

The perception of the elderly about communication in the aging process

A percepção do idoso sobre a comunicação no processo de envelhecimento

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Abstract

Purpose: to verify the perception of the elderly about their communication process in aging. **Methods:** a qualitative study, based on the research-action-participant methodology, developed through Paulo Freire's research itinerary, which consists of three dialectical stages: thematic research; coding and decoding and critical unveiling. The study was developed in four Circles of Culture, from June to July 2017, including the participation of ten elderly people from an open university of the elderly. **Results:** from the dialogue, were thematic issues that involved the unveiling of technologies and their impact on the communication of the elderly. The participants' fragility was highlighted in relation to advances in Information and Communication Technologies and the difficulty presented by this public in the interactive processes, mainly related to the family, resulting from the large-scale use of these tools. **Conclusion:** the participants did not mention pathological aspects or the functional losses of the aging process, but they had interest in dialoguing on Information and Communication Technologies. The study represented the participants' perception in the Culture Circles, evidencing the relevance of methodologies, such as that of Paulo Freire, in the discussion of themes that touch the daily life of people, contributing to a reflexive process that seeks to improve the quality of life.

Keywords: Speech and hearing therapy, Aging, Communication, Health promotion, Information technology.

Resumo

Objetivo: Verificar a percepção dos idosos sobre seu processo de comunicação no envelhecimento. **Métodos:** Estudo qualitativo, com base na metodologia pesquisa-ação-participante, desenvolvido por meio do Itinerário de pesquisa de Paulo Freire, que consiste de três etapas dialéticas: investigação temática; codificação e descodificação e desvelamento crítico. O estudo desenvolveu-se em quatro Círculos de Cultura, no período de junho a julho de 2017, incluindo a participação de dez idosos de uma universidade aberta da terceira idade. **Resultados:** A partir do diálogo, foram enunciadas temáticas que envolveram o desvelamento das tecnologias e seu impacto na comunicação dos idosos. Destacaram-se a fragilidade dos participantes, em relação aos avanços das Tecnologias da Informação e Comunicação, e a dificuldade apresentada por este público nos processos interativos, principalmente relacionados à família, decorrentes do uso em grande escala destas ferramentas. **Conclusão:** Não foram mencionados, pelos participantes, aspectos patológicos, ou em relação às perdas funcionais do processo de envelhecimento, mas o interesse em dialogar sobre as tecnologias de informação e comunicação. O estudo representou a percepção dos participantes nos Círculos de Cultura, evidenciando a relevância de metodologias, como a de Paulo Freire, na discussão de temas que tangem o cotidiano das pessoas, contribuindo para um processo reflexivo que busca a melhora da qualidade de vida.

Descritores: Fonoaudiologia; Envelhecimento; Comunicação; Promoção da saúde; Tecnologia da informação

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INTRODUCTION

The life expectancy of the population has gradually increased worldwide. In Brazil, in 2010, there were 39 elderly people for each group of 100 young people and projections for 2040 estimate 153 elderly people for every 100 young people⁽¹⁾. If, on the one hand, it can be said that the increase in the life expectancy of these elderly people represents an achievement in the social and health spheres, on the other hand, it poses a challenge to the possible economic and social demands, especially in developing countries⁽²⁾. In this scenario of population change, it is important to emphasize that the elderly population also grows older, being able to be found people who reached advanced ages, passing the 100 years⁽²⁾.

Aging is defined as a natural, progressive and irreversible process common to all beings of a species and can be influenced by social, political, economic and psychological factors⁽³⁾. This process comprises a group of changes in functional and structural levels, which can lead to motor impairment and psychological and social difficulties, bringing negative influences on the relationship between the individual and the environment that surrounds him⁽⁴⁾. Several changes due to the aging of the organism can influence the communication process, bringing difficulties that can be reflected in the social exclusion⁽³⁾. The communication process can be defined, in a simplified way, as a human activity determined by the exchange of information between people, or as the way in which meaning is constructed and decoded from the exchanges of information generated, being a determinant factor for the growth and human development, as well as their quality of life⁽⁵⁾.

However, not only the changes of physiological order influence the interactive process on the part of the elderly public. In parallel with the increasing aging of the population, there has been a constant evolution of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), which have been consolidating and changing the communication profile among individuals⁽⁶⁾, so that in order to remain included in social media, the use and appropriation of technological objects are necessary.

The aging process has, as one of its characteristics, the difficulties of adaptation or re-adaptation, which can be associated with the appropriation of ICTs, by the elderly public. Thus, understanding this demographic reality, it is fundamental that public policies direct their attention to this population and the changes that affect it in order to promote possibilities for the elderly to participate, actively, in society⁽⁶⁾.

This study aimed to verify the perception of the elderly about their communication process in aging, using Paulo Freire's methodological framework as a basis. In order to build a dialogue between the participants, this article aimed to bring reflections about the perspectives and emotions of the elderly, in relation to the communication process, linked to the generational changes of the models of communication experienced over the years.

METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study, based on the research-action-participant methodology, developed through Paulo Freire's research itinerary, which includes the stages of thematic investigation, codification and decoding and critical unveiling,

carried out in Circles of Culture with elderly people from a nucleus of studies of the old age.

The place of accomplishment was the Nucleus of Studies of Old Age, linked to the Federal University of Santa Catarina (NETI/UFSC). The NETI/UFSC has developed as an open university of the elderly, where workshops are promoted for the elderly, and has, as principles, the appreciation of the elderly, the recognition of their potential and the incentive to engage and participate in society⁽⁷⁾. The study was carried out between June and July 2017 in the city of Florianópolis, State of Santa Catarina.

Elderly aged 60 years or older, of both genders and sexes, who voluntarily accepted to participate in the study were adopted as inclusion criteria. As exclusion criteria, those individuals who did not attend more than two meetings were defined.

Initially, the elderly were invited to participate in the study voluntarily and received explanations related to the purpose of the study. The group counted on a total of ten participants that already knew each other previously, since they participated in another activity offered in the same place.

In addition to the elderly, the study had the participation of two speech therapists, a nurse and a student of the undergraduate course in Speech Therapy at the research institution.

The methodology makes reference to the Culture Circle, which brings with it the representation of a dynamic space of learning and knowledge exchange, in which subjects gather in the education process to investigate themes of interest to the group itself. Thus, these stages allow the establishment of a dialogue relationship between the participants, that is, research subjects and researchers. In this way, it reveals the social reality experienced by the analyzed group, being able to expand the reflections generated and lead to new proposals of action on the daily life, in order to promote the health of those involved⁽⁸⁾.

For carrying out the first stage, understood by investigation of the generating themes, two guiding questions were used: "What do you understand by communication?"; "What is the perception of your communication in the aging process?". The issues stimulated the initiation of dialogue and significant themes by individuals' conceptions and experiences.

After the topics were raised, the codification and decoding stage was carried out, in which the participants, through their reflections, were able to contextualize and seek the social meaning of the themes generated in the previous stage, becoming aware of and expanding their knowledge. For the codification of the themes, dynamics and dialogical wheels were carried out, in which the topics raised were compiled in two main themes, which were discussed during the Culture circles.

Finally, the critical unveiling stage occurred, through which the participants were able to analyze the extracted themes, becoming aware of the existing situation and discovering possibilities that contributed to the process of overcoming the limitations, allowing a new look on the subjects discussed.

Freire's research itinerary allows the research to be carried out with a reduced number of participants, because it is a dynamic and flexible method, which provides the establishment of a proximal relationship between the researchers and the participants⁽⁹⁾.

The ethical aspects that guided this research followed Resolution 466/2012 of the National Health Council of the Ethics Committee in Research with Human Beings of the Federal University of Santa Catarina, and was approved according to the CAAE: 54780416.2.0000.0121. After clarification about the

study, the elderly signed the Free and Informed Consent Term and answered a sociodemographic questionnaire prepared by the researchers to characterize the study population.

RESULTS

The group was characterized by nine women and one man, aged between 60 and 81 years, mean age of 68.89 (standard deviation = 7.56) years, being the Complete Higher Education the prevailing level of schooling.

The results are presented in front of the dialogical moments that occurred during the development of the Circles of Culture, according to the stages of Freire's research itinerary.-

Thematic investigation

In the first Culture Circle, thematic research took place, aiming at raising the generating themes from the participants' conceptions and experiences. Initially, a dynamic presentation of the group was carried out, aiming at promoting dialogue, leaving them at ease with each other, and later expressing their opinions.

The dynamic consisted of a presentation, in which each participant should expose their qualities, as well as the manifestation of their expectation in relation to the proposed meetings.

Through the group dialogue, during the Culture Circle, the theme of the research was presented, which refers to communication in the aging process, as well as the objectives and the proposal of the study. Then, there was the reading and signing of the FICT.

To begin the dialogue, the guiding questions were used. As a proposal to record the participants' responses, materials such as cardstock, collages and flipchart were used, so that the themes were written and visualized by all.

From the themes generated, the participants revealed their feelings, emotions and perspectives, in relation to the communication process, which were reflected throughout the dialogues made in reports of personal experiences. In addition, they highlighted the changes in communication with the insertion of the New Information and Communication Technologies (NICT). Thus, a total of 45 generative themes related to each other were raised and converged on two central themes: communication and technology. In the light of the topics listed and the reflective process carried out with the participants at the end of the first stage, codification and decoding began at subsequent Culture circle meetings.

Encoding and decoding

The dialogue in the Culture Circle took place horizontally, with respect to the needs and interests of each participant. Among the 45 themes that were raised during the investigation stage, and as a result of the reflection among the participants, two were chosen to be codified and decoded in the second Culture Circle. The two main themes - communication between individuals and technology as a communication tool - led the elderly, in their speech, to express, on the second theme, two more: facilities and difficulties.

The theme of communication between individuals discussed their relationship with the exchange of information permeated by personal feelings and values, acquired and experienced by the elderly, throughout their life trajectories.

