

NEEDS ANALYSIS FOR A PORTUGUESE CURRICULUM DESIGN: PROFILING THE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY

ANÁLISE DE NECESSIDADES PARA O DESENVOLVIMENTO DE UM CURRÍCULO DE LÍNGUA PORTUGUESA: PERFILANDO A COMUNIDADE ACADÊMICA

ANÁLISIS DE NECESIDADES PARA EL DISEÑO DE UN CURRÍCULO DE PORTUGUÉS: PERFIL DE LA COMUNIDAD ACADÉMICA

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ABSTRACT: This article discusses one of the crucial steps in the development of a curriculum for an online course of Brazilian Portuguese to international students: the needs analysis. The study relies on a theoretical framework for curriculum in language courses, pragmatics for language teaching, and the impact of a solid needs analysis for the curriculum. Results suggest that, besides the complexity of choosing questions and verifying the patterns in the answers, a needs analysis is a valuable tool for profiling an academic community and identifying lacks and wants in a teaching and learning process.

KEYWORDS: Portuguese as an additional language. Teaching for academic purposes. Needs analysis. Curriculum design.

RESUMO: *Este artigo se dedica a uma parte crucial do desenvolvimento de currículos para cursos on-line de Português brasileiro para estudantes internacionais: a análise de necessidades. Este estudo se concretiza a partir de um quadro teórico sobre currículos para cursos de línguas, ensino de pragmática e o impacto de uma análise de necessidades sólida para o currículo. Os resultados sugerem que, apesar da complexidade em escolher questões e em verificar os padrões nas respostas obtidas, uma análise de necessidades é uma ferramenta valiosa para o perfilamento da comunidade acadêmica e para a identificação de lacunas e desejos envolvidos no processo de aprendizagem.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Português como língua adicional. Ensino para fins acadêmicos. Análise de necessidades. Desenvolvimento de currículo.*

RESUMEN: *Este artículo analiza uno de los pasos cruciales en el diseño de un plan de estudios para un curso en portugués brasileño para estudiantes internacionales: el análisis de necesidades. El estudio se basa en una teoría para el plan de estudios en cursos de idiomas, la pragmática para la enseñanza de idiomas y el impacto de un análisis sólido de*

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necesidades para el currículo. Los resultados sugieren que, además de la complejidad de elegir preguntas y verificar los patrones en las respuestas, un análisis de necesidades es una herramienta valiosa para perfilar una comunidad académica e identificar carencias y deseos en un proceso de enseñanza y aprendizaje.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Portugués como idioma adicional. Docencia con fines académicos. Análisis de necesidades. Diseño de currículo.*

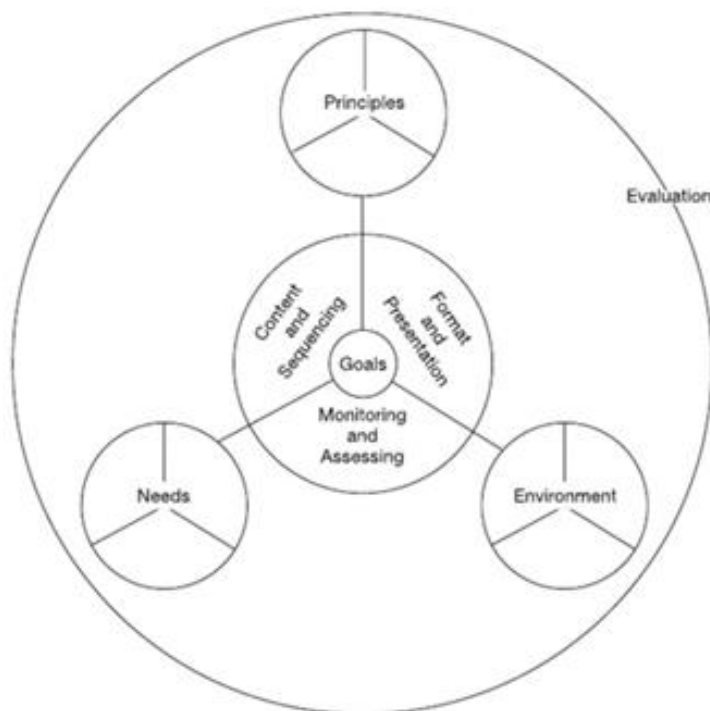
The basis for curriculum design: an introduction

