

Notes on teaching work during the pandemic

Notas sobre trabalho docente em tempos de pandemia

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Abstract

The uncontrolled spread of the Covid-19 epidemic required social distancing and the closure of schools worldwide. Brazil was no exception, and the community was surprised by the need to develop alternative strategies to maintain school operations. Therefore, this study aims to discuss the intensification of the platformization process in basic education in a municipality in southwestern Goiás during the pandemic and its effects on the work and functions performed by teachers. Through the application of online questionnaires, it was possible to identify the conditions under which teaching was carried out during the pandemic and the repercussions on the personal and professional lives of teachers. Another relevant aspect to be considered is the role of technology and the school learning process, from the perspective of the study participants. The participants pointed out elements that characterize this process locally and lead us to reflect on the current educational project.

Keywords: teaching work; new technologies; teaching functions.

Resumo

O descontrolado da epidemia do Covid-19 exigiu distanciamento social e fechamento de Instituições escolares no mundo. Não diferente no Brasil, a comunidade foi surpreendida pela necessidade de articular outras estratégias para manter o funcionamento das escolas. Diante disso, pretende-se debater a intensificação do processo de plataformação da educação básica em um município do Sudoeste Goiano durante a pandemia e seus efeitos sobre o trabalho e as funções exercidas por docentes. Por meio da aplicação de questionários *online* foi possível identificar as condições nas quais a docência foi realizada no período pandêmico e os rebatimentos sobre a vida pessoal e profissional de docentes. Outro dado relevante a ser refletido é sobre o papel das tecnologias e o processo de aprendizagem escolar, na perspectiva dos participantes do estudo. As pessoas participantes apontaram elementos que caracterizam esse processo localmente e nos levam a refletir sobre qual o projeto de educação em curso.

Palavras-chave: trabalho docente; novas tecnologias; funções docentes.

INITIAL NOTES

[the pandemic figures reveal that] "economic interests and pressures proved to be far more powerful than concern for human life". Miguel Nicolelis (2021).

The assertion put forward by Miguel Nicolelis is shared as a premise for the debate proposed in this text: concern for human life seems to have always remained on the margins of the procedures established in the conduct of public health, social isolation, survival conditions, and education.

Considering this element, the central objective of this text is to discuss the intensification of the platformization process of basic education in a municipality in southwestern Goiás during the pandemic and its effects on teaching work and on the functions performed by teachers.

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From a theoretical-methodological standpoint, it is understood that this process of platformization is grounded in neoliberalism and managerialism as forms of state management.

According to Lima and Gandin (2012, p. 70):

With regard to the Brazilian context, the issue of managerialism is crucial, since social policies are increasingly aligned with market-oriented managerial logic. Managerialism brings new relations between the State and the market to the fore, substantially altering the way public policies are conceived and implemented.

It is hypothesized that the pandemic did not give rise to the platformization of education, but rather intensified it. Relations between the State and the market were rapidly altered during the pandemic in order to meet the demands of the moment.

The use of technologies in schools is not a phenomenon inaugurated by the pandemic, as previously noted. Saviani (2007) had already warned of the reorganization of the State and of schooling from a neotechnicist perspective.

At that time, he argued that the concept of qualification would be replaced by that of competence and that being productive would become synonymous with being efficient. In schools, under neotechnicism, there would be a shift in the process (neo-progressivism) toward results, and evaluation would be the means by which the quality of school education could be measured (Saviani, 2007).

Taking the analysis a step further, in light of the development of the technical-scientific apparatus, Previtali and Fagiani (2022, p. 162) state that: "Industry 4.0 represents the most recent level of sociotechnical development of human sociability under the dominance of capital".

In the authors' words

Thus, what the working class experiences today, under the Fourth Industrial Revolution or Industry 4.0, is the replacement of human mental operations by machines and the attempt to conceal the exploitative relationship between capital and labor through technological mediation (Previtali; Fagiani, 2022, p. 158).

Thus, the pandemic brought platforms and their functionalities into schools and into the homes of teachers, students, and families, producing effects on various elements of teaching-learning relations, on the planning, implementation, and assessment of classes, only to encompass didactic aspects, and also on teacher education and teaching work that have been investigated.

