DIALOGUE ABOUT LEARNING: AGING AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

DIÁLOGO SOBRE O APRENDER: ENVELHECIMENTO E EDUCAÇÃO NÃO FORMAL

DIÁLOGO SOBRE EL APRENDIZAJE: ENVEJECIMIENTO Y EDUCACIÓN NO FORMAL

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ABSTRACT: A aprendizagem é um processo que ocorre de maneira indissociável das vivências humanas e permeia diversos contextos, ambientes e características. Pautado na convergência entre o envelhecimento populacional e a vivência da aprendizagem durante toda a vida, este estudo objetivou compilar conhecimentos referentes à vivência do processo de envelhecimento, destacando os possíveis efeitos da aprendizagem não formal ao longo da vida sobre o indivíduo. Para tal, realizou-se uma investigação narrativa da literatura científica disponível nos bancos de dados Scielo e PubMed. Foi possível reconhecer que há organizações institucionais que se atentam para os benefícios da aprendizagem na velhice, estes, versando sobre os benefícios sociais e individuais, relacionando-se com a criação de redes de apoio, aumento da independência e sentimentos positivos como a autoestima. Conclui-se que a aprendizagem no processo de envelhecimento é uma importante fonte de impacto positivo de maneira multidimensional, favorecendo a qualidade de vida e o bem-estar na velhice.

KEYWORDS: Learning. Education. Aging

RESUMO: *Learning is a process that occurs inseparably from human experiences and permeates several contexts, environments and characteristics. Based on the convergence between population aging and the experience of learning throughout life, this study aimed to compile knowledge regarding the experience of the aging process, highlighting the possible effects of non-formal learning throughout life on the individual. To this end, a narrative investigation of the scientific literature available in the Scielo and PubMed databases was conducted. It was possible to recognize that there are institutional organizations that pay attention to the benefits of learning in old age, these, versing on the social and individual benefits, relating to the creation of support networks, increased independence and positive feelings such as self-esteem. It is concluded that learning in the aging process is an important source of positive impact in a multidimensional way, favoring quality of life and well-being in old age.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Aprendizagem. Educação. Envelhecimento.*

RESUMEN: *El aprendizaje es inseparable de las experiencias humanas e impregna distintos contextos, entornos y características. Partiendo de la convergencia entre el envejecimiento de la población y la experiencia del aprendizaje, este estudio pretendía recopilar conocimientos sobre la experiencia del proceso de envejecimiento, destacando los posibles efectos del aprendizaje no formal a lo largo de la vida en el individuo. Se realizó una investigación narrativa de la literatura científica disponible en las bases de datos Scielo y PubMed. Fue posible reconocer que existen organizaciones institucionales que se dedican a los beneficios del aprendizaje en la vejez, éstas, versando sobre los beneficios sociales e individuales, relacionándose con la creación de redes de apoyo, el aumento de la independencia y sentimientos positivos como la autoestima. Se concluye que el aprendizaje en el proceso de envejecimiento es una importante fuente de impacto positivo de forma multidimensional, favoreciendo la calidad de vida y el bienestar en la vejez.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Aprendizaje. Educación. Envejecimiento.*

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Introduction

The current world scenario is undergoing a demographic change at a rapid pace, marked by increased life expectancy and an increase in individuals with older age than the general population (INTERNATIONAL LONGEVITY CENTER BRAZIL - ILC-BR, 2015). Under the terms provided by Law No. 10.741 of October 1, 2003, in the Statute of the Elderly, those individuals aged 60 years or more are recognized as elderly (BRASIL, 2003) and, as in the rest of the world, the age subgroups covered by this delimitation have been overgrowing in Brazil. In this context, it is highlighted that in the year 2018, the elderly population already represented about 13% of the total Brazilian nation, and it is estimated that in the next three decades, this representativity will reach double in proportion (BRAZILIAN INSTITUTE OF GEOGRAPHY AND STATISTICS - IBGE, 2019).

The aging process is associated with structural and physiological changes, thus raising concerns regarding the integrity of elderly individuals (RESENDE-NETO *et al.,* 2016). However, these trends are not determinants for the natural aging process to imply a decline in functionality and autonomy(ANDRIOLO *et al.,* 2016) and, in addition to the physical and psychological dimension of the individual, it is also cited that sociocultural factors influence aging given the environment where the subjects are inserted (FALLER; TESTON; MARCON, 2018).

The social environment, referring to society and the family group, is linked to constructing the meanings attributed to the aging process and the individuals experiencing it (FALLER; TESTON; MARCON, 2018). One of the trends convergent to aging is the reduction in the volume of social networks observed among older individuals, which brings together a greater risk of the elderly finding themselves in a vulnerable situation by having fewer sources of social support (RABELO; NERI, 2014).

