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**MENTORING PRACTICES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE:  
A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR STUDENTS OF EFL**

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**PRÁTICAS DE TUTORIA EM LÍNGUA INGLESA:  
AMBIENTE DE SUPORTE PARA ALUNOS DE ILE**

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**PRÁCTICAS DE TUTORÍA EN LENGUA INGLESA:  
AMBIENTE DE SOPORTE PARA ESTUDIANTES DE ILE**

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper aims to discuss the development of the teaching project *Mentoring Practices in English Language: a supportive environment for students of EFL*, under the effects and circumstances of the remote teaching context. Focused on the systematic monitorship of contents and related knowledge, this project seeks to offer, in the Portuguese-English language program at Felcs/UFRN, pedagogical support for students in their freshman and sophomore years who present learning difficulties related to the English Language. The report addresses aspects that underlie the work with activities that aim to improve the quality of the undergraduate course and the teacher training process: the interaction and learning space, the use of technological resources, and the approach and use of the target language linked to the development of the participants' autonomy. This proposal is theoretically based on studies developed by Harmer (2007), Bygate (2001), Larsen-Freeman (2001), and others. Data obtained through monitoring, and dialogue with those involved during the meetings point to the importance of the pedagogical support that is provided through the mentoring project, taking into consideration the existence of gaps and weaknesses in learning, which become evident at the beginning of the educational process in Higher Education.

**KEYWORDS:** English Language. Mentoring. Remote Teaching.

**RESUMO**

O presente trabalho tem como objetivo discorrer sobre o desenvolvimento do projeto de tutoria *Mentoring Practices in English Language: a supportive environment for students of EFL*, dentro de um contexto de ensino remoto. Voltado ao acompanhamento sistematizado de conteúdos e conhecimentos relacionados, tal projeto busca ofertar, no curso de Letras Português-Inglês da FELCS/UFRN, suporte pedagógico a alunos ingressantes e/ou veteranos que apresentam dificuldades no aprendizado de estruturas básicas da Língua Inglesa. Trata-se do relato de aspectos que fundamentaram o trabalho com atividades destinadas à melhoria da qualidade do curso de graduação e do processo de formação docente: o espaço de interação e aprendizagem, o uso de recursos tecnológicos e a abordagem e uso da língua-alvo com vistas ao desenvolvimento da autonomia dos participantes. A presente proposta está teoricamente ancorada nos estudos realizados por Harmer (2007), Bygate (2001), Larsen-Freeman (2001), entre outros. Os dados obtidos a partir do acompanhamento e diálogo entre os envolvidos durante os encontros da ação apontam para a importância do suporte pedagógico que é atribuído

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**Submetido em:** 19/04/2022 – **Aceito em:** 23/08/2022 – **Publicado em:** 06/10/2022

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mediante os projetos de tutoria, haja vista a existência de lacunas e fragilidades de aprendizagem, as quais se tornam evidentes no início do processo formativo dos discentes, no ensino superior.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Língua Inglesa. Tutoria. Ensino Remoto.

## RESUMEN

El presente trabajo tiene como objetivo disertar sobre el desarrollo del proyecto de tutoría *Mentoring Practices in English Language: a supportive environment for students of EFL*, dentro del contexto de enseñanza remota. Vuelto al acompañamiento sistematizado de contenidos y conocimientos relacionados, tal proyecto busca ofrecer, en el curso de Letras Português-Inglés de la FELCS/UFRN, soporte pedagógico a alumnos principiantes y/o veteranos que presentan dificultades en el aprendizaje de estructuras básicas de la Lengua Inglesa. Es el relato de aspectos que fundamentaron el trabajo con actividades destinadas para mejorar la calidad del curso de grado y del proceso de formación docente: el espacio de interacción y aprendizaje, el uso de recursos tecnológicos, el abordaje y el uso de la lengua meta en vista al desarrollo de la autonomía de los participantes. La presente propuesta está teóricamente basada en los estudios realizados por Harmer (2007), Bygate (2001), Larsen-Freeman (2001), entre otros. Los datos obtenidos a partir del acompañamiento y del diálogo entre los involucrados durante los encuentros de la acción, señalan para la importancia del soporte pedagógico que es atribuido a los proyectos de tutoría, considerando la existencia de lagunas y fragilidades de aprendizaje, las cuales se hacen evidentes en el inicio del proceso formativo de los discentes en la enseñanza superior.