The curriculum is a term that first appeared in the 1600s, in order to name a study plan. Among the current definitions, a curriculum is classified as formal or informal. The former is used to describe a solid and closed curriculum, and the latter is dedicated to more flexible plans. Based on that, we believe the curriculum is a pedagogical plan, with goals, content, and assessment criteria (aspects from the formal one), but it is also flexible and adaptable to every group involved.

Curriculum development is therefore synonymous with syllabus design, especially when it comes to language curricula. In this sense, the selection of themes, activities, texts, and any other aspect involved in the future course to be delivered is the main purpose of a designing process. We should have in mind, though, vocabulary and grammar are not always basic units to language courses, although they are necessary to learn additional languages (henceforth L2), and learners' needs are not always focused on language needs.

As a means to solve these problems and to respond to assumptions like the ones aforementioned, Nation and Macalister (2010) developed inner circles that represent what a curriculum must contain in order to achieve its own proposed goals:

Figure 1 – Nation’s & Macalister’s model of a curriculum design



Source: Nation and Macalister (2010)

Firstly, according to these authors, it is imperative to figure out what the needs involved in the process are – regarding the students and the professors, teachers, or instructors. At the same time, it is important to rely the practices on pedagogical material and theories, on individual differences, and on motivation factors in order to build a solid but also flexible curriculum.

The environment and its particularities are other decisive factors for the practices to be taken into account. Lastly, the goals to be achieved are the reason for all the designing process; this is why the authors placed it in the middle of the circles. These items are the ones responsible for establishing the content, the sequencing, the assessments, the format, and the presentation of the course.

In the case of the curriculum developed by Antunes (2020), a needs analysis (henceforth NA) was performed in order to gather data about a representative sample of the people who would be involved in an online Brazilian Portuguese (henceforth BP) course for international students. It is important to mention that the principles assumed in this article rely on pragmatics (KASPER; ROSE, 2002) and the speech act theory (AUSTIN, 1975; SEARLE, 1979). The environment was also chosen and analyzed through the NA rationale, which gave us responses on how the format may work and which materials may be used in order to guide the students to the common goal of the course. The NA is, among other things, an attempt to

answer questions related to what Nation and Macalister (2010) indicated as mandatory background information in a process of designing a language curriculum.

A curriculum for academic purposes: “principles”, “needs”, and “environment” inner circles

The area of “Academic purposes” (SWALES; FEAKE, 1994; HYLAND, 2006) encompasses the language and the texts used in the university. In this sense, it is possible to affirm that teaching for academic purposes constitutes one of the most important parts of the curriculum design for language courses since it is responsible for setting the principles and the general guidelines that should be followed.

In the Brazilian scenario, language for academic purposes, mainly BP for academic purposes, is focused on students and faculty writing rather than any other category listed by Hyland. Motta-Roth and Hedges (2010) suggested this practice is based on the belief that academic productivity and publishing are synonymous. The main academic texts with different functions emerge from the university. These texts are easily characterized by their themes, objectives, and organization, which impacts directly their writing.

One strategy to teach and therefore to produce these texts is related to the digital context in which the students (international or not) are immersed. Chapelle (2008) clearly states that teachers must be prepared to use technology in their classes because the more the learners use it outside the classroom, the more they expect to find it inside the educational environment. This is the purpose of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (henceforth CALL), a field in which researchers analyze and suggest the use of some technological tools in order to improve language learning.