In light of this, the following section presents the results of a study conducted with teachers from the early years of Elementary Education in a small municipality in southwestern Goiás and, while preserving local specificities, presents a framework that may be faithful to teaching conditions during the pandemic in different places, allowing for the identification of analytical trends regarding teaching functions in this period.

Brief notes on methodological procedures

The proposal to evaluate the conditions under which teaching work was carried out in a municipality in the interior of the state of Goiás constitutes an opportunity to understand the devastating effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on workers in various fields and, more specifically, in education.

With the aim of capturing and giving visibility to the concrete reality and the dilemmas faced by basic education teachers upon the return of in-person pedagogical activities in Educational Units of Municipal Education Systems, in confronting difficult working conditions marked by impasses and contradictions inherent to their work environment within an accelerated process of platformization, our methodological choice was grounded in theoretical deepening inspired by historical-dialectical materialism as a tool for data analysis, as pointed out by Evangelista and Shiroma (2018, p. 87):

Among the numerous issues to which we direct our attention when analyzing educational policy documents, some are fundamental, such as the relations between labor and capital and the role played by the State within them. We start from the assumption

that, from the contradictions of the capitalist system, derive the demands and concrete actions for the formulation of public policies for education, and that the interests of the fundamental classes, within a given correlation of forces, are expressed in the process of producing educational policies.

With the support of this theoretical-methodological conception, we made use of questionnaires administered through Google Forms, considering their feasibility in a pandemic context. According to Marconi and Lakatos (2003), multiple-choice questions, although presented as closed-ended questions, may suggest response options that tend to encompass various facets of the topic under investigation.

In this sense, the research was conducted with teachers from the early grades of Elementary Education in a small municipality in southwestern Goiás. With approximately 20 thousand inhabitants in 2023 (IBGE data), and with regard to education, according to data from the Municipal Department of Education, in the first semester of 2023 the municipality served 1,409 students and had ten schools, six located in the urban area, of which four offered grades 1 through 5 and two were daycare centers, and five located in the rural area, three of which were multigrade schools. The municipality had seventy-seven tenured teachers and sixty-seven contracted teachers.

The questionnaire was sent to all teachers who worked in the early years of Elementary Education during the pandemic (approximately 80 teachers). A total of 41 questionnaires were completed by teachers who worked in these grades, specifically between 2020 and 2022. The instruments contained a set of questions addressing knowledge, functions, and professional challenges in the context of the pandemic, some of which will be discussed in the following section.

Intensification and precarization of teaching work in the pandemic context¹

As previously noted, the study that underpins this section was carried out in a municipality in southwestern Goiás with approximately 20 thousand inhabitants and a Municipal Education System composed of ten schools, which also offer multigrade classes in rural schools, serving approximately 1,500 students and employing seventy-seven tenured teachers and sixty-seven contracted teachers. These data, collected in 2023, indicate that this is a small city.

In addition to these census data, the research produced a historical overview of the municipality's documentary output related to the pandemic between 2020 and 2021, during which 13 local documents were issued addressing the operation of food services and food retail businesses, the functioning of local commerce and artistic performances, coercive measures for businesses that failed to comply with social distancing, among other matters. Of these, two focused on education: the first, issued in October 2020, advised that Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education institutions should not return to classes, given that the State did not have an ICU bed occupancy rate below 75% (as stated in the opening provision of the guidance issued by the Department of Education), and the other document, from July 2021, presented biosafety protocols for the resumption of in-person pedagogical activities in Educational Units of the Municipal Education System.

It is noted that no document providing pedagogical guidance or guidance on the use of technologies for teachers was issued, even though remote teaching had been implemented in the middle of the first semester of 2020.

Through the questionnaires, it was possible to characterize the predominant profile among the respondents: most are female, married, aged between 40 and 50 years, with approximately 25 years of professional experience, working 40 hours per week. The majority also hold a degree in Pedagogy and a *lato sensu* specialization. The responses showed that a large proportion of the participants have a robust professional trajectory, stable in relation to the teaching function, and that their choice of the profession stemmed from motivation and engagement with the act of teaching.

¹ This section is the result of a master's thesis. The research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Jataí – CAAE: 66 106 122.1.0000.0187.