**PALABRAS-CLAVE:** Lengua Inglesa. Tutoría. Enseñanza Remota.

## INTRODUCTION

The effectiveness of English language teaching in Brazil has been marked by the evident lack of policies to promote integrated practices that generate possibilities of didactic and pedagogical action and intervention. The formal educational system in the country starts, then, to demand, in the scope of foreign language teaching, attention to teacher training and to point out that the university should occupy an important place in this process of human and professional development, in order to provide subsidies to meet the demands of schools, institutes, etc. Thus, higher education, especially as far as the world of Letters is concerned, must offer assurance to the professionals in training, paying attention to the training itineraries and to the profile of the student/professional to be attained.

It is in this context that the teaching project *Mentoring Practices in English Language: a supportive environment for students of EFL* is inserted. Linked to the objectives of the UFRN Support Program for the Improvement of Undergraduate Education Quality<sup>4</sup> and included in the set of institutional resources that promote the support to undergraduate students, this project constituted itself as a strategic tool for pedagogical monitoring and support to student-

<sup>4</sup>The Support Program for the Improvement of Undergraduate Education Quality is an action linked to the Pro-Reitoria de Graduação (PROGRAD/UFRN) with the purpose of promoting, through financial support, the development of teaching projects that, linked to the need to overcome course weaknesses, will contribute to the improvement of academic performance in undergraduate education.

teachers in training, regarding their weaknesses when learning English as a foreign language (EFL henceforth), in the context of the Letters course - Portuguese and English - at Faculdade de Engenharia, Letras e Ciências Sociais do Seridó (Felcs henceforth), a specialized academic unit of Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte.

The purpose was to monitor and offer support in working with the content and knowledge required in the different classes of the English Language area that are offered in the initial semesters of the course. Furthermore, it sought to provide an opportunity for the involvement of beginner and veteran students in decision making and in the assumption of their leadership role regarding their learning needs, especially in the scope of vocabulary acquisition, the work with lexicogrammatical contents, and the practice of oral production and comprehension in the studied language.

In order to directly address and reduce the historical gap between the idealized education and the school experienced by students in Brazil (OLIVEIRA, 2011), the project provided an opportunity to involve students, who are at an advanced level in learning a foreign language, in pedagogical assistance to beginners and/or students who face difficulties in dealing with content related to English language classes. Thus, the purpose was to provide an environment of supervised mentoring aimed at reinforcing the contents outlined in the course plans of the respective components of the area, with special emphasis on those that are foreseen, from the pedagogical project of the course, for the semesters 2021.1 and 2021.2, at Felcs/UFRN.

The implementation of the actions proposed by the project was made possible through weekly virtual remote meetings between the tutors and the other participants, students of the Letters course (Portuguese and English), bringing together those interested in practicing the English language, from different levels of proficiency, with the primary purpose of strengthening and expanding the knowledge acquired in the disciplines related to the components of the area. The objective was, therefore, to build a supportive environment for the resolution of questions and for monitoring learning difficulties, involving student tutors, who have satisfactory fluency in the target language, and who were under the supervision of the coordinating teacher and the guiding teacher, and students being tutored, who presented weaknesses in the reading and mastery of structures, competencies, and basic linguistic skills in the target language, and who constituted the target audience of the respective action.

Considering the limitations and the potentialities related to remote work, established due to the Covid 19 pandemic and its implications to the education network in Brazil and in the world, and based on the need of an environment of pedagogical reinforcement for students who present weaknesses in the learning of English, the following work is justified by the

evident need to ensure a motivating environment in undergraduate courses that is able to (i) welcome new students and engage them with learning and knowledge experiences in the context of university education with a focus on working with the target language; (ii) promote conditions for teachers in training to understand the amplitude of concepts such as autonomy, effective learning, teaching methodology in times of remote study, among others; (iii) encourage the use of the target language as a tool for interaction among those involved with direct contributions to improving the language skills of speaking and listening.

In this way, with regard to the constitution of this work of teaching experience report<sup>5</sup>, initially, the approach and use of the target language in the project are presented, with the theoretical foundations used in the preparation of the classes. Next, it discusses the aspect of learner autonomy and how this becomes a foundation in the process of learning a foreign language and, in particular, in the scope of remote work, made possible by the use of technological resources and network interaction. Later on, it presents the technological resources used during the project, and finally, discusses the implications of the project for the teacher training of the tutors.

### *Mentoring Practices in the teaching of English language*

The students who are entering the new Letters course - Portuguese and English - at Felcs/UFRN and who have demands for curricular components related, in turn, to the English Language, need to look for tools and instruments that can ensure good academic performance. Besides, it is of utmost importance to pay attention to the innumerable difficulties presented by this public regarding, above all, the ability to speak and the satisfactory mastery of the contents that are the object of work in the related disciplines in the undergraduate course in Letters.