The environmental part of the curriculum proposed by Antunes (2020) is CALL, that is, e-learning. Using CALL for distance learning is, therefore, an endeavor to provide the learners the needed support for autonomous learning, because it adapts the content of a language course to the future needs at the university.

We strongly believe that providing online BP classes to international students through CALL may be an effective way for them to scaffold learning levels among activities of increasing complexity. In order to do so, it is imperative to be aware of the profile of the target group, to select the most suitable pedagogical materials, and to choose the most appropriate technological environment.

When talking about the teaching of additional languages, it is impossible to avoid the curriculum issue. There is a large number of researchers who point out the need for students' information in order to design the activities and the materials which will be used in the classroom – both face-to-face or in e-learning.

González-Lloret (2014) goes beyond the classical definition and establishes that NAs should address linguistics and pragmatics necessities when it comes to language learning; also, a NA should gather information about digital skills and innovations in terms of technological resources to the classroom.

We strongly believe that a NA is a valuable tool since it has the conditions to portray a multicultural and multilingual group of international students enrolled in undergraduate or graduate courses. As the objective of a NA is to guide the process of designing activities, by choosing materials and assessing knowledge, becoming aware of the students' authentic needs is certainly helpful.

Needs analysis for curriculum design: methodology description

This article aims at describing the process of creating a NA questionnaire and the impacts of the data gathered to the curriculum design for a Portuguese as Additional Language (henceforth PAL) online course in a higher education institution (HEI) in the south of Brazil. Thus, the intention is to explain the aspects identified as relevant for the teaching of PAL, especially when it occurs from the perspective of CALL, and in academic contexts.

The steps presented in the following sections were based on the description of how the NA was built and why its questions were chosen. Also, due to the second objective of this article, a brief analysis of the aspects considered by international students and professors as positive or to be improved in the teaching of PAL in the higher education institution where the research was conducted will be presented. In order to do so, this section is divided into two topics: firstly, the sampling criteria are presented; lastly, the questionnaire creation and application are described.

Sampling criteria

For this research, the sample was composed of two different groups: international students and professors. Both groups were contacted via mailing lists. All professors who

worked at this HEI in 2019 and all international students enrolled there between 2016 and 2019 received the disclosure of the research and the questionnaire to be answered.

International students are, as a general rule, born and raised in foreign countries. They came for immersion programs at this HEI to carry out a short period of an exchange program during their (under)graduation. Students with this profile were invited to answer the students' questionnaire after their length of stay at the HEI. This is due to the fact that they had to have their exchange program completed to be able to talk about their experiences – clearly and somehow with a distant and analytical point of view. Perceptions could be underrated or overestimated if they were still at the HEI.

The HEI's faculty received the invitation to complete a different questionnaire. The aims of this NA were: (a) to draw a profile of the professors involved with face-to-face teaching in order not to overlap activities already carried out in the institution, and (b) to identify the methodologies and technological resources used by the faculty as a means to ensure the online course would not be a completely new trend in that educational context.

The questionnaire

Two questionnaires were developed in a Google Forms template, one for the students' and one for the faculty's needs analysis. This tool was chosen because it is a free platform, with an easy interface to create the questions and also to gather the necessary information from the participants.

A first review of the questionnaires had been made by the research group of Use and Processing of Additional Languages (UPLA). Questions were carefully read and some changes were made concerning language adequacy, punctuation, display of questions, and terminology. After that, the questionnaires were sent to three faculty members from the HEI's School of Humanities. The three professors read the questionnaires as judges, and also suggested some improvements.

Informed consent was added to the first section of the NA. The consent was approved by the HEI's Ethics Committee (CAAE: 48376615.5.0000.5336). By accepting this consent, participants declared themselves aware of the research objectives and were informed they could ask for new information about the tool anytime.