To promote the quality of life of the elderly population and to subsidize the functional independence of this age group, the World Health Organization (WHO, 2002) proposed the active aging model. This idea of lifestyle consists of principles to be followed to preserve health and lead a fuller life. Active aging is based on health maintenance, safety, and social participation as central elements of its proposal, and lifelong learning is a vector that sets in motion the three pillars mentioned above. Such practices are highlighted as protective factors of the integrity of the elderly to promote the construction of support networks and maintenance of psychological aspects of individuals, including the elevation of self-esteem by overcoming social stigmas related to the position occupied as elderly subjects (DERHUN *et al.,* 2022).

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The education and social participation offered in the form of educational programs favor the reduction of the imminent risk of the establishment of vulnerability during old age, from the promotion of a better quality of life by empowering the attendants to perform self-care practices properly (MARTINS *et al.,* 2019). Beyond formal contexts, the learning process occurs daily, characterized by integrating new information into the previously existing cognitive structure, being linked to it by the relevance in which it is attributed by the learner and may be evoked by more than one association (MOREIRA 2011).

When considering the heterogeneity of forms that the learning process can adhere to and the convergent trends to the aging process, questions are raised about the relationships established between the elements present during old age, especially regarding learning from a life course perspective. Thus, the present study was based on the following research problem: how does lifelong learning relate to the experience of old age? Therefore, in an attempt to get closer to a solution for the established research problem, the objective was to compile knowledge regarding the aging process experience, highlighting the possible effects of lifelong learning on the individual.

Methodology

The present study's design is cross-sectional and descriptive research, characterized due to the time dedicated to evaluating the contents and its objective, respectively. Data were collected at a specific moment, aiming to describe the presence or absence of elements in a context without the intention of establishing causal relationships between them (CAMPOS, 2019).

Regarding the technical procedures employed, the research design is configured as bibliographic research by investigating available materials to judge the existing theoretical contributions to approach an explanation for the research problem (KÖCHE, 2011). The outline adopted for the research consisted of a narrative literature review, thus, used articles published in scientific journals and books to support the construction of the work with a broad scope, presenting a qualitative character (ROTHER, 2007).

Qualitative research methodologies allow greater degrees of external validity to be achieved since they seek to be comprehensive, consistent with reality and to raise new ideas, presenting themselves as an exposition of verisimilitude ideas, i.e., these characteristics bring

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the objects of study and their relations closer to reality, considering its multidimensional nature (CAMPBELL; MACHADO, 2013).

The capture of the works addressed in this study was carried out in search platforms and databases, such as Scielo and PubMed. The searches resorted to the use of the Boolean descriptors "learning," "non-formal learning," and "aging," separately and in various combinations. However, the research was not delimited to a period to cover classic works. Initially, the materials found were selected by their titles and abstracts. Later, articles that dealt with learning and the aging process were included in the current review, exposing information regarding the interfaced relationship between both.

Results and Discussion

Through the method used, 14 materials produced around the theme were selected, including books, articles, and bills, presented in the format of analysis and discussion of the findings and during the investigation, perceived that research on learning among the elderly is still a recent and fruitful area for advancement. Studies showed a sparse scenario regarding pedagogical interventional formats that approach the formal education process and, even more, scarce investigations about the non-formal process. The main topics interconnected with the present theme imbricate the promotion of functionality and autonomy, reinforcing that the literature lacks more works and that there are no specific guidelines for educational work with the elderly population.

Learning is offered through formal education recurrently in the first decades of life and the later stages of development (ILC-BR, 2015). In the early stages, school activities are focused on the socialization of individuals to the social environment in which they are inserted, which is a formative element in the constitution of the individual (MARCOLINO; MELLO, 2015).

As a higher cognitive function, learning is a process that occurs daily and in different contexts, however, to be acquired, a deep understanding of the phenomenon is required to consider the affective and social dimensions related to learning (JIN; KIM; BAUMGARTNET, 2019). Schugurensky (2000) proposes that learning be differentiated into three types due to the context in which it occurs, and it can be formal, non-formal, and informal learning. Formal learning refers to acquiring knowledge through the traditional education system, which is highly institutionalized and hierarchical. By taking this first modality as a reference, non-formal

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learning refers to the learning processes that occur beyond the curriculum provided in formal education, exemplified by extension courses and sports practice. Finally, informal learning is configured as a residual category, referring comprehensively to the everyday experiences of acquiring and refining skills or knowledge, not being part of the proposals of educational institutions.

Formal education is not the only source of knowledge for an individual, but studies show that it is beneficial because the completion of basic studies is significant in reducing social and economic differences (TCHAMYOU, 2020). Moreover, a more extensive academic education establishes associations with favorable characteristics for the learner, and it is worth highlighting the tendency to have a greater aptitude to provide self-care (COURA *et al.,* 2013).

Participation in activities linked to educational institutions can support achieving various forms of formal, non-formal, and even informal learning. The university environment is an opportune example to contextualize the situational possibilities, projecting attention to the elements of education. Thus, it is valid to reaffirm the existence of educational programs aimed at older people in Universities Open to the Third Age - UNATI (ELTZ *et al.,* 2014).