Regarding this historical lacking of learning enhancement projects at Letter Course (Felcs/UFRN) we can mention and highlight the data provided by the official documents as well as the mapping discussions that have been taken through the years in that teaching context. The data we now refer to are available and integrated into the goals, aims, and implementation proposals as traced by the Teacher Bureau at Felcs/UFRN with the Pedagogical Project of the Letters Course at Felcs/UFRN, and the Triennial Undergraduate Action Plan (PATCG).

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<sup>5</sup>A short and preliminary version of this paper was published, in Portuguese language, in the Journal *Discursividades*, v. 8, n. 1 [jan – jun] 2021, available at: <https://revista.uepb.edu.br/REDISC/article/view/975>

In the meantime, the participants of this project have become involved with the policies to improve undergraduate education, through the environment and tools that effectively seek to guarantee their insertion and integration in higher education. This was a project aimed at consolidating, with quality, the learning in curricular components that have presented, over time, a history of higher rates of retention and difficulties. In this regard, the words of Oliveira (2011, p. 88) can be highlighted when dealing with the potential of the educational system to provide productive and engaging space for learning<sup>6</sup>:

The educational system cannot customize the educational process to fit the particular profile of each learner. It can, however, offer a wider range of learning opportunities for the individual to pursue the education he or she desires. I am not only referring to a more varied curriculum but mainly to learning modalities that are not tied to the physical space and ritual of the classroom. It is necessary to create multiple contexts of interaction with language that allow the development of the literacies required by the out-of-school world and by our students' individual projects.

Thus, this project sought to provide support to incoming students with mentoring based on active learning methodologies that stimulate the learner's autonomy to master basic language skills and to acquire and mobilize vocabulary, improve fluency, and deepen familiarity with the target language. It is worth saying that active methodologies, according to Moran (2018), are vital and are directly linked to the emphasis on the student's protagonism, his direct, participatory, and reflective involvement in all stages of the process, experimenting, designing, creating, with guidance from the teacher.

For this, it is essential to have a bridge capable of linking the weaknesses to the necessary resolutions and motivations, whether of veteran students or newcomers, regarding the journey as EFL learners and the scope of teacher training in Letters, because as Low and Ang (2011, p. 1123) argue:

If we believe that the future belongs to our young people, then we have a serious responsibility to ensure that we provide them by teaching and giving them the foundations necessary to build a world where they and future generations can flourish. We, as teachers, have a unique opportunity and an obligation in our homes, our community, our businesses, and our schools to influence the kind of world that they want to have. And for this reason, even if we study to old age we shall not finish learning.

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<sup>6</sup> As a matter of methodological preference, we expose below an excerpt of a direct quotation from a bibliographical reference in Portuguese as a product of free translation. This option is extensive to the other passages throughout the text.

The use of active methodologies also provided an opportunity for students tutors to engage in collaborative practice through specific activities focused on the study of basic linguistic structures, conversation, oral production and comprehension, and continuous assistance with the resolution of worksheets with reference content and vocabulary.

The contents and knowledge worked on were foreseen in the Pedagogical Project of the Letters Course at Felcs/UFRN, as well as in the set of actions, guidelines, and strategies outlined in the document of the Triennial Undergraduate Action Plan (PATCG) of the Letters Course at Felcs/UFRN. The above mentioned knowledge also appears in the international reference documents for the teaching of English as a foreign language, such as the European Framework of Reference for Languages (COUNCIL OF EUROPE, 2001).

### *Speaking performance as a main goal*

The speaking skill in particular was problematic for the participants because of its production aspect and because it demands a real performance of continuous interaction where an immediate response is expected. So, it is necessary to consider that different processing skills are required in oral production compared to written production, and these need to be thought of when planning activities.

According to Levelt (1989, apud BYGATE, 2001), the speech production involves four major processes: conceptualization, formulation, articulation, and self-monitoring. Conceptualization refers to planning the content of the message, which involves the speaker's prior knowledge, knowledge about the topic, the speech situation, and speech patterns. Formulation, on the other hand, would be related to the structural organization of the content in words, sentences, and the correct use of grammatical markers. Articulation concerns the control of the articulatory organs, such as lips, tongue, teeth, etc. And finally, self-monitoring is the ability to identify and correct errors.