Before applying the NA with the sample of this research, the questionnaires were sent to three English instructors. They were English L1 speakers (US Citizens), but proficient in

Portuguese. They also read the questions carefully, answered them, and evaluated them in order to check if they were clear and assertive.

Only after that, the forms were sent by the Office for International Cooperation to all international students enrolled at PUCRS between 2016 and 2019; the faculty's questionnaires were sent by the Communication and Marketing Advisory to all professors who were currently working at the university. Involving Institutional departments in this process was a conscious decision in order to avoid interactions between the researchers and the participants - unless respondents needed any additional information.

The questionnaire: gathering data through needs analysis

In this section, we will introduce the questions that integrate the questionnaire used by Antunes (2020) in order to gather information from the target public. After presenting the questionnaires, the reasons that evoked those questions will be discussed, and some results will be shown.

Students' questionnaire

The international students' form was divided into six sections, 25 mandatory questions, and six optional questions. Part one was dedicated to informed consent to online studies – which was not counted as a question. In this part, students had to decide if they continued to answer the questionnaire based on information provided by the researcher. Part two had the aim of gathering general information about the participants. Questions in this section were:

- (MSQ³01) What is your full name?
- (MSQ02) How old are you now?
- (MSQ03) How old were you when you were at PUCRS?
- (MSQ04) Where are you from?
- (MSQ05) How many times have you been at this HEI? (Considering long lengths of stay, such as exchange programs – for instance, “twice: one in undergraduate course and one in graduate course).
- (MSQ06) In which academic semester were you at this HEI?
- (MSQ07) Which course did you take at this HEI? Was it an undergraduate program? Or was it a graduate program?
- (MSQ08) What is the name of the course you are enrolled in at your home university?

³ MSQ stands for Mandatory in Students' Questionnaire.

Asking for the students' full names was an endeavor to control which students have effectively filled in the form and also to keep the data anonymous. Also, it was a way to effectively control who should receive the deadline reminders. Questions about age revealed the profile of the participants. With this information, the curriculum can be adapted to the themes and activities that attract most of the public in a certain age range, which is a theme of studies of the individual differences of acquiring an additional language.

Researchers suggest that age is an imperative factor in language learning and state that young learners tend to acquire an L2 faster and with more proficiency in terms of fluency. On the other hand, they also state that adolescents and adults tend to have better grammar since the regular process of teaching adults starts from syntax and morphology rather than pronunciation in an attempt to establish correspondences between target and native language. Getting to know the students' age range is an attempt to identify the needed complexity for language teaching.

Another intersection with studies on individual differences has to do with the purposes of learning a new language. As shown in the data collected in the aforementioned questionnaire, the subjects have the specific goal of learning BP as a means to improve skills on academic and/or professional domains, for either current or further achievements. Based on the goals set by the students, it is possible to say that their success in the process of learning an L2 is also a matter of social impact since such an opportunity is a synonym to getting to know other cultures.

When the topic came to the international students' country of origin, data indicate which is the native language and the language repertoire of the participants. For curriculum design, it can guide the search for and the development of activities and resources that may be more or less appropriate to the target public. Considering the activities during their period at the HEI, getting to know which courses and programs the students were enrolled in might be a path to select texts and draw activities to the curriculum, as was the case suggested by Antunes (2020).

Part three of the questionnaire was named "learning additional languages" because it aimed at collecting some notes about the process of language learning. Questions in this section were:

- (MSQ09) Indicate below all languages you know in the order they were learned. Remember: number one is your native language.
(MSQ10) How confidently do you READ in each language you learn?

Answers were indicated on a Likert Scale from 1 (not confident) to 5 (totally confident).

(MSQ11) How confidently do you WRITE in each language you learn?

Answers were indicated on a Likert Scale from 1 (not confident) to 5 (totally confident).

(MSQ12) How confidently do you SPEAK in each language you learn?

Answers were indicated on a Likert Scale from 1 (not confident) to 5 (totally confident).

(MSQ13) How confidently do you LISTEN in each language you learn?

