

DIGITAL COMPETENCIES FOR PLA AND PLAC TEACHERS: A PATH WITH NO SHORTCUTS OR RETURNS

COMPETÊNCIAS DIGITAIS PARA PROFESSORES DE PLA E PLAC: UM CAMINHO SEM ATALHOS NEM RETORNOS

COMPETENCIAS DIGITALES PARA PROFESORES DE PLA Y PLAC: UN CAMINO SIN ATAÑOS NI RETORNOS

Ana Laura dos Santos MARQUES¹
Thaís WOJCIECHOWSKI²

ABSTRACT: The aim of this article is to examine the increase in digital competencies of PLA and PLAc teachers for their performance in the context of virtual teaching. Our interest arises from the challenges that this modality imposes on the classes due to the Sars-CoV-2 virus pandemic. We develop our proposal by reviewing studies of teaching areas in virtual environments and the teaching of foreign languages. Our methodological design considers the configuration of a case study, in a qualitative approach to the data to interpret our object of study. The results point to how teachers face the pressures about their digital skills to respond to the immediate needs of their contexts. Also, they recognize a great dependence on digital literacy for their professional performance and for the training of their students, offering them opportunities to participate both in educational and social scopes in Portuguese.

KEYWORDS: Digital competencies. Portuguese as Additional Language (PLA) and Portuguese as a Welcoming Language (PLAc). Emergency remote teaching. Digital literacy.

RESUMO: O objetivo deste artigo é examinar o incremento de competências digitais de professores de PLA e de PLAc para sua atuação no contexto de ensino virtual. Nosso interesse surge dos desafios que a modalidade virtual emergencial de ensino vem impondo às aulas, devido à pandemia do vírus Sars-CoV-2. Desenvolvemos nossa proposta revisando estudos das áreas de ensino em ambientes virtuais de aprendizagem e do ensino de línguas estrangeiras. Nosso desenho metodológico considera a configuração de um estudo de caso, em uma abordagem qualitativa dos dados com vistas à interpretação do nosso objeto de estudo. Os resultados apontam como professores enfrentam as pressões acerca de suas competências digitais para responder às necessidades imediatas de seus contextos e reconhecem uma dependência cada vez maior do letramento digital para sua atuação profissional e para a formação de seus estudantes, proporcionando-lhes oportunidades de participação nos âmbitos educacionais e sociais em português.

¹ Universidad de Santiago de Chile (USACH), Santiago de Chile – Chile. Assistant Professor at the Department of Linguistics and Literature. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1587-7492>. E-mail: ana.marques@usach.cl

² Federal Institute of Paraná (IFPR), Pinhais – PR – Brazil. Teacher of Basic, Technical, and Technological Education. Member of the research group “Nucleus of linguistic and literary studies of the IFPR – NEELI”. Master in Linguistics. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1249-0276>. E-mail: thais.wojciechowski@ifpr.edu.br

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Competências digitais. PLA e PLAc. Ensino virtual emergencial. Letramento digital.*

RESUMEN: *El objetivo de este artículo es examinar el incremento de competencias digitales de profesores de PLA y de PLAc para su actuación en el contexto de enseñanza virtual. Nuestro interés surge de los desafíos que esta modalidad impone a las clases debido a la pandemia del virus Sars-CoV-2. Desarrollamos nuestra propuesta revisando estudios de áreas de enseñanza en entornos virtuales y de la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras. Nuestro diseño metodológico considera la configuración de un estudio de caso, en un abordaje cualitativo de los datos con el propósito de interpretar nuestro objeto de estudio. Los resultados apuntan a como los profesores enfrentan las presiones acerca de sus competencias digitales para responder a las necesidades inmediatas de sus contextos y reconocen una gran dependencia de la literacidad digital para su actuación profesional y para la formación de sus estudiantes, ofreciéndoles oportunidades de participación en los ámbitos educacionales y sociales en portugués.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Competencias digitales. PLA y PLAc. Enseñanza remota de emergencia. Literacidad digital.*

Introduction

Since the 1990s, the area of teaching and learning additional languages not only experiences the incorporation of emerging social practices of communication in resources, methods, and approaches but also understands that their presence in didactic contexts responds to social demands of language uses. In this sense, the use of information and communication technologies, ICTs, are gradually connecting new ways of communicating and producing meanings, in a movement that links the needs and experiences of our interactions outside and inside the classroom.

