (2008, p. 18) points out when conceiving "... literacy as a set of social practices which use writing, as a symbol system and as technology, in particular contexts, for particular purposes".

Literacy is a term resulting "from the act of teaching and learning social reading and writing practices; the state or condition which a social group or an individual acquires as a result of having taken ownership of writing and its social practices" (Soares, 2009, p. 39). Therefore, the term "literacy", according to Tinoco (2008), involves two dimensions: an individual and a social one. The first refers to a "set of linguistic and psychological abilities ... A process of expressing ideas and organizing thoughts in written language". The second, conversely, can be understood as "a cultural phenomenon – which could have political, social, economic and linguistic consequences for the groups" (Soares, 2009, p. 47). Thus, it becomes clear that literacy can be learned in various ways and acts as "a phenomenon which follows us ... throughout life and in the most various activity spheres and with various purposes, enabling our inclusion and participation in events of different social and/or schooling levels" (Silva, 2019, p. 479). Hence, it is extremely necessary to understand literacy studies in Brazil.

The discussion around academic literacy reinforces the relevance of such practices in higher education institutions (HEI), such as the concern about teaching the student how to write academically. This is a particularity ruling the academic world, which is not limited to writing, but rather comprises a new way of reading, researching, writing and critically reflecting.

According to Lea and Street (2006), in academic literacy, in addition to the study skills model, there is also the academic socialization model, the latter being highly important due to the fact that it puts the student in touch with reading and writing of different academic genres (paper, review, etc.). For Zavala (2010, p. 81), it is not merely a technique, but forms of writing which "... go alongside ways of thinking, and the cognitive operations involved are, conversely, indissociable from the subjective and contextualized understanding that a person has about the world". In other words, academic literacy could provide a contribution especially for teaching how to read and write and for readers' education, giving a new meaning to education.

Along these lines, Lea and Street (2006) argue that the reading and writing approaches in an academic context can take place by means of an overlapping of three perspectives: study skills; academic socialization and academic literacies. These models are complementary, meeting a particularity of the process whereby academic literacy is formed. Each model does not take place abruptly, but rather through a slow and complex process, since it involves various institutional practices which require time and engagement until their applicability makes sense for those experiencing them. Thus, they are linked to literacy practices and events.

Literacy practices and events are essential to understand literacy as a social phenomenon. As mentioned before, these practices are abstract, appearing in various kinds of social spheres (religion, profession, home, etc.). Therefore, the act of reading and writing, according to Tinoco (2008), materializes in everyday life practices and occurs in the most various communicative situations.

On one hand, literacy practices cover a "broader cultural conception of particular ways of thinking about and doing reading and writing in cultural contexts" (Street, 2003, p. 79). That is to say, they are actions belonging to the social sphere and thus are varied.

On the other hand, the term literacy events was first used by Heath (1982, p. 93), who defined it as "... any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive processes". Thus, in these events, oral and literate traces mingle. Despite being conceptually different, literacy practices comprise events, such as lectures, slide shows presentations, among others (Street, 1995).

From this perspective, literacy practices refer "not only to the event itself but to the conceptions of the reading and writing process that people hold when they engage in the event" (Street, 1995, p. 83). As Terra (2013, p. 48) warns, "the distinction between literacy practices and events is exclusively methodological, since these are interconnected concepts (two sides of the same coin)". Despite being different concepts, literacy practices and events are interconnected, since events derive from practices. Both of them are part of a socially and historically built structure and are located in a specific time and place. Although they are dynamic, they are marked by tensions due to being heterogeneous, i.e., varying from one context to another (Barton & Hamilton, [1998]2012; Lêdo, 2013).

2.1. The student, entry into university and academic writing

Entering higher education, in regard to academic reading and writing, is not a seamless process, even for those students whose reading and writing skills were praised in high school. This happens because higher education poses different reading and writing demands, "with requirements for its research procedures, with countless new practices which have led them to question whether they actually knew anything" (Alexandre, 2019, p. 20). In this respect, Souza (2012, p. 161) draws attention to the context of students coming from public schools who enter higher education: "Despite being literate (or knowing how to read and write) ..., they have not received a literacy concept which is consistent with or sufficient for literate practices in the academic domain".

Literacy set forth in public schools generally has not been considered to be a social practice; on the contrary, it has been closer to a technique deprived of meaning. This makes the student face something new, different, upon entering university; after all, they are "entering a context with its own domain; hence, it is him who must adapt, although this does not mean that there should not be mediators in the process of learning a new Discourse, the academic Discourse" (Souza, 2012, p. 160).

The university, upon admitting the student, has the demanding task of awakening this desire and interest regarding the written texts (literary or not) among the students and setting forth literacy practices. In doing so, it nourishes the interest in reading and writing, an essential element which could generate not only interest, but also the critical and reflective potential of academic texts studied in any field of knowledge. This interpretative incursion in the way of reading a text, in the questions elicited as to what the text allows, enables the student to understand the past and grasp the present, since it teaches, shapes and humanizes the subject.

Nonetheless, the concern about academic literacies is not inherent to some professors, as Souza (2012, p. 170) cautions: "Even though reading and writing are essential to higher education, since the students' success or failure, to a great extent, depends on them, they neither form part of systematic academic programs nor are they properly taken into account by professors". In contrast, professors complain about the students' inability in face of the academic text, whether in regard to reading, interpretation and the required personal writing. This happens because professors expect the students who enter higher education "... to be at least minimally prepared to understand easier, more basic texts related to specialized literature of their course and area of knowledge, as well as to write a report or summary" (Souza, 2012, p. 170).

Concerning this issue, Silva and Muniz (2015, p. 1313) stress that the newly admitted university student “should be considered merely as someone who is not familiar with academic literacy practices, but not as illiterate, since the academic world is understood as yet another environment which should provide new literacies”. Hence, the professor has the role of identifying the students’ reading and writing abilities and introducing these students to academic literacy practices.

3. METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

The approach followed in this research² is qualitative (Flick, 2018) and is characterized as an exploratory study and field research. In this study, the phenomenon of academic literacy has been analyzed in context, taking into consideration remote classes of Reading and Text Production Practice, in the first semester of the Social Work degree course of UNITINS.

This research strategy has enabled us to deepen our knowledge about the specificities involved in the studied subject and their implications for academic literacy, which, based on the performed investigation, has allowed us to lay out in detail the impact on the education of the studied audience. In this study, we have adopted content analysis (Bardin, 2011). This approach enabled us to interpret the data generated through research in a manner which was transparent and consistent with the purpose of the study.