Answers were indicated on a Likert Scale from 1 (not confident) to 5 (totally confident).

(MSQ14) Indicate below where you have learned each language you speak.

Mark all options, if necessary. The options that could be marked were: home; school or university; language courses; by yourself; academic mobility/exchange programs.

When participants were invited to answer some questions about what languages they knew until that moment, where they learned it (them), and what was their confidence level considering each one of them, they revealed formal education has not always provided opportunities for using real language in context (ANTUNES, 2020). By the answers, students also informed how they boosted their confidence in using Portuguese. For the curriculum, it represents opportunities to set strategies in order to fulfill possible gaps and needs: less confidence in writing, for instance, may be faced as a need for tasks exploring this linguistic competence.

Part four was entitled “Portuguese Language” and investigated how the participants dealt with BP, during and after the academic mobility. Questions in this section were:

(MSQ15) While a student at this HEI, have you been enrolled in a course to learn Portuguese?

(OSQ⁴01) In case your answer was “yes”, how would you evaluate your progress in that course?

Answers were indicated on a Likert Scale from 1 (completely unsatisfied) to 5 (totally satisfied).

(OSQ02) Indicate only one reason that supports your previous answer.

(MSQ16) Indicate, on a scale from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high), which was the impact – generally – from each of the following factors in your process of learning Portuguese.

Activities: interaction with friends; readings; television, series, and movies; music; internet and apps; games; and language courses.

(OSQ03) Is there any activity that might have influenced your learning process? If yes, which?

(MSQ17) How often did you perform the following activities in Portuguese BEFORE traveling to Brazil?

The scale of evaluation was from 0 (never) to 6 (daily). Activities: talking to friends; speaking at the university; reading at the university; writing at the university; reading on social media; writing on social media; reading non-

⁴ OSQ stands for Optional in Students' Questionnaire.

academic texts; writing non-academic texts; playing video games; using apps; watching television, series or movies; listening to music.

(MSQ18) How often did you realize the following activities in Portuguese AFTER traveling to Brazil?

The scale of evaluation was from 0 (never) to 6 (daily). Activities: talking to friends; speaking at the university; reading at the university; writing at the university; reading on social media; writing on social media; reading non-academic texts; writing non-academic texts; playing video games; using apps; watching television, series or movies; listening to music.

(OSQ04) According to your self-assessment, indicate how proficient you are in Portuguese.

Answers were indicated on a Likert Scale from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high). Activities: reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

(MSQ19) Have you ever handed one of the following academic texts? If yes, which of them?

Options: note taking, review, abstract, expanded abstract, scientific article, review article, and research project. There was an open item for the students to indicate any other academic text.

(MSQ20) Have you ever presented one of the following spoken texts? If yes, which of them?

Options: presentation in the classroom, conference or seminar, communication in events, poster, oral defense (monograph, thesis or dissertation). There was an open item for the students to indicate any other spoken text.

Knowing which and how often the students performed some activities may lead the curriculum to encompass or not a certain kind of task. For example, if the students are willing to play video games, gamification can be a reasonable choice for testing their progress in the language which is being learned. If the target public is willing to learn grammar, choices may be different for the curriculum progression. All these features may be contrasted with individual differences in research on intrinsic motivation to learn new languages (DÖRNYEI, 2005; KASPER; ROSE, 2002).

It is safe to say the more the students are immersed and consuming BP materials⁵, the more they use native-like language. By including materials, they already know it may be a way to keep those students interested and focused on the lessons. Additionally, knowing which academic texts international students are used to producing and all the information about their knowledge on BP and other languages is certainly helpful for the design of the curriculum.

Part five considered technology issues, such as the operational tasks the participants were expected to perform if they were enrolled in an online course. Questions in this section were:

⁵ BP materials, in this case, are a broad term to encompass inputs in the form of textbooks, grammar, readers, songs, among others.