This process should occur naturally and simultaneously during spoken production, but in the case of beginner-level speakers of a foreign language, several factors cooperate to create speech barriers, such as lack of specialized vocabulary to address a given topic, difficulty in using certain grammatical structures, difficulties in the pronunciation of certain words, etc. And in addition to linguistic aspects, context can also affect speaking practice. Issues such as familiarity with the interlocutor, content, and type of speech act can interfere with the

development of this skill, as pointed out by the scholars Selinker and Douglas (1985), Bardovi-Harlig, and Hartford (1993).

Concerning this point about the interference of the social context on student speech production, we can still mention the need for a blended-learning environment which is there as a productive and ample tool for spreading students' language use as well as the confidence they are expected to build when using the target language in a way that shows not only effectiveness or technical lexicogrammar domain but also ownership and ease. That is what we learn from Chuanpiti Sriwichai (2020, p. 24): "Blended learning is a combination of face-to-face classroom instruction and e-learning, or a support of tradition teaching by using internet-based technology such as chat rooms, discussion groups, podcasts, and self-assessment tools". Considering this sort of educational current need and trend, it turns obvious to remark that the role of the higher educational institutions urges to suffer real modifications due to the new social global learning requirements we are facing then.

Pursuing the target of the enhancement of student language performance, we see the lack of new policies and practices that comes to require educational institutions not only to be aware of the new educational challenges but also and mainly to be able to reform the education system by planning and proposing a diverse and more closed to student reality teaching paradigm, curriculum, and teaching methods. In these terms, and under the effects and circumstances of the remote teaching context, we are happy to present the roots and contributions linked to the teaching project *Mentoring Practices in the English Language: a supportive environment for students of EFL*,

All of these elements are relevant to English oral production and comprehension and can determine the learner's communicative performance. In this regard, despite the many interconnections and elements that cross and permeate the ability to speak and understand in the target language, it is expected that the student, when developing the oral skill, will be able to produce speeches with fluency, precision, and language complexity. But attention to one aspect can diminish the effectiveness of another, as Bygate (2001, p. 16) points out: "Hence, for an elementary L2 speaker it will be difficult to manage this speech fluently and accurately, since they lack automation and/or accuracy, and it is difficult for them to pay attention to all these processes simultaneously under pressure of time".

How to overcome this situation? A possibility also presented by Bygate (2001) to work on speaking in order to develop the automation of processes is through the repetition of tasks

because it enables a greater familiarization of the speakers with the content and types of speech acts to be practiced.

At this point, as it is stated by Anne Burns (2019, p. 3), it is “valuable for teachers to be knowledgeable about what speaking competence involves and how different aspects of speaking competence relate to each other”. This perspective implies a work by the teachers themselves to explore sensitivity and engagement when dealing with the students’ learning demands. Regarding this view, it is a kind of work that requires a more based teaching proposal in which it must be evident and clear to see different aspects and factors functioning alongside the learning goals, such as knowledge about language and discourse, core speaking skills, and proper communication strategies (BURNS, 2019).

This practice could be implemented in the project because the contents covered in the online meetings were directly related to the subjects that were being studied by the participants in the initial semesters. Then, since the contents of the mentoring meetings were linked to what was previously studied in class, and since the contents were selected by taking into consideration the students’ background – as it must be seen over the course plan for the subjects and components for the initial turns at the Letters Course – it was possible to promote the repetition of specific tasks depending on the participants’ needs and the coordinator’s guidance.

Counting that the work with elementary-level speakers/students demands more attention and specificity on language topics choices, it turns here indispensable to detach the importance of thinking about those three main questions highlighted in the studies organized by Anne-Brit Fenner and Aud Solbjorg Skulstad (2020, p. 9) when they talk, in their *Teaching English in the 21st Century – Central Issues in English Didactics*, about the circumstances learning is assumed to be provided: “why should English be taught, what is to be taught and learnt, and, finally, how can be the subject taught and learnt?”.

The speaking skill figured as a central concern and also as a guiding element of the practices implemented in the project, it is worth highlighting that the strategies and resources used were subsidized, then, in the promotion of interaction. As stated by Paiva (2014), it is in the establishment of interaction bonds in the context of foreign language teaching that learners become participants in the negotiation of meanings, and such a relationship provides the opportunity for feedback practices on pronunciation and the use of linguistic forms, in addition to favoring the attainment and consolidation of input and output factors in the learning process.