The field research was performed in the Social Work degree course of UNITINS, Campus of Palmas, in the period between 2018 and 2021. The participants in the investigation are students (from the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th and 7th semester) who have attended the subject *Reading and Text Production Practice* in the 1st semester, with a 60-hour workload, with weekly classes (on Monday), in the form of remote classes, due to the new coronavirus pandemic in the years of 2020 and 2021. In addition to this audience, we have also included the students from the 7th semester who attended in-person classes of this subject in 2018.

This subject was chosen due to the fact that it is offered at the beginning of higher education in Social Work, thus being in position to support the academic education and training of academic readers.

The field study was carried out in the months of September and October, 2021, by means of an online survey sent to the classes who matched the research inclusion criteria and to the professor of the subject at hand. A total of 42 participants (01 professor and 41 students) answered the survey.

The part of documents comprises 03 institutional documents³ which provide knowledge about the role of the teaching of reading and text production in the Social Work course, as well as the legal treatment given to literacy in these documents. We underline that the data set of the study is part of a broader research work, performed in order to complete a master’s thesis (see Amado, 2022).

The semi-structured survey, as a technique, provided a contribution to this research process, as it allows us to know the studied group in regard to its “... opinions, beliefs, feelings, interests, expectations, experienced situations, etc.” (Gil, 1997, p. 124).

The analysis categories created based on the answered survey were: difficulties in the context of emergency remote teaching; teaching provided by the subject *Reading and*

² Submitted to the Research Ethics Committee (CEP) of Universidade Federal do Tocantins (UFT) and approved on 08/31/2021, according to the CAAE 45151321.4.0000.5519 and decision Nr.4.943.168.

³ 1) Pedagogic Course Project (PPC) of Social Work; 2) Curriculum of the subject “Reading and Text Production”; and 3) Lesson plan.



Text Production Practice; the learning outcomes in the above-mentioned subject offered through remote teaching.

4. DISCUSSION AND DATA ANALYSIS

The audience participating in the research, as already mentioned, is composed of students from the Social Work degree course at UNITINS who attended the subject *Reading and Text Production Practice* in the years of 2018, 2020 and 2021, as well as the professor who taught the subject. In sum, there were 42 participants, namely, 41 students and 01 professor. Most of the participants are women (95%).

Regarding the participants' age range, most are between 18 and 30 years old (71%). They are followed by the participants aged between 41 and 50 years, and finally, those aged 31 to 40 years (12%).

Concerning the participants' marital status, the majority (69%) is single, followed by those who are married (24%); in the sequence, are those (5%) who did not want to inform the surveyed marital state and, finally, amounting to 2% of the researched universe, come divorcees.

Another important piece of data which helps understand the profile of the participants refers to the academic education. We notice that most of the participants (76%) are taking their first undergraduate degree. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that many (15%) are already taking their second, and some (7%) their third undergraduate course. The professor of the subject, in turn, holds a Doctorate in Literature and Linguistics.

Having presented the profile of the research participants, we proceed to discuss how the use of remote emergency teaching caused by the new coronavirus pandemic has challenged professors and students, besides having affected the teaching and learning process.

4.1. The students' assessment of the difficulties in the context of remote teaching

The pandemic caused by COVID-19 has deeply changed the world and things around us, created major changes and required quick adjustments to the new reality imposed by the presence of the new coronavirus. In this context, UNITINS, taking into account the need to uphold health emergency combat measures, resumes its educational activities in a remote form⁴.

Emergency remote teaching is characterized "by a temporary change from in-person to remote teaching. ... all instructions and all educational contents are provided on remote platforms" (Appenzeller *et al.*, 2020, p. 4-5). This change occurred due to the temporary interruption of in-person activities.

This new teaching format led to severe changes in the teaching and learning process, and in some situations, professors "turned into youtubers, recording video classes, and learned how to use video conference systems, such as *Skype*, *Google Hangout* or *Zoom*, and learning platforms, such as *Moodle*, *Microsoft Teams* or *Google Classroom*" (Moreira, Henriques & Barros, 2020, p. 352).

Garcia *et al.* (2020) highlights the fact that these platforms are not strictly educational spaces, hence the teacher had to insert other support tools to innovate their pedagogical practice. However, the author stresses that this requires the professor's facilitation process, even when they knew that their students handled these tools well.

In addition to these particularities, several other concerns arise when thinking about access to remote teaching, such as the purchase of digital devices and efficient use of

⁴ Decree/UNITINS Nr. 075/2020.

digital applications. In other words, the concern is not limited to what device should be used, but includes the consideration that access and learning are equally ensured to everybody.

In our research, the professor of the subject *Reading and Text Production Practice* stated that he offered an initial training in order to begin classes and activities in remote form, as well as in the use of virtual tools. According to him, the purpose was to adjust the in-person content for emergency remote teaching. For such, the employed methodology in the in-person class was altered and adapted to the remote environment.

The research was initially planned for face-to-face classes. However, with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, classes were moved to emergency remote teaching, which brought numerous challenges for students and teachers. Without prior theoretical and conceptual planning, the teacher's didactic-pedagogical practice had to be adapted, resulting in the transposition of face-to-face work into the digital environment. Classes took place via the educa platform and Google Meet. The teacher made the theoretical content, exercises and literary texts available for reading on the educa platform offered by the university. While the remote classes took place via google meet, the teacher explained the content, corrected the exercises and discussed the literary texts with the students.

Therefore, we mapped how the above-mentioned audience accesses synchronous classes (by *Google Meet*) offered during the pandemic. When we asked about how they access remote classes of the Social Work degree course, most of them (32%) answered that they watch the classes from their home, through paid broadband Internet and good quality. However, we noticed that a significant proportion (9%) attends the course by cell phone, i.e. by mobile data. For the teacher, it was a great challenge to plan and evaluate the activities in face-to-face teaching and later in remote teaching for such a large and heterogeneous class.

This data reinforces the educational inequality in Brazil, further intensified by the pandemic of the new coronavirus, which led to suspension of in-person classes by the emergency remote format, according to Decree Nr. 343 of MEC and other official documents (Castioni *et al.*, 2021). In order to access remote classes, it is essential to have good-quality Internet access, although this communication is performed in different ways depending on the Brazilian social class:

... while most of homes from class A and B accessed Internet through a fixed broadband connection (87% and 81%, respectively), most homes from class D and E accessed Internet through mobile connection via modem or 3G or 4G chip (47%).... Thus, it can be seen that access to fixed Internet in this country is still limited to a richer percentage of the population. For the economically less favored, who represent the majority of the population, mobile connections and cell phones act as gateways to Internet access. (CGI.br, 2020, p. 122).