The forms of teaching adopted during the pandemic, according to the data obtained, were (Figure 1).

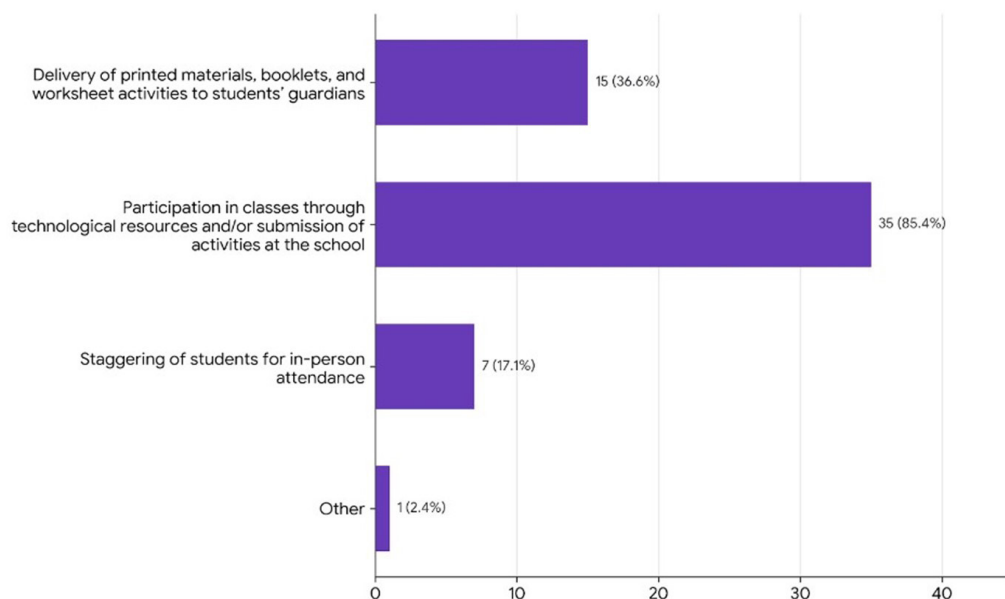


Figure 1. Technological alternatives for teaching during the pandemic.

Source: Gonçalves (2024) (Field research).

The responses indicate that the technology used for classes was something commonplace for teachers, namely the use of their mobile phones to interact via instant messaging applications, the posting of videos and links from video platforms, and, in some cases, the delivery of printed materials to students' guardians.

When asked whether the pandemic had effects on the teaching-learning process, the teachers indicated that (Figure 2).

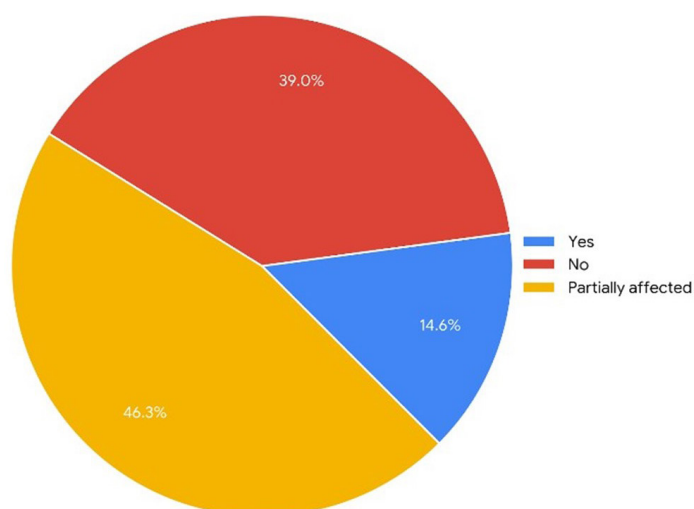


Figure 2. Effects of the pandemic on teaching functions/teaching – learning process.

Source: Gonçalves (2024) (Field research).

The majority, representing 46.3% of the respondents, indicated that the teaching-learning process was partially affected during the pandemic. Meanwhile, 39% stated that they did not observe any impact, and 14.6% reported that the process was affected during this pandemic period.