The activities offered by UNATI are very reasonable regarding the content addressed in their proposals since they are not part of any curriculum established by formal education, although they are highly institutionalized (ELTZ *et al.,* 2014). To conceive the framework of such an issue, the Statute of the Elderly Person, established by Law No. 10.741 of October 1, 2003 (BRASIL, 2003), assigns to the public power that supported the creation and organization of educational programs in UNATI. However, the Brazilian State has not provided norms or regulations directed to such proposals to ensure their quality, as seen in the National Education Plan for 2014 to 2024, provided in Law No. 13.005 of June 25, 2014 (BRASIL, 2014).

Given the organization of the extension activities offered by UNATI, the learning materialized in these means is classified as non-formal learning, however, it can be stated that there is a concomitance between non-formal and informal education (SCHUGURENSKY, 2000). The proposed activities often deal with culture, leisure, and issues related to health maintenance, using expository educational strategies and active methodologies, but the organization of the programs does not provide for informal learning provided in the exchange of knowledge through socialization among participants (ELTZ *et al.,* 2014).

Interpersonal contact is a central element for the elderly population, so much so that, when investigating the motivations and aspects related to the desire to participate in UNATI activities, speeches report referring to the desire to deal with the idleness experienced due to

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retirement, to feel self-fulfillment by having the possibility of attending educational institutions and exchanging experiences, with the possibility of forming social networks among program participants (DERHUN *et al.,* 2019).

The learning process's motivational aspects are relevant elements to understanding the phenomenon. At the individual level, the quest for knowledge and skill refinement is instigated by reasons set themselves, especially when learning is self-directed by the learner. When it comes to the elderly population, the risk of establishing vulnerable frames is increasing, and is a problem to be addressed. Learning plans to provide the necessary knowledge to solve problems at this stage of development, being a tool to promote systemic changes. In other words, this age group seeks to learn to alleviate possible daily difficulties and instigate the development of adaptive capacity (MORRIS, 2019).

To converge with the construction of autonomy and independence, new modalities of literacy are currently discussed, which are more comprehensive than mere literacy when referring to familiarity with social practices of reading and writing (SOARES, 2002). Given these contextual variations, digital literacy has been an object of interest in the field of Gerontology and has become a necessary skill to move in contemporary social environments, allowing the enjoyment of rights by having access to information available on the internet, such as access to online courses, educational websites, and online discussion forums (MORRIS, 2019).

When visiting works of scientific literature that deal with the use of mobile devices by the elderly population, such as cell phones and their applications, it is observed that the search for familiarization with mobile devices is motivated by the desire to acquire knowledge about health issues and independence to manage financial resources through banking applications (JIN *et al.,* 2019). Along these lines, learning during old age is recurrently focused on promoting the functional independence of older people when considering the increasing risks to which this age group is subjected (RESENDE-NETO *et al.,* 2016). The pragmatic nature of learning is made explicit, with health complications as challenges to be addressed and learning as a means of achieving resolutions to the respective problems (MORRIS, 2019).

Surrounding learning means to the aging process, the influence of individual aspects of older people on coping with adversities during old age is highlighted, being that sociodemographic characteristics and personality traits conjure to the construction of the adaptability of the individual (MCDANIEL *et al.,* 2022). Therefore, as learning is a continuous process throughout life, it can be understood as the sum of all accumulated learning,

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overcoming the concept of learning conceived solely by the education system and in formal contexts. As was observed in the findings, traditional education does not represent the totality of knowledge acquired during different periods, with the activities offered by UNATI as incentives to recognize the construction of non-formal learning.

Final considerations

As final considerations, it is appropriate to reaffirm that the present investigation aimed at compiling knowledge regarding the experiences of the aging process, highlighting the possible effects of lifelong learning on the individual. Based on such a proposal, published works that deal with learning issues in the aging process were approached, exposing a theoretical model about the learning modalities due to the conjuncture in which it is concretized and the specificities found when working with the elderly population.

The current research presented some beneficial effects of learning on the lives of learners, including specificities observed when specifying the elderly. For example, educational programs aimed at the elderly population are offered at Universities Open to the Third Age, allowing non-formal learning. Among the programs proposed, the objective is often to enable the elderly participants to perform activities that benefit their health, such as self-care practices and independence with information directly and referring to knowledge that allows a better articulation with the available resources.

Participation in university activities during old age is a voluntary practice since individuals are no longer obliged to participate in activities in educational institutions as it is imposed during the first decades of life. The older adult's motivational issues determine the search for learning in the context of aging. It is worth highlighting resilience as an individual factor for building the ability to deal with life's adversities, supporting the use of cognitive reserve functionally.

Lifelong learning is a comprehensive concept beyond formal education and acquiring knowledge through institutional means. The learning process takes place at the individual level but is elaborated in collaboration with other individuals who do not necessarily play the role of mentors, thus, non-formal learning partially overlaps, given the exchange of knowledge through interpersonal contact between learners. Educational processes have the potential to favor everyone, regardless of school years, so social participation is opportune to enable learning

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through socialization and to build support networks, in addition to benefiting the well-being of individuals.

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