Watching classes on the cell phone by using mobile Internet hampers the learning process, since it becomes more difficult to follow the synchronous activities due to the 3G or 4G connection that oscillates and drops (Appenzeller *et al.*, 2020). In addition to this issue, people are not familiar with using the Internet to study, but rather for other purposes related to entertainment and communication. According to the PNAD-Contínua survey, in 2019, Internet access in the country is performed mostly (98,6%) over the phone; however, its purpose was to send and receive messages (95,7%), to chat (91,2%), to watch video, series and programs (88,4%) and to send emails (61,5%) (IBGE, 2021).

A study carried out by Castioni *et al.* (2021) puts into question whether Internet access was a limiting factor for federal universities in Brazil to join the remote modality implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic. For such, the authors referred to data from

the Continuous National Sample Survey of Households (PNAD-Contínua), by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), about the proportion of (undergraduate and graduate) students with Internet access. The survey showed that the Internet access problem affects 2% of higher education students, having an impact mainly on low-income students, students from ethnic minorities and students living in poorer regions of the country.

Despite being a low percentage, doubtless it was an obstacle for higher education students in Brazil to access remote classes. A fact which explains why many HEIs suspended their classes and took a while to adhere to emergency remote teaching.

Remote teaching posed countless challenges both for the student and for the professor. The latter had no theoretical and conceptual plan for their didactic-pedagogical practice in remote teaching; therefore, what occurred was “merely the transposition of in-person work to a digital or printed space” (Appenzeller *et al.*, 2020, p. 5). The students had to adapt, in some situations using cell phones from someone else and often missing classes due to the fact that they did not have stable and good-quality Internet. These challenges apply to other HEIs from different regions in the country, reinforcing the need to implement actions in order to assist less-favored students.

In particular, a study carried out by Mauricio *et al.* (2020) provides an overview of student assistance in the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic (March to October, 2020) provided by Federal Universities of the Brazilian Northern region, eight HEIs in total, as shown in detail in Table 1:

Table 1. Student assistance in the Northern region during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Universities	Student aid/assistance											
	Food voucher	Housing	Health	Transportatio	Scholarship	Pedagogical support	For purchase of electronic	Lending electronic	Nursery	Expensive didactic	For indigenous and quilombola	For R&D
UFAC	X	X			X	X	X					
UNIFAP	X				X		X					
UFAM		X			X		X		X	X		
UFPA	X	X			X	X	X					X
UFOPA	X	X			X		X				X	
UFRA	X	X		X		X	X		X			X
UNIFESSPA		X			X		X	X				X
UNIR	X	X		X	X	X	X		X			
UFRR	X	X		X			X					
UFT	X	X	X			X	X				X	X

Source: Based on Mauricio *et al.* (2020, p. 197).

Table 1 shows the different kinds of support implemented by FHEIs of the Northern region to meet the needs arising due to the COVID-19 pandemic for students in a situation of socio-economic vulnerability. These are essential actions to support those who have been most affected by the effects of the pandemic.

Concerning our research, in order to determine the main difficulties faced by students during this process, the participants received a list containing seven potential difficulties, according to Figure 1.

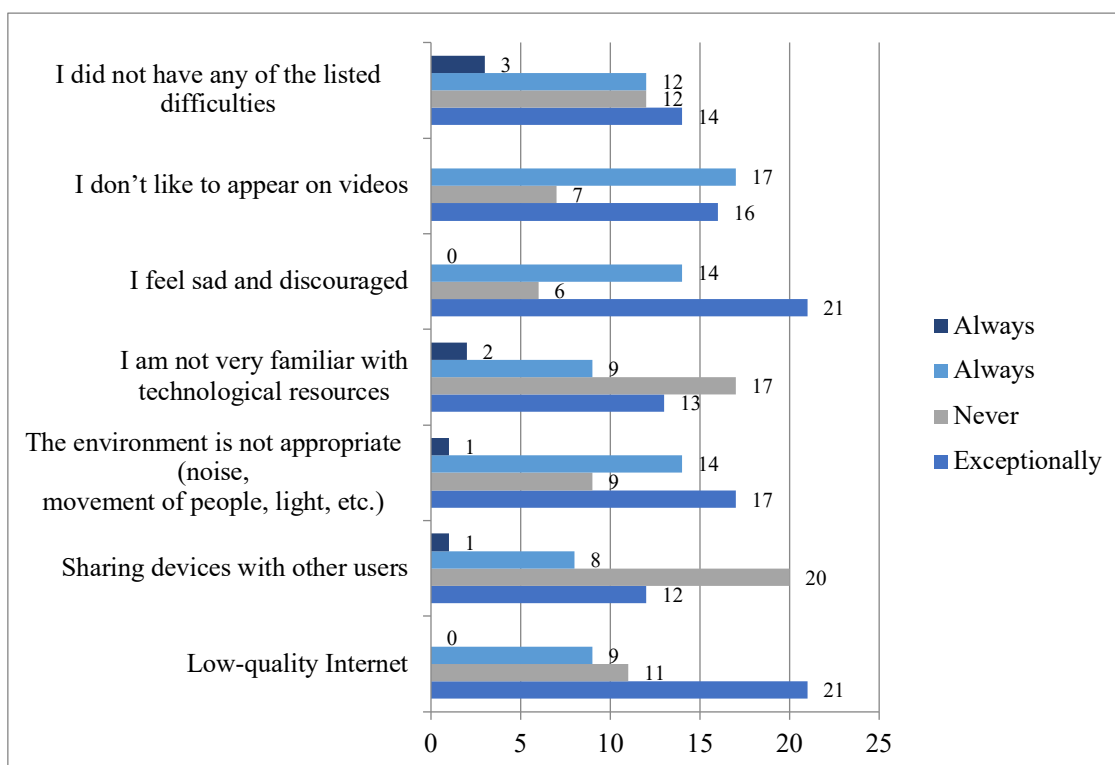


Figure 1. The students' assessment of the difficulties in remote teaching.
Source: Own elaboration based on participant's answers, 2021.

Figure 1 presents relevant data: we notice that Internet quality, despite being a hampering factor, was not a limitation for most of the participants, given that 21 of them answered that low and unstable Internet quality was something which happened sporadically. Furthermore, we observe that 11 participants answered that they never had issues related to Internet quality, meaning that this was not a detrimental factor for watching the synchronous classes of the Social Work degree course.