In this context, it is worth highlighting the study conducted by Bianconcini (2020). According to the speaker, when remote classes began, many teachers did not receive adequate training or more specific guidance on how to conduct their classes, which directly impacted their pedagogical practices, given the introduction of technologies that were new to many of them as teaching tools, as was the case for teachers in the municipality studied.

Vieira and Ferraro (2025), in an article that discusses the platformization and precarization of learning, add that teachers—especially during the pandemic—became captive to this apparatus, which may result in drastically altering the meaning of teaching work. In the authors' words:

It is observed that teaching work is also affected, since teachers' growing dependence on the pedagogical structures of platforms may end up transforming them into performance managers dedicated to optimizing goals on the platforms. (Vieira; Ferraro, 2025, p. 4).

Another question in the data collection instrument addressed in greater detail the difficulties faced by teachers in their teaching practice, which resulted in several challenges to the effective implementation of the teaching-learning process among students.

It was also asked, in cases where respondents had selected the option "yes" or "partially" in the previous question (regarding whether there were difficulties in teaching practice), in what ways the pandemic affected their functions as teachers. The data showed that these difficulties were associated with school infrastructure, characterized by limited access to the internet for both teachers and students. In the teachers' own words, the difficulties referred to:

[...] The search for methodologies that could support students' learning without causing harm. (Teacher 1).

[...] It was affected because there were only tips on how to use some tools. (Teacher 7).

[...] It was affected in the sense of seeking new alternatives to carry out my work, that is, it led me to learn how to use new tools. (Teacher 6).

[...] Technological difficulties in preparing the content of remote classes. (Teacher 8).

[...] During this period, students' learning was considerably impaired, since there was some resistance to carrying out the proposed activities by a large number of children, including by guardians, who complained about the lack of patience during their completion. Many did not collect and/or return the activities, making it necessary to deliver and retrieve them at students' homes in an attempt to minimize learning losses. Unfortunately, one of the main causes was technology, given the lack of preparedness of many in dealing with this tool; another issue was the excessive use of screens, which caused stress among several colleagues. (Teacher 37).

[...] The greatest difficulty was to follow students' difficulties in person and provide guidance. (Teacher 40).

The Figure 3 complements the reflections on the difficulties faced by teachers.

In this question, the figure revealed that, on a scale from 1 to 5, in which 1 represents the lowest level of difficulty and 5 the highest, most participants considered that they did not encounter challenges in preparing their classes or in choosing/selecting teaching materials, but reported some difficulty in assessing students' learning. They also experienced difficulties related to the duration of classes and activities, given the full-time dedication required while working from home during this period.

The teachers were also asked whether the Covid-19 pandemic brought challenges to education and what directly affected their work, resulting in the following responses (Figure 4).

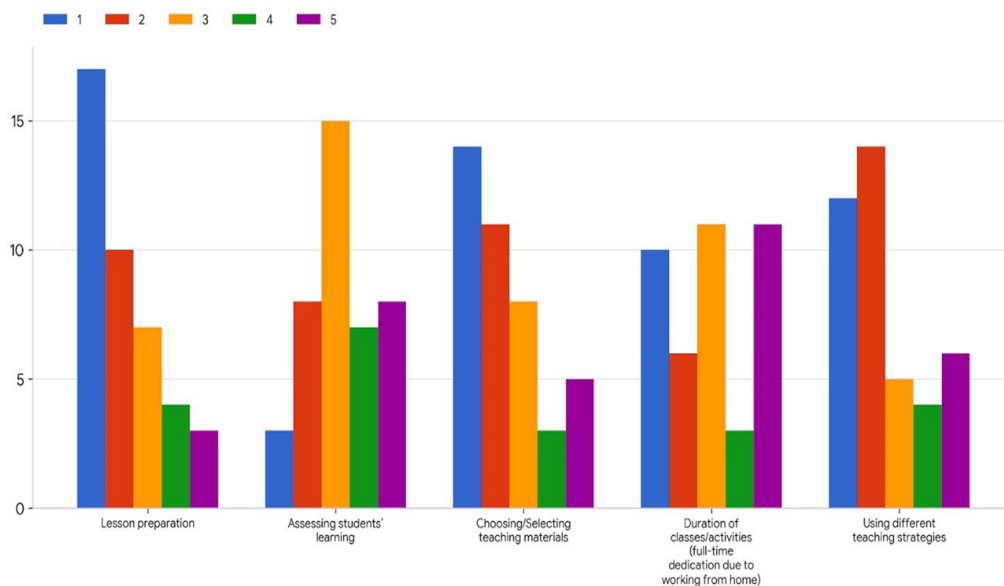


Figure 3. Difficulty in teaching practice during the pandemic.
Source: Gonçalves (2024) (Field research).