In the area of Portuguese as an Additional Language (PLA) (SCHLATER; GARCEZ, 2012) and in its emerging sub-area, Portuguese as a Welcoming Language (PLAc) (LOPEZ; DINIZ, 2019), the incorporation of ICTs seemed limited to its function of tool to support student development, in an era when digital literacy (COSCARELLI; RIBEIRO, 2005) gains prominence and status as an essential skill for daily, professional and educational interactions. Specifically in PLA, institutional and/or personal motivations and interests often guided initiatives around proposals for the virtualization of teaching and learning processes (MARQUES, 2021). However, we experience, from the year 2020, a transformation in the way we understand and develop teaching with the help of communication technologies as a consequence of the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic.

Under the name emergency remote teaching, Hodges et al. (2020) discuss the temporary changes that affect instructional processes caused by “crisis circumstances”. For these authors, using ICTs in emergency remote teaching contexts presupposes an analysis of how its main actors, that is, teachers and students, deal with and depend on their digital skills. For language teachers, the development of these competencies is no longer optional or support to their teaching techniques and resources, and has become a necessity, both for the adequate configuration of their classes, and to promote the development of these competencies by their students. According to Hodges et al. (2020), is correct to conclude that the demands to this new functionality of ICTs in classrooms go way beyond the methodological urgency that we faced, since digital literacy and digital competencies are now required in social contexts for study, work, and social interactions nowadays.

In this article, our attention is focused on teaching PLA and PLAc. We consider it valid to explore how both contexts are experiencing remote emergency teaching. In this way, we relate teacher education, digital skills, and the methodological mastery of teaching Portuguese – non-mother tongue – as requirements that make the practice of a virtual classroom especially challenging for the actors involved. Our objective is to examine the increase in the digital competencies of PLA and PLAc teachers for their performance in the context of virtual teaching, answering the following questions: a) “How do digital competencies impact the configuration of PLA/PLAc virtual classes, according to experiences of the teachers?”; and b) “How are pedagogical and digital competencies related to these teachers?”.

To collect and systematize this information, our research is based on an analysis of responses to online questionnaires that consider teachers' experiences with the use of technology, both prior to the emergence of remote teaching and in the current pandemic moment. We interpret their answers as ways of understanding the challenges of teaching PLA and PLAc, concerning the digital competencies of their main actors, in a way that, for sure, impacts and will impact teaching and students' learning experiences, either in a virtual, hybrid or face-to-face.

We structure this article as follows: first, we present a brief bibliographic review about studies that relate ICTs and language teaching and learning processes, among which we highlight experiences in the PLA area, and we approach digital competencies as skills needed by teachers. Next, we present the methodological design of our proposal, and then we summarize, in the analysis section, the responses compiled from the research carried out. Finally, in the last section of this article, we make some considerations about digital

competencies and teaching experiences in PLA/PLAc as guidelines for future teacher education practices, digital literacy, and the permanent incorporation of ICTs in their classes.

Between ICTs and Digital Skills of PLA Teachers: where are we?

Researchers and language teachers have long been interested in the potential of incorporating ICTs in the planning and development of courses, in teaching resources, and in supporting language teaching and learning activities. In the North American context, Egbert and Petrie (2005) refer to the first works in the area of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (or CALL, for its acronym in English, Computer Assisted Language Learning), which date back to 1991. According to this author, research in this area has been exploring learning experiences with, through, and around computing technologies. With the advent of the internet, there was a potential for complementarity of this tool concerning traditional classrooms.

In the Brazilian context, Paiva (2001) highlighted the transformations that the internet provided for a new language teaching. The author argued in favor of the technological literacy of teachers in formation, so that they could be “technologically literate” and know how to incorporate “these new forms of communication into their pedagogical planning” (PAIVA, 2001, p. 93). Affirmations that, two decades later, seem still largely valid.