In contrast to this reality, 9 respondents answered that low Internet quality is definitely a hindrance for studying. This fact has a structural dimension, since it is a basic material condition, namely: access to remote classes. This concern is increased when considered in the light of the subject *Reading and Text Production Practice*, which is a key educational step for the subsequent periods of the course.

Figure 1 also provides an interesting piece of information about sharing devices with other users. About this factor, 8 students mentioned that they share devices with other users. Conversely, 20 mentioned that they never share devices and 12 answered that this rarely happens.

As to the study environment, we see that a significant part (14) of the survey respondents claimed that noise, movement of people, light and other factors affect the attention and learning in remote teaching. Also about this issue, 17 claimed that this happens on few occasions and 9 that they do not face this kind of problem.

Regarding familiarity with technological resources, we notice that the academic community of the Social Work degree course mostly (17) handles these tools well; concomitantly, there are those (13) who hardly ever have difficulties with technology. However, 9 answered that they always face limitations with these resources.

In regard to motivation to study in a remote format, 14 of the students participating in the survey feel discouraged and sad about this teaching format. Unlike those, 21 said that they rarely feel discouraged or sad, and 6 answered that, since the beginning of the pandemic, these feelings surface every day throughout classes.

About appearing in videos, the data is balanced: 17 do not like to appear, 16 said that, in particular situations, they do not feel at ease to appear/turn on the camera during classes. In contrast, 7 do not consider it a difficulty to attend classes with the camera switched on and appearing on video.

Having made this assessment of the difficulties faced by students in regard to remote teaching, in the following section, we will discuss the learning process encouraged by the subject *Reading and Text Production Practice*, considered in this study to be accountable for and the driving force of academic literacy in the Social Work degree course.

4.2. Learning outcomes in the subject Reading and Text Production Practice, provided in and via remote teaching

Academic literacy practices, as pointed out before, focus on the production of academic genres, both in the context of writing and of reading. After all, literacy, according to the “New Literacy Studies”, is established by the way subjects interact with reading and writing in society (Terzi, 2006), thus extending beyond the university locus and encompassing the meaning in reading and writing processes of the subjects’ everyday life. Hence, the literacy practices fostered in the academic context must be understood as social practices (Lea & Street, 1998; Zavala, 2010).

Based on this assumption, we have sought to assess how the learning process was stimulated by the subject *Reading and Text Production Practice*, by asking the participants how it occurred during remote classes. For such, the survey respondents could choose two options (“sometimes not” and “sometimes yes”) in the survey, as shown in Figure 2 below.

We ought to remark that, out of the 41 students participating in this research, 32 took the subject in remote teaching format.

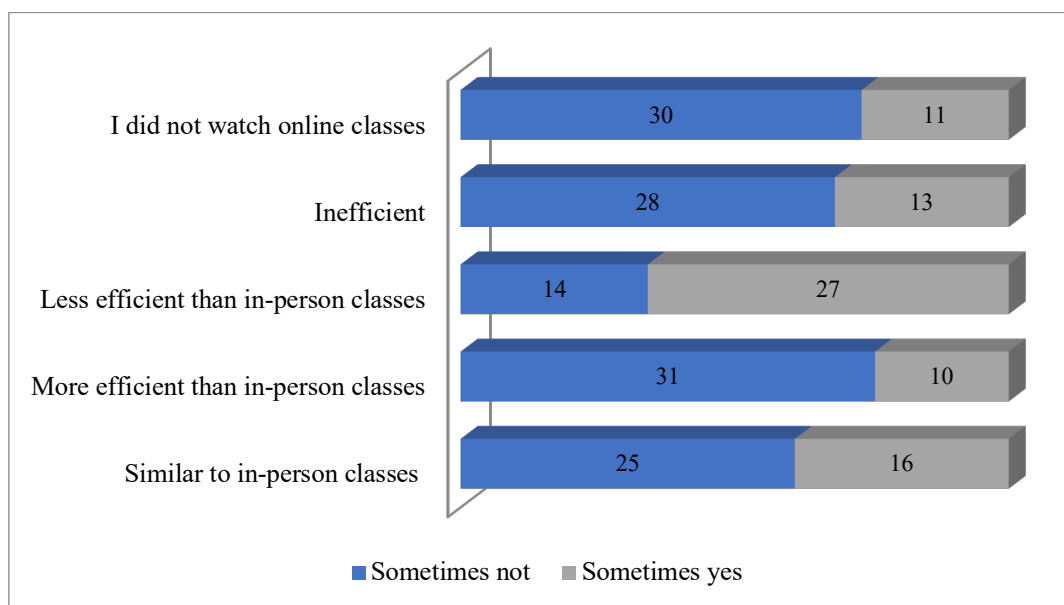


Figure 2. Assessment about the learning process in remote teaching.

Source: Own elaboration based on participant’s answers, 2021.

Figure 2 presents unique data: 31 answered that on-line classes are not more efficient than in-person classes. This answer is validated as we notice that 27 of them stressed that the remote format is less efficient than in-person classes when it comes to learning. An answer which was reinforced as 13 pointed out that, sometimes, on-line classes are

inefficient. This comparison between “similar” and “more efficient” suggests that the learning process in on-line classes may have been impaired in the researched subject.

Thus, we also sought to understand, in the context of the pandemic, which aspect of the teaching and learning process was most strongly affected within the subject of *Reading and Text Production Practice*. Therefore, we provided the students with a set of elements spanning the learning process, so that the participants (students and teachers) could choose which ones could directly or indirectly have affected the learning process, as displayed in Figure 3:

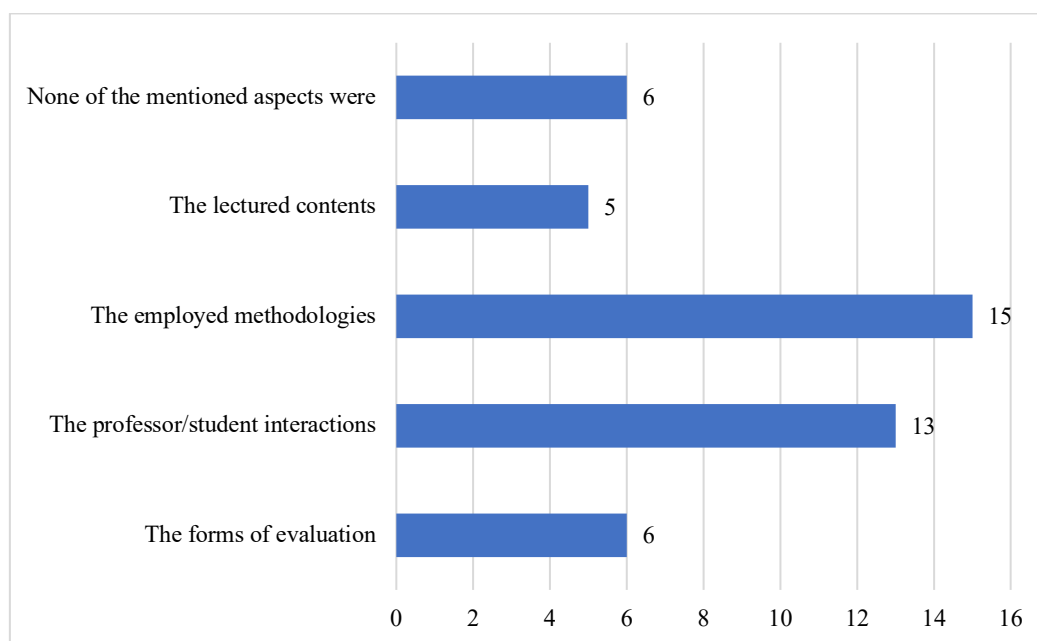


Figure 3. Assessment of the aspects affected by remote teaching (students).
Source: Own elaboration based on participant’s answers, 2021.

Figure 3 shows that the interlocutors chose methodologies (15) as the main aspect affected within the context of remote classes. This suggests that the writing of the higher education student may have been impaired to a certain extent. The writing, according to Lea and Street (1998), could be verified based on: the study of cognitive abilities; academic socialization regarding the reproduction of genres from that field; academic literacy in connection with the meanings assigned to writing practices.

Secondly, the interactions (12) between the professor and student were impaired, which was remarked both by the students and by the teacher of the subject. This fact is a remarkable element of academic literacy, given that, if the teaching and learning process is muted, the composition of the intended genre is affected, since the detailed instructions by the professor fall short of what is required, as well as the performance of the activity itself. For this reason, it is of paramount importance “how the writing practices are designed and instructed by the teacher, so that the students perform the proposed activities with greater proficiency and understanding and actually grasp the text production ... as a situated literacy practice” (Almeida & Santos, 2016, p. 11). After all, the teacher’s dialogic construction is one of the essential representations in the act of teaching, which, in turn, is key for the development for literacy practices in class, which will maximize the subject’s preparation for life.

In the third place (6), according to the participating audience, the forms of assessment (Figure 3) were yet another impaired aspect. We ought to remark that, previously, at in-person classes, “beyond measurements or attributes of a quantitative or qualitative

character, the assessment represents a mapping of contexts, relations, representations embedded in specific historic and cultural dimensions...” (Marinho-Araújo & Rabelo, 2015, p. 444).

If previously, during in-person teaching, evaluating meant a process complex, in the remote context, this complexity increased, since it is not restricted to the choice of a particular assessment tool, but comprises other specificities, such as, for instance, taking into account whether the student will have access to this assessment tool, considering that to them the Internet is not accessible, let alone ensured.

Finally, the lectured content (5) was also considered to be an element which was affected over the course of remote classes. Nonetheless, there are also participants (6) who do not see any loss in the subject in view of the fact that it was offered online.

Taking into consideration the remarked difficulties, we asked the academic community who participated in the survey what were the main challenges/impacts on their academic life caused by remote teaching. The answers were various, as the following figure shows:



Figure 4. The students’ assessment of the difficulties faced in remote teaching.
Source: Own elaboration based on research data, 2021.

Figure 4 shows that the students pointed out various challenges regarding emergency remote teaching. The most recurrent words in the answers are: motivation, lack of concentration and noise. These factors had a decisive impact on the learning process, as shown by the following excerpts: “Lack of motivation to study. And here at home we don't have a quiet environment, this disturbs the concentration a lot” (Student 1); student 2 also highlighted that she lacked “motivation to continue with remote classes, which are often exhausting”; this problem was also noticed in the speech of student 5: “I got discouraged, to the point of thinking about giving up”.

Motivation “is characterized by a process which mobilizes the body to action, based on a need of satisfaction. ... a need, a desire, an intention, an interest, a willingness or a predisposition to act” (Tabile & Jacometo, 2017, p. 80). Therefore, during the academic education process, motivation is vital, since being discouraged interferes negatively in the teaching and learning process. In other words, Tabile and Jacometo (2017, p.81) underline that “there is no learning without motivation”. Thus, we presume that motivated students have a greater disposition to develop academic writing, which requires the specific use of different genres of the university context (Fiad, 2011).

The noise which was considered to be a hampering factor for studying might be an element that helps understand the discouragement during remote classes, as it makes it

harder to concentrate on the lectured content and affects socialization and academic performance.

Furthermore, handling digital technologies and having Internet access were also factors which directly or indirectly, in the view of the students, interfere in the learning process, as the participants report: “Internet access, and lack of time due to my job, in order to complete the activities” (Student 8); student 12 mentioned “Internet access, because I don’t have a laptop and I complete all activities on the cell phone, and that is awful”.

The previously discussed Internet access is reinforced in the reports of the participating students. To this hampering factor, we add the use of digital tools, i.e. the platform used in the remote classes of the subject. These factors affect the students’ participation, whether intervening, discussing and/or debating the contents addressed in the subject, as the professor reports: “The challenges were related to the use of technologies to perform the synchronous classes, due to the Internet quality and the technological resources of the academic community. The dynamics of requiring the students’ participation was also one of the most challenging issues” (Professor).

We notice that there are many issues underlying remote teaching, and everything is interconnected: access, use of digital tools/platforms and participation. If this interconnection is not provided, the literacy practices are certainly jeopardized, as they “involve values, attitudes, feelings and social relations. Furthermore, they include ... how they speak about and build meaning with and towards literacy” (Fischer, 2008, p. 168). After all, writing in the academic context is different, being inherent to the university context.

Another element which stands out, having caused difficulty to learn in the context of remote teaching, was the overload of activities required by the subject, as the respondents show: “The backlog of activities and, consequently, the overload of material to hand in and/or study” (Student 16), and “many tasks that were assigned, requiring more than when it used to be in person” (Student 13).

The assigned tasks in emergency remote teaching were impaired because the student was unable to complete them in time and, in order to avoid getting no grade, they did them in a careless way, as they used to do previously in the classroom. The overload from home office, household and family chores has an impact on the academic education, as one of the students reported: “An overload, because being a housewife, wife and scholar at the same time is a bit tough for me, and during in-person classes, I had four sacred hours to take a little break.” (Student 15).