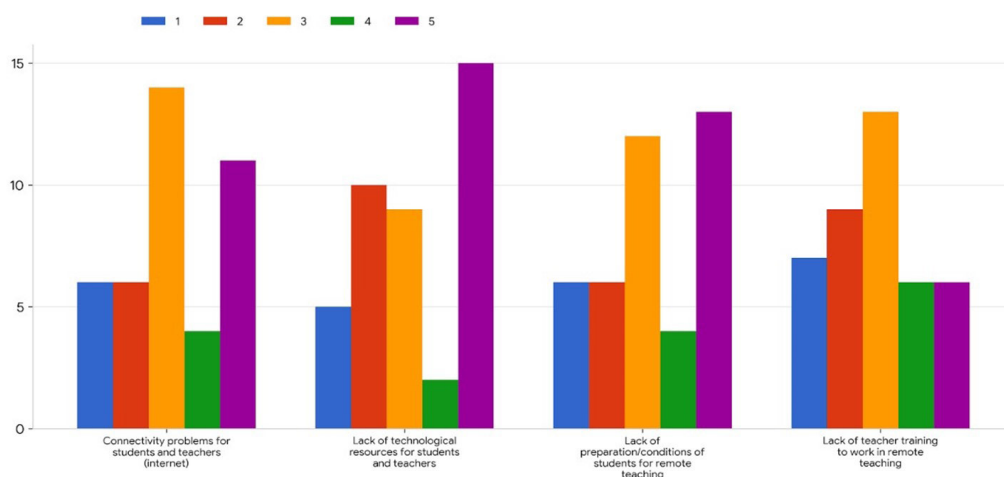


Figure 4. Challenges in teaching practice during the pandemic.
Source: Gonçalves (2024) (Field research).

Among the participants' responses, issues related to technological equipment were the most challenging for teachers' work during the pandemic.

Other difficulties included parents' lack of knowledge regarding the use of equipment, inadequate support from the school unit and public authorities for the acquisition of information technology equipment, such as notebooks and smartphones, and the lack of adequate social conditions on the part of students' guardians.

These same reasons were identified in the studies by Leite and Nunes (2022), who also highlighted that other factors, such as low salaries, excessive workload, lack of information and training, insufficient equipment, concerns about the future, anxiety, and mental exhaustion, contributed to the challenges faced by education professionals.

In addition to concern for students' physical health since the beginning of the pandemic, anxiety regarding mental health remained high. Beyond these aspects, long-standing issues emerged and were transformed into challenges for teachers, such as the broader use of technological resources. This finding is alarming, considering that it directly interferes with the teaching function.

According to Vaillant and Ferreira (2024), the challenges faced by novice teachers in the post-pandemic period reveal, similarly to the participants in this study, that preexisting problems were exacerbated during this time, demonstrating that:

It is now essential to understand how novice teachers managed to mitigate and overcome the serious consequences produced by COVID-19. Everything suggests that the pandemic exacerbated preexisting problems in the field of education, such as the lack of connectivity and resources in educational institutions, the limited relevance of educational programs, and the lack of digital skills among teachers, among others (Vaillant; Ferreira, 2024, p. 8).

As a further complement to the previous item, participants were asked to mention other factors that could directly affect teaching practice.

In the responses, the lack of awareness among students' guardians, who trivialized remote teaching, and the lack of preparation of school unit coordination stood out, among other factors, as can be directly observed below:

[...] *Parental support in remote activities.* (Teacher 1).

[...] *There was just a lack of preparation, as it involved technology that was not used as frequently in daily practice.* (Teacher 4).

[...] *Students who did not have the financial means to afford internet access and mobile phones, and families with three children in different schools and only one computer.* (Teacher 5).