About the use of ICTs in language teaching and learning, the work of Rodrigues, Muenchow, and Ribas (2017) highlight the responsibility of the teacher to know how to take advantage of them, take them to classrooms and use them as enhancers of student learning. This perspective is shared by Ribeiro (2014, p. 157), for whom the discussion about using ICTs no longer applies. This author argues about the appropriation of these tools, according to objectives and functions for the expansion of language, that is, about its “semiotic power”. As ICTs are based on participation and collaboration and, by themselves, do not guarantee the expansion of knowledge, Ribeiro (2014) asserts that it is up to teachers to integrate these practices that emerged outside educational environments into new teaching configurations and ways of learning.

In the area of LA, the development, research, and use of ICTs, we identified studies that reaffirm their role in supporting the development of language classes with the use of ICTs. We find, for example, the work of Silva (2013), whose focus is to show how ICTs are articulated with the educational and social context, and constitute complementary tools in the teaching-learning process of PLA. In turn, Cani (2020) discusses the contribution of tools

such as mobile learning as resources for language learning. Its objective is to review the potential that these applications have as support or complement to language development.

Two different initiatives regarding the support function of PLA classes are presented below. In the first one, Kelm (2013) articulates the notions of authentic texts, participation, and collaboration provided by ICTs in his project “Conversa Brasileira”, a set of online audiovisual resources for the development of Portuguese for English speakers. The second, as an institutional initiative to virtualize the teaching of PLA, is the course “Pluralities in Brazilian Portuguese”, from the University of Campinas. Installed on Stanford University's Coursera platform for distance learning, it is a course open to the public, structured, and dependent on ICTs. Such a proposal certainly allows a greater projection for the virtualization of the PLA area from the Brazilian context.

The works reviewed in this section reveal incipient possibilities for the use of resources available in the virtual context for teaching and learning languages, showing that, in this space, the PLA area still lacks studies. We see how these practices leave open a wide path that depends on training in digital skills currently required by PLA teachers. And on this term, digital competencies characterized below, we emphasize the need and urgency of its incorporation into the (continuous) education of teachers.

When we refer to digital skills, we address a set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to the technological domain (SILVA; BEHAR, 2019) that must be considered in a specific context, such as education, work, and citizenship. This knowledge involves the use of technology to obtain, exchange and produce information, critically evaluate it, and participate, through the internet, in communication practices.

We highlight, in the publication of the European Framework of Digital Competence for Educators, in 2017, the configuration of a proposal to characterize digital competencies for teachers in all areas. Its functionality lies in offering parameters for self-assessment, grounds for education, and encouraging the incorporation of teaching strategies based on the use of digital tools. Its structure articulates the professional competencies of teachers with their pedagogical competencies to promote, in turn, the digital competence of learners.

Although the reality of PLA teaching in different contexts is different, both in terms of teacher formation, institutional resources, student needs, and resources, and also that the European reality cannot be transposed to our Latin American reality, we consider it valid, in a mere guide, a careful analysis about the descriptors of digital competencies presented in the DigCompEdu Table.

In the following section, Methodology, we present how our exploratory research proposal on the digital competencies of PLA teachers was configured.

Methodology

We developed this research proposal based on a qualitative approach, through a case study (GÜNTHER, 2006) to understand how PLA and PLAc teachers have been dealing with the virtual teaching imposed in the current pandemic context. We incorporated in our systematization some numerical data that support the interpretation of the information obtained.

As a data collection instrument, we used 2 (two) questionnaires prepared using the Google Forms tool. The first of them was aimed at teachers working in different PLA contexts, and the second was at teachers working specifically in the PLAc context. Understanding that PLAc teaching differs from other PLA sub-areas due to its specific characteristics, we chose to offer a questionnaire reserved for professors in this area, so that it was possible to analyze the answers with this context as a reference.

To gain access to these informing professors and the possibility of contacting them, we used the snowball technique, in which professors replicate the invitation to participate in the research among their peers, inside or outside their institutions.

The data obtained were collected in July 2021 and resulted from responses from 21 (twenty-one) participants, 10 (ten) PLA teachers, and 11 (eleven) PLAc teachers. The questionnaires contained multiple-choice items and items for essay response, most of which were optional. Both questionnaires were composed of 13 (thirteen) identical questions, however, the PLA questionnaire also contained an initial question, which we defined as question 0 (zero), which sought to delimit in which PLA context the teacher works. In the analysis we present in this article; we focus on the answers obtained to questions 1 to 7.