In-person classes are often mentioned in the interviewees’ speeches as a unique time of learning, of devotion to the education in progress. Concomitantly, the absence of the professor face to face was another factor mentioned by the interviewees, as the student 16 reports:

I felt harmed in various aspects. But mainly the lack of a professor in person is what affects me most, in addition to the shyness of clearing my doubts in front of everybody in the video call, which posed a great challenge and still does. I have the feeling that, even though the professor is there with the full disposition to help us, the teaching has a gap, it is hampered. (Student 16).

Her statement brings up the issue of affection, shyness, clearing doubts which the online format does not always allow or enable. The interpretation of student (16) is that she is learning by herself, despite the online presence of a teacher of the subject.

In the classroom, it is easier to concentrate, because there is the facilitating professor, doubts arise more easily and are solved right



there. Conversely, the online modality curbs this development, because sometimes we have to study by ourselves for the discussion of the topic in class. Due to this circumstance, learning by ourselves is not always enough, the time in class was reduced, doubts always come at the wrong time, among other details. (Student 18).

The speech of student 18 corroborates the importance of the teacher as a learning facilitator, particularly by establishing in-person, face-to-face contact with the students. In-person teaching is unique, according to the respondent. Being in class allows doubts to be solved more clearly; in addition, the commitment between the professor and the student is strengthened; likewise, the knowledge exchange is refined and receives support and help from the classmates.

4.3. Learning promoted by the subject Reading and Text Production Practice

In order to map the contributions provided by the subject *Reading and Text Production Practice*, we have covered the following path: we asked the professor of the subject in question which textual genres were used. The professor listed: opinion piece, academic essay and critical review; afterwards, we reviewed the subject syllabus⁵ in order to recall the key aspects of the subject, as provided in detail in Figure 5.

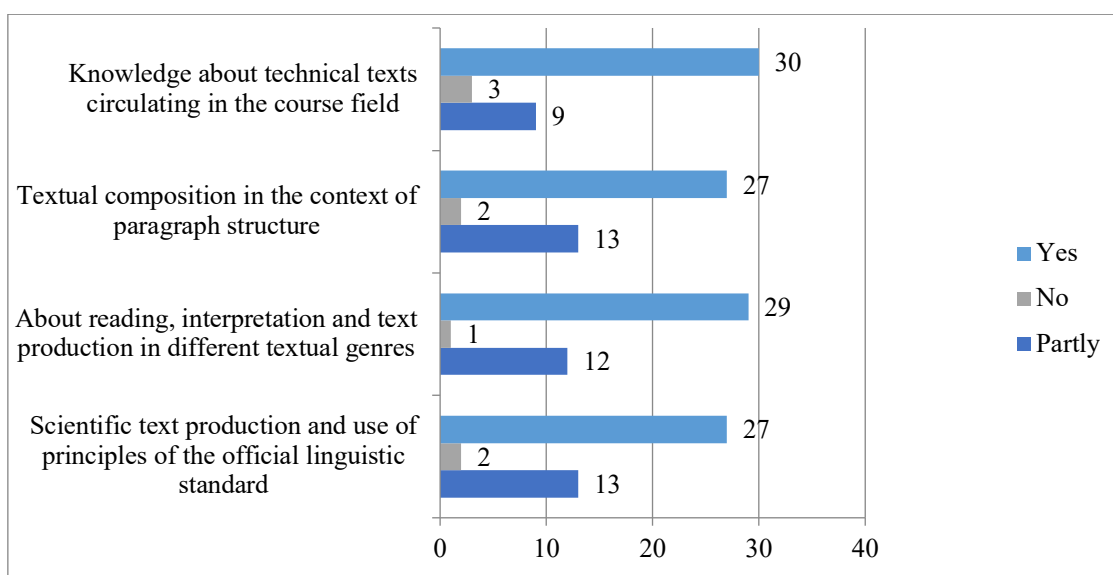


Figure 5. Assessment of the skills promoted by the subject (students).
Source: Own elaboration based on participant's answers, 2021.

Figure 5 presents the assessment of the research participants regarding the skills encouraged over the course of the teaching and learning process by the subject *Reading and Text Production Practice*. In order to better understand this process, it is worth defining the terms “competence” and “skill”. Skills are related to “... actions and procedures which we use to establish relations with and between objects, situations, phenomena and people whom we would like to know”. Competences “refer to the immediate level of know-how” (INEP, 2007). Thus, we intended to verify in which way

⁵ Reading: conceptions, cognitive aspects and skills. Study of the concept of language and speech. Text production: text, context and intertext; textuality factors, cohesion and coherence; rules of the New Orthographic Agreement; text, paragraph and sentence structure. Production practice and rewriting of academic/scientific texts in different situations of professional use. (UNITINS, 2020, p. 58).

the analyzed discipline makes use of literacy practices to advance the know-how in the context of academic writing.

The results can be seen in Figure 5, with 27 participants answering that the subject made use of skills to teach text production. Likewise, in regard to technical texts, 30 interlocutors pointed out that yes, the subject did provide access and knowledge opportunities in the field of Social Work. The text composition in terms of paragraph structure displayed in the answers of 27 students also positively highlighted that the professor of the subject used specific situations to advance that skill. Moreover, concerning reading, interpretation and text production progress in different textual genres, 29 remarked that the subject was satisfactory.

Also in Figure 5, we notice that the respondents indicated that the skills furthered by the subject were applied in part, meaning that the introduced skills were not fully accomplished when it came to know-how: text production (13), specific knowledge of the field of Social Work (9), the development of text composition in the context of paragraph structure (13), as well as the progress of reading, interpretation and text production in different textual genres (12).

We ought to stress that the full content of the subject, according to the professor, was “uploaded to the Educ@ platform with the intention that the class time would occur more dynamically and with greater interaction” (Professor).

Another question aimed to investigate how the students assess the competence furthered by the subject in regard to reading, interpreting and producing texts in line with the approach of academic/scientific knowledge. In the researched universe, 14 answered that the subject enabled the development of the ability to read, interpret and write in the academic/scientific environment. It follows that a change in style took place among the students in the aspect of writing, such as the genre in the academic sphere (Lea & Street, 2006). This happened because social usage practices of writing were proposed throughout the subject.

Nevertheless, for the great majority (24), the development did not fully take place, but only partly, a fact which may have occurred due to the remote emergency teaching and/or because the subject was offered only at the beginning of the course.