[...] *Lack of awareness among students' guardians.* (Teacher 6).

[...] *We did not have technological equipment to carry out the classes.* (Teacher 8).

[...] *Many children did not have access to the internet and did not even have a mobile phone.* (Teacher 9).

The responses of teachers from a small city in the interior of Goiás resonate with the findings of research conducted by Denise Vaillant in Latin American countries, which point to changes in teaching work as a result of the adoption of remote work through platforms:

The pandemic was accompanied by problems in the appropriation and familiarization with digital technologies, challenges in motivating and supporting students, and a lack of availability of technologies and devices. Teachers pointed out that, in many cases, their working conditions worsened, workload increased, physical and mental exhaustion occurred, there was a lack of support from institutions and school leadership, high levels of teacher stress were recorded, and significant difficulties emerged in communication with students and families (Vaillant; Ferreira, 2024, p. 8-9).

The perspective of teachers who worked in the early years of Elementary Education within a Municipal Education System in a small municipality in the interior of Brazil shows that the pandemic and the urgency of remote teaching may have affected teaching functions, understood as:

[...] a set of attributions inherent to the exercise of teaching. Such attributions take on variations and are influenced by multiple determinations of the historical-social context, which is in constant transformation. Commonly inherent to the teaching function are the socialization of knowledge historically produced by humanity and the development of activities related to this process that sustain teaching and the operationalization of the school curriculum, such as: selection of content to be taught; creation of mechanisms to relate curricular content to students' cultural and concrete experiences; development and/or planning of teaching methodologies; construction of teaching plans; participation in the elaboration of the pedagogical-political project and school councils; and the development of learning assessment processes (Silva, 2010, p. 1).

The extensive quotation reveals that teaching functions are already complex in themselves. Added to these were the demands intensified by the pandemic, which undermined the daily routines of teachers and families without the necessary training and preparation. Even experienced teachers pointed out difficulties in dealing with school time, learning assessment, and the attribution of meaning to technologies usually used for private purposes.

Telework and the extensive use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), as part of the response to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, expanded the exploitation of labor as a new “[...] form of work resulting from recent technological transformations under which traditional labor relations are transformed” (Previtali; Fagiani; Lucena, 2019, p. 190).

Complementarily, it is important to consider that, in reflecting on teaching work and the need to understand the dilemmas faced by teachers, especially during and after the pandemic, the aim was to highlight the problems resulting from changes in the work process, with the increase in remote activities and the use of technological tools such as computers and smartphones.

FINAL NOTES

This text joins academic efforts to understand the effects of the pandemic in many fields of human activity. In education, at all levels of schooling, as previously noted, these effects are still not sufficiently understood to allow for the mitigation of the impacts produced on students’ learning, for example.

In proposing to discuss the intensification of work mediated by technologies—many of which are not so new—under the scope of platformization, the study drew on data collected in a small city in southwestern Goiás, which may illustrate situations comparable to different locations and specificities across the country.

The teachers who agreed to respond to the instrument—within a context of intensified use of tools such as Google Forms and similar platforms due to social distancing—revealed difficulties in the use of technologies for teaching, limited institutional and training support for this purpose, constraints in dialogue with families and guardians, as well as an increase in the time devoted to work. Many of these situations are causes of teacher illness: how can one deal with an unfamiliar situation that interferes with the classic functions of teaching practice?

The conclusions of this study are not intended to be Luddite. However, it is a fact that the pandemic accelerated the use of technologies in schools and the platformization of teaching work without a critical examination of the meanings attributed to this process and its repercussions. What is merely promoted is the idea that technology can contribute to teaching practice. And it can! Nevertheless, it is necessary to identify this process as a synthesis of multiple determinations.

Silva (2010, p. 1), in reflecting on teaching functions, indicates that

School organization, as a constitutive and constituent instance of broader social practice, tends to incorporate hegemonic management trends present in the world of work, influencing the profile and dimensions of the teaching function.

In this sense, by incorporating the tendency toward platformization—within a context of managerialism in State management—what educational project does education uphold, and what parameters are established for teaching work? The recent experiences reported here indicate that there are limits, and these must be widely considered in order to ensure that the school remains a space of teaching and learning aimed at the instrumentalization of the working class.

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