(MSQ21) How confident are you in performing the following activities?
Answers were indicated on a Likert Scale from 1 (not confident) to 5 (totally confident). Activities: open and close tabs in the browser; find icons; access videos, photos and other links in the web page; read online texts; do quizzes and other online activities; write online texts; login and logout pages; and select reliable sources for academic research.

(MSQ22) Have you ever attended a 100% online course?

(OSQ05) Indicate the reasons that led you to (a) finish, (b) start, but not finish, and (c) not attend an online course.

(MSQ23) If PUCRS had offered a 100% online course about Portuguese for academic purposes before your exchange program, would you attend it?

(OSQ06) Indicate a reason that supports your previous answer.

According to González-Lloret (2014), it is imperative to investigate not only the linguistic needs of L2 learners but also their technological demands, that is, the support they need in order to perform some specific activities in technological equipment and software.

Besides the fact that the vast majority might declare themselves totally confident in working with technological resources, part of the students might not know how to do so. Because of that, it is essential to know the tools with which the students are struggling and to provide resources to overcome that difficulty. Additionally, the difficulty in performing online activities may be caused by overloaded pages with unnecessary content and icons. Designing a clear curriculum and modern layouts, with only the required information, can be an alternative to attract and engage as many participants as possible.

To finish the form, part six invited the participants to describe the positive and negative aspects they faced during their mobility program at the HEI. Questions in the section were open to the student's writing:

(MSQ24) Which are the strengths of Portuguese classes at the HEI?

(MSQ25) Which are the weaknesses of Portuguese classes at the HEI?

Becoming aware of the positive aspects and issues to be improved is more important than it seems. It is not an easy task though. In the educational system, it means revising teaching methods and techniques, setting new goals, accepting personal and team faults, leaving the comfort zone, planning new lessons, and reconsidering subjects in an endeavor to meet the expectations of the entire academic community. Nonetheless, it is a process in which the participants recognize the projects, lessons, content, and moments that should happen to lead to good results.

When it comes to the study of pragmatics and speech acts, as in the case of Antunes (2020), it is imperative that every involved person may be aware of the needed achievements, if the goal is to promote pragmatic awareness, which does not have to do with the learning of

the speech act per se but with the sensitivity to notice their use as a previous step (AUSTIN, 1975; SEARLE, 1979). To sum up, a section like this reinforces the need for students to have information about the purposes of the course they take.

Faculty's questionnaire

The faculty's questionnaire was shorter: it had four sections, 14 mandatory questions, and four optional questions. Part one was also dedicated to informed consent. In this part, faculty had to decide if they continued to answer the questionnaire based on information provided by the researcher. Part two intended to gather personal information about the participant professors. Questions presented in this section were:

- (MFQ01) What is your full name?
- (MFQ02) In what program and School do you teach?
- (MFQ03) In which language have you always taught at this HEI?
- (MFQ04) For how long have you been teaching this language?
- (MFQ05) For how long have you been teaching at this HEI?

Data provided by this section of a NA may exemplify what the consolidated methods and techniques used by faculty to teach a large number of classes are and the schools and areas in which they teach. Concerning the curriculum design, it represents a landscape, a map of how lessons are being delivered, and which are the practices that may be applied to the newest curriculum.

Part three was called “academic genre”, since its goal is to investigate which texts were produced in the (under)graduate courses, mainly in the classes in which international students were enrolled. Questions from this section were:

- (MFQ06) Which of the following academic texts do you request in your classes?
Options: note-taking, review, abstract, expanded abstract, scientific article, review article, and research project. There was an open item for the faculty to indicate any other academic text.
- (MFQ07) Which of the following spoken texts do you request in your classes?
Options: individual presentation, seminars, participation in class. There was an open item for the faculty to indicate any other possibilities.
- (MFQ08) Which formatting pattern is required in your classes?
Options: ABNT, APA, MLA, Vancouver. There was an open item for the faculty to indicate any other possibilities.
- (MFQ09) Have you ever received any international students in the courses you teach?