As for the participants in this study, of the 10 PLA informants, we obtained the following data: 50% taught Portuguese classes for academic purposes (teaching undergraduate or graduate students), 20% worked in Portuguese for different interests (private courses or free/extension), 10% in Portuguese as a heritage language and, using the open-response option “Others”, 20% of the teachers reported working in all the contexts presented, including here also the option “Portuguese for Business”. PLAc teachers did not need to specify their work contexts, as working in this subarea was a prerequisite for answering the questionnaire.

The brief analysis to be presented is a non-generalizable sample obtained for the purposes of this study, and the research and discussion on the subject cannot be ended here.

Data analysis

We present below an analysis of the responses obtained to the two questionnaires designed to collect data for this research. To systematize the information that we were able to compile from these instruments, we will present, in this article, a synthesis of the sets of responses in two categories, Virtual Classes, and Digital Competencies.

Category 1: Virtual Classes

The answers obtained to questions 1 to 4, presented in Table 1, reveal differences between the opinions of professors working in the PLA context and of professors working in the PLAc context.

Table 1 – Questions 1 to 4

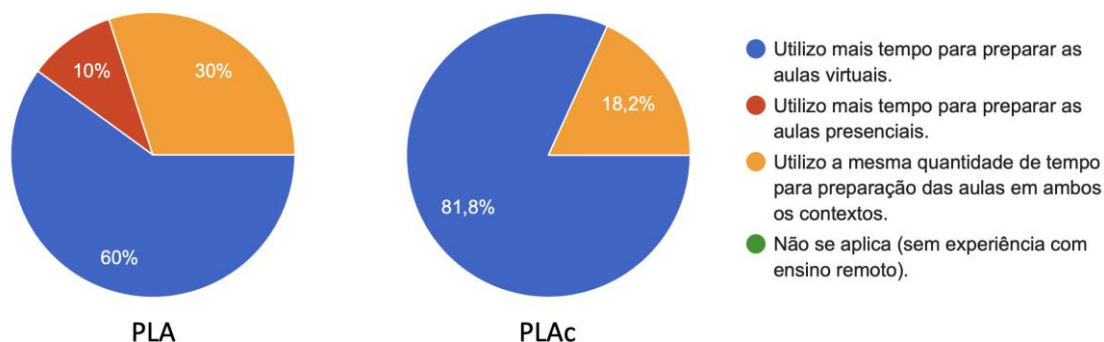
1. Have you ever worked with PLA/PLAc teaching through virtual classes?
2. Regarding the time to prepare the classes, indicate (see Graph 1)
3. Regarding confidence in your planning for lessons, check (see Graph 2)
4. About your ability to deal with unforeseen circumstances, indicate (see Graph 3)

Source: Prepared by the authors

To question 1, 60% of PLA teachers answered in the affirmative, due to the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic, while 40% reported that they already worked with remote teaching in PLA even before the pandemic. A different reality pointed out by PLAc teachers, 100% attested to working through virtual classes as a result of the pandemic.

In question 2, we could see how much the professors have made an effort to work in a new reality. Virtual teaching demands learning, questioning of already consolidated practices, and constant reflections arising from experiments carried out through the trial-error-improvement triad. The data that corroborate this statement are in Graph 1 below:

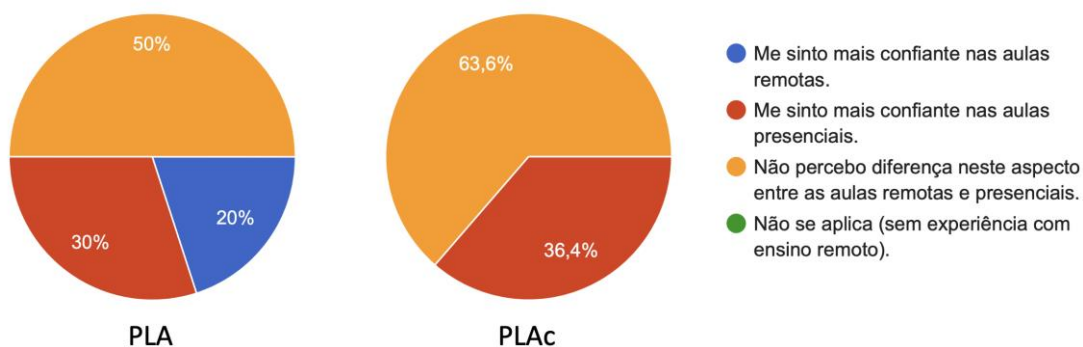
Graphic 1 – Time dedicated to class preparation



Source: Prepared by the authors.

With question number 3, we intended to verify whether virtual teaching had affected the teachers' feeling of confidence concerning a crucial point in their practice. The answers obtained are systematized in Graph 2 below:

Graph 2 – Confidence in practice

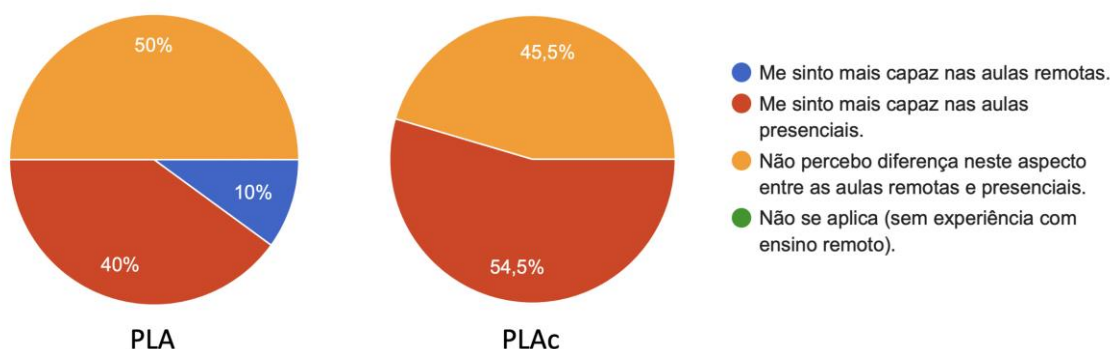


Source: Prepared by the authors.

These results demonstrate that, although most teachers, in both contexts studied, do not feel their confidence is affected, there is a significant portion, especially among PLAc teachers who feel more confident in a face-to-face context. Exclusively in PLA teaching, there are professors who feel more confident about planning their classes when destined for the virtual context.

In the answers to question 4, which referred to the ability of teachers to deal with unforeseen events, the information obtained reveals that most PLAc teachers feel more capable in face-to-face classes:

Graph 3 – Dealing with the unforeseen



Source: Prepared by the authors

Category 2: Digital Skills

In this category, we explore the answers to questions 5, 6 and 7.

Table 2 – Questions 5 to 7

5. Regarding the use of digital tools and resources, mention those that you usually use in your virtual classes.

6. How do you evaluate your teacher formation to work with ICTs in PLAc classes?

7. Could you mention some adaptations (concerning face-to-face teaching) or new practices that you carried out/used in the virtual teaching of PLA/PLAc?

Source: Prepared by the authors

In the answers to question 5, there is a diversity of resources mentioned, including sites, platforms, tools, and resources for online presentations. The data show that more traditional and more familiar resources for teachers are the most used in their classes. Nevertheless, there are mentions in both groups of several specific resources for virtual teaching, which shows that teachers are gradually experimenting and becoming familiar with new possibilities. Likewise, it is interesting to note that only PLAc teachers mentioned the use of social networks, audio recording, and translation tools as digital resources for teaching. In terms of the number of cited resources, this group also surpassed PLA teachers, with 27 tools or resources cited, compared to 21. This result is compatible with the considerations made from the previous analysis, PLAc teachers have a bigger challenge in the remote teaching model, so they seek more resources and diversify them to optimize their classes.