*Lexicogrammar issues in a supportive environment for language learning*

As Carter (2001) claims, the knowledge of a word involves several aspects that are not exhausted only in a dictionary translation. It is necessary to develop active and productive as well as receptive knowledge. With this in view, during the execution of this teaching project, we saw the need to work with the lexicon in a way that would break the paradigm of word lists or of sequential and gradual exploration of reference vocabulary. Thus, we approach the debate about what is the best way to teach vocabulary that encompasses all these aspects mentioned.

Also according to Carter (2001), at advanced levels, and for the study of structural, semantic, and discourse properties of less frequent and more abstract words, implicit vocabulary learning through reading, using inference strategies, may be central to the study. However, at initial levels, when working with concrete basic words, explicit learning through memorization and translation can be valuable for vocabulary acquisition. This assumption agrees with the idea of a language learning process directly conjugated into a variety of interaction features and elements as well as it has been advocated by Burns (2019). Then, as we had as a main goal for the teaching project, the author brings, at least and at the same level of involvement, the important variables for the working with student speaking performance in the English classroom environment: consistency, integration, and guidance.

It is important that teachers guide learners systematically, introducing activities that are integrated and sequenced and that allow them to raise their awareness of the knowledge, skills and strategies needed for different types of interaction and discourse. Students may need guidance on specific aspects of the language, such as pronunciation features, either at segmental or Second Language Speaking Competence suprasegmental level, or they may need support in relation to affective factors, such as anxiety, nervousness or embarrassment about speaking in another language (BURNS, 2019, p. 4).

Still concerning the dimension of lexicogrammatical work from the reference contents in the project, it is important to mention the lexical approach with the so-called lexical chunks or lexical phrases that are combinations of words that commonly appear together by linguistic and contextual or practical association and are classified and grouped typologically as collocations, phrasal verbs, expressions, and idioms. As Harmer (2007) points out, talking about vocabulary exclusively in terms of “words” is not sufficient to encompass the different kinds of meaning units that exist at the disposal of speakers.

Therefore, based on the studies by Norbert Schimitt and Diane Schimitt (2020) about the work with vocabulary in the English classroom environment, a methodology involving both explicit and implicit vocabulary teaching was adopted in the project. In explicit teaching, word groups and especially lexical chunks were used in combination with imagery that mobilized and imputed, in turn, certain communication contexts and specific genres. In this way, the students were able to make the association of the word with the meanings that had been mobilized, exploring the strategy of textual inference from semantic and typographic clues. In implicit teaching, participants were exposed to new vocabulary through reading and exposure to the target language in order to provide multiple and productive spaces for comprehension, through context and inferences.

Following this concern, with the teaching project, we aimed not only to expose the participants to an ample possibility to learn and acquire a new set of words, sentences, or linguistics structures, but we also try to let them be aware and take an effective part on this process. According to Norbert Schimitt and Diane Schimitt (2020), it is necessary to involve students with the nature and size of vocabulary they are up to deal with in order to provide a proactive and positive background for a self-conscious process of linguistic management. The authors bring the example of the phrasal verbs to illustrate the aspects of multiple applications and meaning words may have through different contexts of use.

### *Grammar aspects and language function*

The awareness and the need to include in the project not only formal aspects also proved to be a crucial and remarkable element regarding the teaching of grammar. As Larsen-Freeman (2001) suggests, grammatical structures not only have form, they are also used to express meaning in a context appropriate to their usage. Thus, it is necessary to work with the multiple dimensions of grammar with special emphasis on structure or form, semantics or the production and mobilization of meaning, and the pragmatic conditions that govern use.

The emphasis exclusively on the formal structures and nomenclatures that make up this systematic universe of language, therefore, is insufficient to develop the ability of learners to communicate orally. Hence, language teaching cannot be limited only to the teaching of grammar, because such explicit teaching does not generate fluency in students. In addition, as we indicated previously and to mention the studies conducted by Norbert Schimitt and Diane Schimitt (2020), a valid option for teaching grammar would be the use of the communicative approach which is based on the idea that language is more assertively and contextually apprehended through communication, and not just through a mechanized presentation of grammatical structures.

Therefore, unlike a rigid, rule-based teaching approach, communicative approaches do not rely on prescriptive ways of teaching a foreign language. So based on this communicational conception, we began to focus more on meaning. However, this did not necessarily represent, in the effectiveness and execution of the related activities, an abandonment of the teaching of grammar in an explicit way. As pointed out by Larsen-Freeman (2001, p. 251), “In contrast, research has shown that teachers who focus students’ attention on linguistic form during communicative interactions are more effective than those who never focus on form or who only do so in decontextualized grammar lessons”.