One more purpose of the research was to measure the degree to which the skills were acquired by the students during the subject *Reading and Text Production Practice*. Therefore, we presented four potential abilities, as shown in Figure 6:

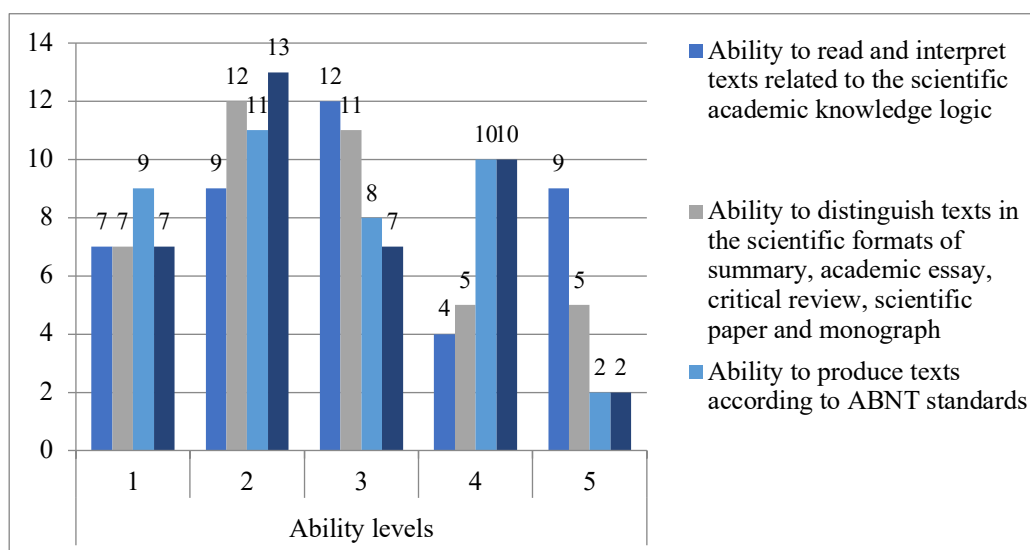


Figure 6. Assessment of the acquired skills (students).

Source: Own elaboration based on participant’s answers, 2021.

Figure 6 provides details about how the students assessed the skill level achieved through the subject. The top voted level was 3, in which the students (12 in total) assessed the skill of reading and interpretation. It is followed by level 2, assigned to the following skills: ability to distinguish scientific texts; ability to produce scientific texts, according to ABNT standards and within different contexts.

As it seems, these were medium scores. However, one must take into account the difficulties faced during the pandemic period and in remote teaching format. Nonetheless, these skills acquired by the students who participated in the research are the result of social literacy practices applied by the professor, which enabled them to understand the academic genres which are part of higher education, including scientific papers, research projects, review, etc. (Arnt, 2012). Furthermore, literacy cannot be circumscribed to the academic reading and writing domain, but includes knowing how to apply it in contexts which are inherent to its usage (Terra, 2013).

A further inquiry addresses the methodologies presented by the professor of the studied subject, with the aim of mapping which methodological strategies supported learning in the teaching context.

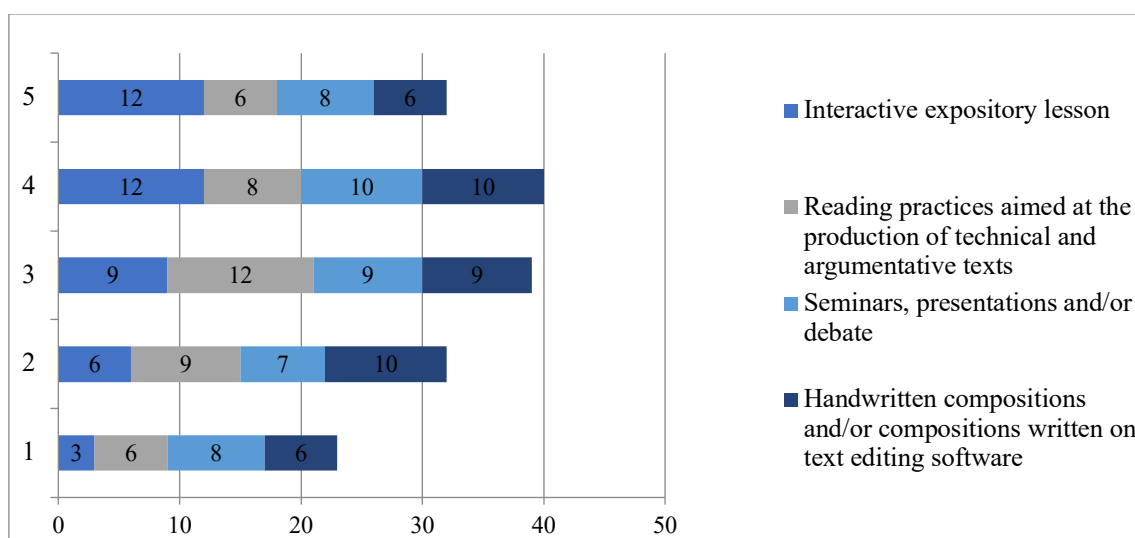


Figure 7. Assessment of the methodological strategies (students and professor) in the subject Reading and Text Production Practice.

Source: Own elaboration based on participant's answers, 2021.

Figure 7 reveals that, according to the students and the professor, the interactive expository lesson was the methodological strategy which provided the greatest contribution to the teaching and learning process. The mentioned type of lesson is not limited to rote and repetition, but rather is established by means of the dialog between the professor and the students in the “effort to present significant dimensions of an individual's contextual reality; the analysis of which will make it possible for him to recognize the interaction of the various components” (Freire, 1987, p. 61).

The interaction and facilitation by the professor allowed an exchange of knowledge and “at the point of encounter there are neither utter ignoramuses nor perfect sages; there are only people who are attempting, together, to learn more than they now know” (Freire, 1987, p.52). Secondly, the participants pointed out the reading practices aimed at the production of technical and scientific texts, and in the sequence mentioned the seminar, presentations and/or debates as two strategies which drive learning. Finally, they chose handwritten compositions and/or compositions written on text editing software as the last tool which fosters the education process.

Regarding the assessment tools, the participating student and the professor were asked to measure the level of importance of ten employed pedagogical tools and to assign a value/level to each of them in terms of how they supported the learning process, as shown in Figure 8.