Question 6 refers to a self-assessment proposal related to teacher formation and the use of ICTs. For this purpose, we used descriptors from the DigCompEdu Table, paraphrased and systematized in Table 3 below:

Table 3 – DigCompEdu Framework Descriptors

	PLA	PLAc
a) I had little contact with digital tools and I need guidance to expand my repertoire.	10%	0%
b) I have already started using digital tools, but I do not follow specific strategies for their use.	10%	54.5%
c) I experiment with different digital tools for a variety of purposes.	30%	27.3%
d) I use a repertoire of digital tools safely, creatively, and critically.	50%	18.2%
e) I draw on a wide repertoire of flexible, complete, and effective digital tools.	0%	0%
f) I question contemporary digital and pedagogical practices, of which I myself am the protagonist.	0%	0%

Source: Prepared by the authors

When answering question 7, the teachers pointed out that their adaptations to virtual teaching were aimed at reorienting the classes “to ensure that the student is not so distracted by 'other tabs' during the class” and to work in smaller groups “to ensure student participation”. They also referred to the “reduction in the use of grammatical exercises, reduction of exclusively expository instances”, as well as the need to “use more virtual resources, master online teaching tools, and educational platforms.” Likewise, PLAc professors indicated a concern with the “interaction” component, characterized as “essential”. We observed how these answers meet the reflections on the use of digital communication technologies in language teaching and learning to build virtual learning environments based on collaboration, active participation, and student leading roles (CHINAGLIA; MENDONÇA, 2017). This is a change in the culture of teaching and in the culture of learning that, forced by the current pandemic context, will reorient the practices and continuous education of PLA and PLAc teachers.

Final considerations

The brief bibliographic review that we present, articulated with the answers to the research carried out, shows us the need for interaction and a collaborative teaching approach in virtual contexts. Thus, there is an invitation and a challenge for teachers who are – or who will inevitably be – teaching in a virtual context. It is imperative to change the paradigm, the understanding that the virtual context is not an adaptation of the face-to-face and that the methodologies for teaching in digital media are not face-to-face methodologies facilitated by virtual resources. It is about constant learning about a new way of acting based on collaborative learning carried out through the interaction between all the actors involved.

We observed that institutions need to provide teachers with initial and continuing education on teaching mediated by digital communication and information technologies. PLA and PLAc teachers, in turn, experience the incorporation of digital technologies into their practices, adapting their methodologies as their digital skills increase, with an evident concern about interaction in classes.

We know that the widespread start of remote classes took place during a period of crisis, without consistent formation for this. The teaching of PLA and PLAc, distant, until recently, from virtualization initiatives, follows a path of experimentation, adaptations, and reality shocks with the impact of the health emergency. As stated by Ribeiro (2014, p. 157), learning in the present articulates the questions as and which technological tools to incorporate and for which functions it is intended to use them. With the answers analyzed in this article, we realize the current need, and that will certainly be updated, to learn about non-face-to-face teaching. At the same time, teachers once again question and reorient their PLA and PLAc classes regarding their potential for the production, expression, and participation of students in literacy practices. Coincidentally, all this can be made, why not, in a collaborative way, and in a virtual context.

REFERENCES

- CANI, J. B. Tecnologias Digitais Móveis e o ensino de Língua Portuguesa para estrangeiros. **Letras de Hoje**, Porto Alegre, v. 55, n. 4, p. 496-513, 2020. Available: <https://revistaseletronicas.pucrs.br/ojs/index.php/fale/article/view/38183/26581>. Access: 12 July 2021.
- CHINAGLIA, J. V.; MENDONÇA, M. Materiais didáticos para os novos e multiletramentos: uma proposta de atividade gamificada. **Linguagem em Foco**, Fortaleza, v. 9, n. 1, p. 39-52,

2017. Available: <https://revistas.uece.br/index.php/linguagememfoco/article/view/1533/1280>. Access: 20 May 2021.

COSCARELLI, C. V.; RIBEIRO, A. E. (org.). **Letramento digital: Aspectos sociais e possibilidades pedagógicas**. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica, 2005.

EGBERT, J. L.; PETRIE, G. M. **Call Research Perspectives**. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005.