(OFQ01) In case your previous answer was yes, how often?

(MFQ10) Do you know any resource available at this HEI that can help students, especially international ones, regarding the language and formatting of texts adopted at the university? If yes, which one(s)?

Data gathered in this part of the questionnaire suggest whether or not the students are being encouraged to produce different text genres within the classes they took in their undergraduate courses. Both written and oral academic texts were evaluated, so the students probably had the time and the support to accomplish the tasks. For a curriculum under development, this information expands the number of possible tasks to be outlined in future activities considering this specific audience.

Part four, as it occurs in part five of the students' forms, evaluated the participants about the technological issues related to online courses; in this questionnaire, however, the theme was expanded to the use and/or mediation needed when the faculty chose to add technological resources to classroom activities. Questions presented in this section were:

(MFQ11) How confident are you in performing the following activities?

Answers were indicated on a Likert Scale from 1 (not confident) to 5 (totally confident). Activities: open and close tabs in the browser; find icons; access videos, photos, and other links in the web page; read online texts; do quizzes and other online activities; write online texts; login and logout pages; and select reliable sources for academic research.

(MFQ12) Have you ever been enrolled in a 100% online course?

(OFQ02) In case you answered "yes" or "I have started, but not finished" in the question above, how do you rate that experience?

Answers were indicated in a Likert Scale from 1 (completely unsatisfied) to 5 (completely satisfied).

(MFQ13) Have you ever taught a 100% online course?

(OFQ03) In case you answered "yes" in the question above, how do you rate that experience?

Answers were indicated on a Likert Scale from 1 (completely unsatisfied) to 5 (completely satisfied).

(OFQ04) Please, indicate a reason that supports your previous answer.

(MFQ14) Do you use any digital resources in your classes? If yes, which?

This section is an endeavor to estimate what resources must and should be added to the curriculum under development, and also to detect the areas in which continuing education courses could be offered in order to qualify the teaching staff in the issues they suggested as little known. Lastly, this information reveals the current practices in order to avoid the designing of a course disconnected or overlaid to the activities currently conducted at the institution.

Developing teaching realia to digital contexts is always triggering: there is always a percentage of the participants who consider it as a negative aspect, and part of them who seem to enjoy the process of creating activities according to the always-changeable students. Recognizing the profile of each group of students is what allows and, at the same time, helps the faculty to find the most enjoyable learning path for the group. In this journey, both professors and students may find the best digital resources to support or to guide all practices included in the program curriculum.

The impact of a needs analysis to a curriculum under development: final remarks

Profiling the academic community somehow involved in an online course is essential for the curriculum design of any language course. It is based on this information that the curriculum will address the necessary input and the most adequate materials for effective learning. Gathering data on the profile of the international students and the faculty is the method of meeting students' expectations and not diverging from the teaching standards adopted by the institution and its professors.

The recommendations that emerged from the NA were based on the needs reported by both students and the faculty: to identify an appropriate level of activities to the age range and to students' objectives; to relate the target language to the language that most students learned before Portuguese; to teach Portuguese for academic purposes, but not forget students might not have the previous contact with Portuguese; to indicate games and the use of collaborative text production as an effective way to engage students into using BP in addition to face-to-face interactions; to develop tutorials to every module, in order to provide clear information on how to perform the activities; to include samples of realia from different knowledge areas; to address pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic aspects in the language lessons; to provide clear and effective feedbacks; and, lastly, to describe clear objectives to both lessons and activities.

Only a NA may serve as a direction to inform these issues that play a key role in curriculum design. This methodology is responsible for guiding the selection of teaching materials, texts, and activities, and also for the adaptations concerning language input. Moreover, proposing challenging and technological activities can increase the rates of participation and permanence of students in the course, which may reflect positively on the learning of BP by international students.

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