Consequently, for the teaching of grammar, we prioritized the reflection on the morphosyntactic, semantic, and pragmatic aspects of grammatical structure, given the need to diagnose the weaknesses of the participants and provide subsidies for them. The idea was to provide an opportunity for a didactic-pedagogical reinforcement linked to the communicative approach, in order to prioritize the use of linguistic-grammatical structures aiming at the student's productivity in the target language in situations that demanded objective manifestation, participation, and interaction.

### *The autonomy in the learning process*

It is relevant to point out that the integration of new graduate students in the academic environment, in order to provide autonomy, demanded careful attention from the tutors, alongside coordination, to facilitate language learning through the creation of an interactive and relaxing space, especially in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, which brought about a distance communication space.

This being said, it was essential to foster an academic qualification and to encourage protagonism: the student-teacher coming to occupy the position of an autonomous subject in relation to the learning process and to adapt to the status of language user in the different life contexts. In this sense, it was necessary to establish a welcoming space, capable of providing conditions for learning and improvements as to the participants' linguistic knowledge and that was, therefore, marked by the emphasis on autonomy, which is defined, according to Paiva (2006, p. 88), as:

A complex social-cognitive system, which manifests itself in varying degrees of independence and control over one's own learning process, involving capacities, skills, attitudes, desires, decision-making, choices, and evaluation either as a language learner or as a language user, in or out of the classroom.

Therefore, autonomy is essential for the learner to take the initiative in the process of learning the additional language. This is crucial for the acquisition of the target language since the time available in the classroom or in the tutorial meetings is not enough for effective learning, both in terms of content to be taught and of time to practice the language. Thus, as it has been advocated by our theoretical basis, with statements from studies conducted by Moran (2018), Oliveira (2011), Paiva (2006), Leffa (2011), it is necessary that participants have the motivation and determination to do individualized study to address the gaps that may arise due to the lack of a longer period of language practice.

It is also worth mentioning that, based on the project's monitoring and considering the students' needs evidenced during the meetings, we constantly recommend the practice of self-study, and the use of applications, websites, or other resources specialized in language learning, especially English. These resources were presented to the students through ludic activities during the project's meetings, in order to enable them to use these utilities autonomously.

This practice is also proposed by Harmer (2007) when stating that students need support and supervision for continued learning from instruments that present or require a balanced level of difficulty and complexity. It is therefore necessary to offer specific instructions that may allow students to focus on what is most relevant to their learning objectives. One possible way to do this, still according to Harmer (2007), is to include a "continued learning" topic in the syllabus, suggesting resources available for study, discussing which ones would be most appropriate for students according to their needs, and providing information on how and where to access them

Under these conditions, the project anticipated an exponential contribution regarding the autonomous character and the inclusion of such learning decisions by the participants, considering that the learning of a foreign language should not be anchored only in what is taught in class, but especially outside of it, involving the agents/participants in life contexts that allow a deeper understanding of what is transmitted to them in class. Thus, Freire (1996) also points out the importance of the coexistence of education professionals with their students, through which students can be provoked to assume a posture as social-historical-cultural subjects, as participants in an education linked to the act of knowing oneself, taking it as a gnosiological situation. According to this proactive perspective that underlines Freire's view, it turns to be essential to consider the social nature of learning in order to expand the horizons of students as well as their attitudes when they are required to manage and work with specific sets of knowledge, competencies, and skills.

Freire (1996) outlines a social dimension linked to work with the official and formal labor with systematic knowledge in educational institutions. On this concern, students are there to be considered not as the end of the process itself but as the central agents and active subjects who can take part and determine the flow, the justification, and the relevance of the entire process of learning a different language. This thought is, it is necessary to say, directly related to what we have discussed above when we presented the researching concerns and theoretical contributions bounded by the authors Anne-Brit Fenner and Aud Solbjorg Skulstad (2020).

In light of these issues, the students of the Letters Course at Felcs/UFRN involved with the project were able to participate in a supplementary environment and address their learning gaps in English. In other words, the project allowed a place for pedagogical support, for basic reinforcement of contents and skills, a reinforcement that was intrinsically interactive and that dealt with the difficulties present in language learning, which are also linked to the linguistic skills and the contents worked on in the classroom in the course subjects. In this way, the concept of student autonomy was strongly considered in the project in order to meet the justifications for its creation as a fortuitous space for teaching and learning.