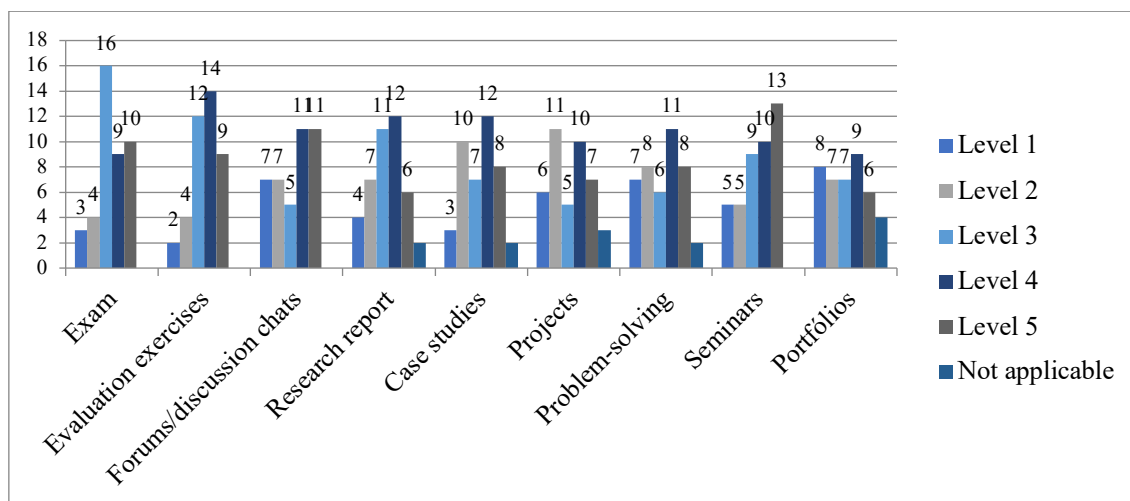


Figure 8. Importance of the assessment tools (students and professor).
Source: Own elaboration based on participant's answers, 2021.

Figure 8 displays how the students establish the relation between the activities performed in class and the evaluation of the acquired knowledge, by listing the tools and their level of importance. The higher the chosen level, the greater was the importance of the instrument. We notice that when the assessment tool is the exam, the research report achieved the importance level 3.

This number increases to 4 in regard to other activities, such as: evaluation exercises, forums, case studies, problem-solving and portfolios. The genres “seminar” and “piece of opinion” had the greatest level of importance in regard to learning, achieving level 5. Projects were on level 2.

Finally, we asked about the academic education provided by the subject in terms of interest in reading, writing and others, as shown in detail in Figure 9:

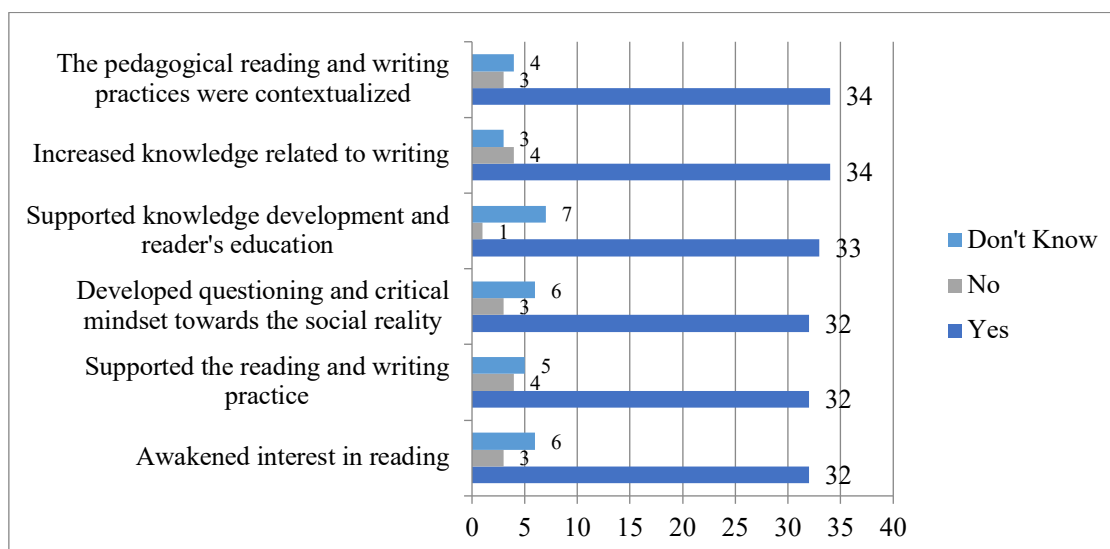


Figure 9. Assessment of the relation between the program content and the academic education provided by the subject. Source: Own elaboration based on participant's answers, 2021.

The outcomes of the academic education provided by the subject *Reading and Text Production Practice* are remarkable. The data (Figure 9) shows that, despite all hardships faced in remote teaching during the pandemic, the achievements were significant: awakened interest in reading, encouraging the reader's education, improvement in academic writing, refined critical thinking about the sociocultural reality. This happens because literacy practices have been encouraged throughout the subject, as the professor reported:

Academic literacy is a tool which provides opportunities to practice reading and text production. In this respect, studying a given genre and the text production based on it disseminates the importance of the education of readers. After all, text production is a result of reading, because without this, the argumentative practice is impaired. (Professor).

Along the same line of New Literacy Studies, the teacher of the subject “concentrates on the meanings which the subjects assign to writing” (Oliveira, 2017, p. 126) and provides the students with opportunities for various communicative practices.

5. BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

Taking into consideration that the research goal was to analyze how the academic literacy practices fostered by the subject *Reading and Text Production Practice*, offered at the Social Work degree course of UNITINS, Campus of Palmas, support the education of readers, the results show that offering this course only in the 1st semester of the Social Work degree course does not allow the academic literacy practices to be in fact encouraged and applied to the extent of leading to changes in writing styles in the genres produced by the students of the course at hand.

This situation became evident in the pandemic context, given that, even though they provided competences and skills in the academic/scientific context, the remotely offered classes harmed the teaching and learning process due to various factors, such as, for instance, the fact that the place where the students watch these classes does not provide learning conditions, due to the noise, movement of people and other issues.

The field research also made evident that, according to the participants, the learning journey in the pandemic was marked by discouragement and sadness, sometimes caused by separation from the classroom and the classmates, sometimes by the activity overload, in-person absence of the professor and lack of interaction (as used to occur in face-to-face classes). Hence, for some, the learning process provided by the investigated subject was more significant, whereas for others it was medium, failing to fully cover the intended knowledge.

We hope that this study will encourage other scholars to reflect on this topic and, furthermore, that it may serve as a propelling topic for those who design the syllabus of the undergraduate courses. It is urgently necessary that academic literacy be considered as a subject which is featured.

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