GÜNTHER, H. Pesquisa qualitativa versus pesquisa quantitativa: esta é a questão? **Psicologia: Teoria e Pesquisa**, Brasília, v. 22, n. 2, p. 201-210, 2006. Available: <https://www.scielo.br/j/ptp/a/HMpC4d5cbXsdt6RqbrmZk3J/?format=pdf&lang=pt>. Access: 12 July 2021.

HODGES, C. *et al.* The Difference Between Emergency Remote Teaching and Online Learning. **Educause**, Boulder, March 27, 2020. Available: <https://er.educause.edu/articles/2020/3/the-difference-between-emergency-remote-teaching-and-online-learning>. Access: 12 July 2021.

KELM, O. **Conversa Brasileira**. Austin: COERLL, University of Texas, 2013. Available: <https://open.umn.edu/opentextbooks/textbooks/251>. Access: 12 July 2021.

LOPEZ, A. P.; DINIZ, L. R. A. Iniciativas jurídicas e acadêmicas para o acolhimento no Brasil de deslocados forçados. **Revista da Sociedade Internacional Português Língua Estrangeira Siple**, v. 9, 2019.

MARQUES, A. L. S. Competências digitais e práticas de ensino de PLE a hispanofalantes em contexto universitário *online* de emergência. **Revista Signo Edunisc**, v. 46, n. 85, p. 70-82, 2021. Available: <https://online.unisc.br/seer/index.php/signo/issue/view/667>. Access: 12 July 2021.

PAIVA, V. L. M. O. A WWW e o ensino de inglês. **Revista Brasileira de Linguística Aplicada**, v. 1, n. 1, p. 93-116, 2001. Available: <https://www.scielo.br/j/rbla/a/s5xKpGJ5TL4dTWYTsGjx74s/?lang=pt&format=pdf>. Access: 12 July 2021.

RIBEIRO, A. E. Tecnologias na educação: questões e desafios para a produção de sentidos. **Práticas de Linguagem**, v. 4, n. 2, p. 152- 158, jul./dez. 2014. Available: <https://www.ufjf.br/praticasdelinguagem/files/2014/09/152-158-Tecnologias-na-Educação.pdf>. Access: 12 July 2021.

RODRIGUES, J.; MUENCHOW, N.; RIBAS, F. A utilização de softwares para o ensino de inglês como L2: o Edilim como ferramenta para promover a aprendizagem na sala de aula invertida. **Veredas on-line**, Juiz de Fora, v. 21, n. 1, p. 21-39, 2017. Available: <https://www.ufjf.br/revistaveredas/files/2017/09/ARTIGO-2.pdf>. Access: 12 July 2021.

SCHLATER, M.; GARCEZ, P. M. **Línguas adicionais na escola: aprendizagens colaborativas em inglês**. Erechim: Edelbra, 2012.

SILVA, I. de S. da. O uso das TIC pelos professores e alunos Centro de Estudos Brasileiros (Asunción, Paraguay), dentro do contexto educativo e social como ferramentas complementares no processo ensino-aprendizagem de PLE. **Vozes dos Vales**, Diamantina, n. 4, ano 2, p. 01-23, 2013. Available: <http://site.ufvjm.edu.br/revistamultidisciplinar/files/2014/03/O-uso-das-TIC-pelos-professores-e-alunos-Centro-de-Estudos-Brasileiros-Asunci%C3%B3n-Paraguay.pdf>. Access: 12 July 2021.

SILVA, K. K. A. da; BEHAR, P. A. Competências Digitais na Educação: uma discussão acerca do conceito. **Educação em Revista**, Belo Horizonte, v. 35, p. 1-32, 2019. Available: <https://www.scielo.br/j/edur/a/wPS3NwLTxtKgZBmpQyNfdVg/?lang=pt>. Access: 12 July 2021.

How to reference this article

MARQUES, A. L. S.; WOJCIECHOWSKI, T. Digital competencies for PLA and PLAc teachers: A path with no shortcuts or returns. **Rev. EntreLínguas**, Araraquara, v. 7, n. esp. 6, e021136, Dec. 2021. e-ISSN: 2447-3529. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.29051/el.v7iesp.6.15348>

Submitted: 06/08/2021

Revisions required: 21/09/2021

Approved: 29/11/2021

Published: 28/12/2021