### *The use of technological resources*

In the midst of the specificity of the contemporary environment of technological sophistication, it is valid to affirm that teachers have several methodological options at their disposal, as well as possibilities to make communication more dynamic through virtual tools. In this sense, despite the context of classes in remote format, the project fostered a welcoming practice related to the difficulties presented due to the pandemic, in addition to providing an interactive environment focused on the students' learning weaknesses, through the use of several online interaction tools.

As established by Brinton (2001), the use of such technical or technological resources should not be limited to the structural aspect of the work, that is, one should avoid relegating the media components and resources more to the design or procedure level than to the effective work with contents, skills, and knowledge. What must be done, in this scenario, is to make sure that media resources and tools are integrated into the learning environment as a general and broad process and not only as technical supporting devices. In these terms, we can mention the contributions from Anne-Brit Fenner's Studies, according to which new technologies are a compelling reality that imposes on the language teaching process different



approaches, views, and perspectives due to the students' modern behavior and educational needs (FENNER, 2020).

In this context, in addition to Google Meet, a tool through which synchronous meetings with participants were held and slides with exercises and ludic activities were shared, platforms such as Padlet, Jamboard, Kahoot, and Wordwall were used to create a more interactive and enjoyable environment.

With Padlet, using virtual walls, the participants worked on the contents and explored their knowledge of the subjects covered in class. In this way, with the walls produced by the participants, it was possible to conduct interactive classes with comments and exploration of the knowledge highlighted by them, which allowed everyone to develop a collective linguistic growth.

In the case of the digital platform Jamboard, students' language knowledge was shared, and related to the lessons through a collaborative digital whiteboard. It focused on vocabulary mobilization and contextual analysis of words with which students had a certain familiarity. In one of the meetings, for instance, the tutors worked on phrasal verbs. In this context, the tool allowed participants to engage and share information through the interactive whiteboard by adding sticky notes. Such activity favored the understanding of the polysemic characteristic of phrasal verbs, as well as the importance of context as a determinant for meaning, considering, above all, the diversity of discursive/textual genres and supports, and the wide range of communication situations.

The Kahoot platform, which provides a more playful and competitive environment, allowed an intense activation of the participants' foreign language skills, and enabled students to have a more fun experience. On the use of this tool, 30 seconds are set for the resolution of each question, and the student needs to give a more immediate and intuitive answer. In the game, both the hits and the speed of the answers determine the score and, at the end, it is possible to see the performance of the participants through a ranking. In this way, the participants, with the comments and corrections of the tutors involved, were able to analyze the reasons for the inconsistencies and errors.

With Wordwall it was possible to create several customized teaching resources related to the content that was being discussed. Such resources involved, for example, games, thematic classroom activities, classroom commands, and allowed tutors to make custom activities in

favor of the classroom interactions and to provide objective and wide speaking practice with a sort of tools such as quizzes, match ups, word games, and much more.

It is worth mentioning that this ludic dimension characterizes a potentiality linked to the use of resources and technologies in the remote teaching environment, because due to the recurrence and support of the tools mentioned above, it was possible to promote a real space for study and support for the learning of those involved. This issue is in line with the most current discussions about the use of technologies in language teaching and assures that “as a tool for language learning/teaching, media have undoubtedly always facilitated the task of language learning for both instructed and non-instructed learners” (BRINTON, 2001, p. 459).

However, it is worth noting that, in the scope of the mentoring project, the remote teaching situation found sufficient subsidies for its effectiveness, even though numerous weaknesses and impossibilities have been observed regarding not only the access, but also the quality of this access, via internet, by the students to the meetings and to the performance of the related tasks.

#### *Implications of the project for teaching training*

Considering the need to encourage the teaching career and to promote the improvement of academic performance, the project also sought to provide conditions for teachers in training to understand the extent of concepts such as autonomy, effective learning, teaching methodology in times of remote study, among others. Additionally, some aspects should be considered regarding the impacts of the pandemic on the performance of the tutors in the project. A survey conducted by the Peninsula Institute (2021) showed that the main legacy of the pandemic for teaching is the importance that has been given to technology for educational use, which is now seen as the main ally for learning and valuing teachers. As examples of important studies that come to contribute with valuable discussions on the legacy of the pandemic for the teaching sphere, we can mention the overview conducted by Katherine Ortolani and Arthur Ortolani (2021). These authors confirm the pandemic scenario as a challenge time for teachers and parents due to the necessity for keeping classes and the work with formal education with the support of the technology.

At the same pace, Kawachi-Furlan and Assunção Tonelli (2021) bring an exponential talk about language education and teacher education during and after the pandemic times. According to the authors' central view, during the pandemic, the technologic supplies, and

the large variety of online resources added to the possibility of using different physical interconnected devices, represented a concrete tool for education with special effects to the language teaching. The authors assume that the technology worked as a prompted feature to guarantee the teachers' attempts "to continue teaching and to find new alternatives (expressed mainly by the verb 'reinvent') to carry out their tasks despite all the emotional, technological and physical barriers and difficulties" KAWACHI-FURLAN; TONELLI, 2021, p. 473).

Nevertheless, the expected benefits go beyond the individual limits of the people involved in our teaching project and extend to the real need of language students/teachers to engage with their own learning process, continuously and autonomously, treating knowledge as a tool for social transformation and political-identity intervention. In addition to what we have brought here in terms of considerations of students' background and their social immediate reality, we follow the Freire's view (FREIRE, 1996) to underscore our central aim with the teaching project *Mentoring Practices in English Language*, since we paid special attention to what students might say, request, and be suggestive of.

We started, therefore, from this perspective of the educational process in the context of language teaching, according to which the teaching work that manifests and proposes itself as productive, contextualized, and promising, should prioritize not only the increase of knowledge that underlies it but, above all, should stimulate the space for diversity of knowledge. In the words of Leffa (2011, p. 22):

[...] as if all teachers should know the same things, as if generic knowledge did not need to be supplied with specific knowledge to produce a class without squandering. Knowledge is more like a needle than a sponge. Knowledge cannot just spread on the surface like a perfume on the skin; it needs to penetrate the body to bring about changes. Each teacher needs to have his/her knowledge, differentiated from the knowledge of others.

Therefore, the project has broadened the understanding of the learning aspect of the tutors involved, which was built from observations and experiences in the course of action as teachers in training and whose roles are to provide paths that favor the protagonism of the students as subjects that build themselves. Thus, as Paiva (2006) reiterates, student learning is not simply the teacher's responsibility. It is necessary, however, to guide him towards autonomy and create a way to facilitate the teaching-learning process.

In light of the above, the project also sought to develop and broaden the teachers' experiences regarding the various forms and modalities of teaching, focusing on viable possibilities in



remote format and exploring the challenges related to the participants' learning processes. Such action fostered didactic-pedagogical practices of immersion of the participants (tutors and students), serving as an exponential tool for the understanding and use of digital technologies in the pandemic and remote teaching context. Moreover, the project consolidated positive impacts with results that signal better academic performance, greater involvement of agents with the target language, and development of an autonomous attitude towards the challenges of learning and training.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The purpose of the project was to contribute to an academic education of quality by developing with the students/graduates a reflexive attitude towards autonomy in learning and the need to be involved with the target language under study. The contribution was made in the sense of promoting the students' advancement in learning the English Language by exploring it in an effective, critical, playful, and contextualized way, while trying to deal with issues related to its teaching, approach, evaluation, and challenges in contemporary times.

The implications of the new scenario of social isolation/distancing caused by the Covid-19 pandemic in Brazil and worldwide were considered in the range of such questions. It was evident that despite the profound scenario of losses and worsening not only of education but especially of life, the reality of remote education provided an opportunity to reflect on the need to monitor and offer support to the student community, in order to ensure the continuity of learning and the training of human and professional capital, especially in the scope of the Letters course. On this concern, as we have mentioned above, we see studies – Kawachi-Furlan and Assunção Tonelli (2021), Katherine Ortolani and Arthur Ortolani (2021), Pensinsula Institute (2021), among others, based on the Brazilian or Latin America context, which summarizes the impacts and convergences of experiences lived at the educational sector regarding the pandemic length.

In the project in question, there was an involvement and exposure of students/participants to situations of effective use of the language, exploring the dynamic and interactive space of educational tools and technologies to work and explore their real difficulties and/or gaps in learning the English language. Language, in the conditions of academic teaching and more precisely in the context of didactic-pedagogical mentoring, was linked not only to instruction, but, in particular, to sociability, autonomy, and the social and political character of education and of the learners.

In short, by pursuing its purpose of becoming a prominent and necessary space for pedagogical and instructional reinforcement, providing immersion practices and encouraging teaching practice, the mentoring project Mentoring Practices in English Language: a supportive environment for Students of EFL has enabled the implementation of policies to improve the quality of undergraduate courses. In the Felcs/UFRN unit, the corresponding action promoted, therefore, the integration of knowledge and skills among students with different levels of proficiency in English Language, in order to establish and foster a productive environment of shared learning and mutual and remote assistance.

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