The perceptions of "meeting someone", "eye to eye" and "listening with the heart" were clearly problematized, clearly demonstrating the importance of personal and social contact. The participants revealed that these forms of communication have now disappeared in favor of a contact that leads to the distancing of the sender from the receiver, as well as from their personal and cultural values, making the process insensitive, as can be seen in the figure 1 and in the lines below.

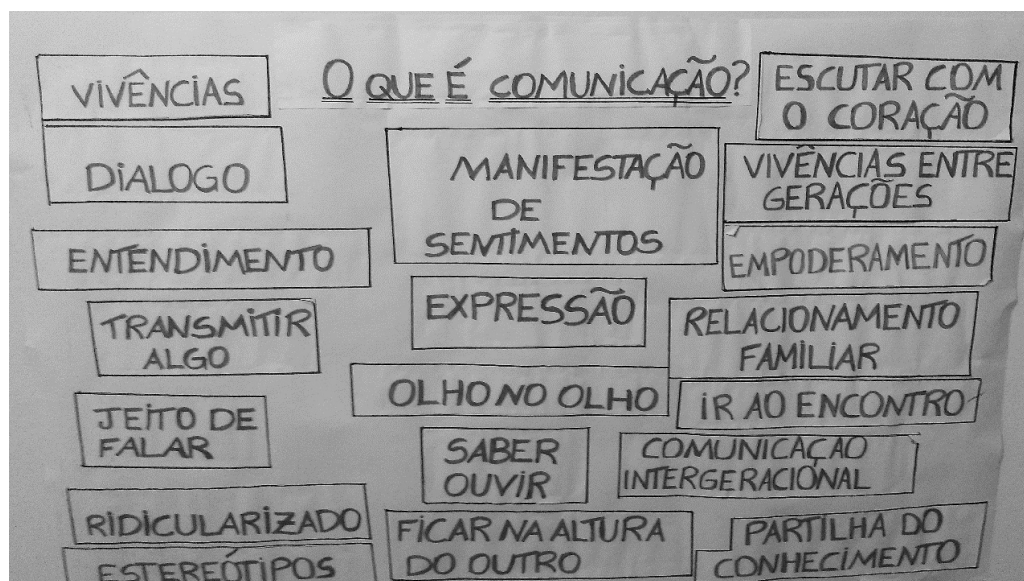


Figure 1. What is communication?

It's that communication really is everything that we wrote there ... because, now, nobody else talks to me, everyone just on the cell phone, cell phone (13). And that will make people more isolated. He gave an interview, which is good in this medium of communication and what is not, and is separating family ties (11).

The technology theme as a communication tool was evidenced by the participants, permeating all the discussions and becoming of manifest interest, revealed in their speeches. The dialogue installed was able to demonstrate the perception of the elderly about ICTs (Internet, smartphone applications and e-mail). With regard to this theme, there were scores that revealed the negative aspects, as observed in the following lines.

Communication today is hindered by technology (11). I've been thinking a bit, I see my grandson, he talks very little, but he's always on the "machine" (cell phone) and he does not talk to us and if he's going to say something, he's still a bit angry (15).

And this will make people more isolated, it's a coolness, it's not a cozy thing (11).

Because communication today is changed, there is no longer any communication (18).

The thematic facilities and difficulties, presented in figure 2, on the ICTs, brought information that, at times contradicted, sometimes supported. In terms of facilities, the benefits were codified and decoded, through the search and exchange of information, as well as the possibility of rapprochement between people. Regarding this last aspect, the participants referred to the possibility of finding relatives with whom they no longer had contact, due to the distance that separated them, showing the overcoming of the geographical barriers. This issue was discussed among the group as one of the great facilitators of technology, associating the reports of experiences that have illustrated and brought significant and expressive relations to this aspect, as can be observed through the following speech.

For me, this technology is all good because my daughter lives very far away and I could not see her or even keep up the growth of my granddaughters if it were not for that.

Now, my other daughter is going to another country and I would die if I did not have the technology so I could see and communicate with her (13).

In this stage of the research itinerary, during the Culture circle, the participants revealed, as one of the difficulties of communication, the incongruity outlined by the distance between people, one of the problems arising from the use of technology. According to them, technology has brought a paradoxical thought, which comprises, at the same time, the opportunity to bring those who are distant and to alienate those that are close. Within this context, the participants questioned this issue, relating it to the separation of family ties and the difficulty of communication with the younger ones, evidencing a difficulty of intergenerational communication.

One thing I think is very important is to communicate with us, I think it is very important, it is the communication of the child with the elderly, the grandchildren with the grandparents, for example, my granddaughter would bring my mother what she learned and the my mother would pass on to her the Italian songs, then, the exchange of experiences and experiences, the language, this exchange I think is very important, I think the world will become more empty if only in these communication technologies (11).

[...] I have four grandchildren of various ages and this communication has been very accelerated; in my time, we saw grandparents and grandchildren on the street chatting like friends; today, no, stay there with the cell phone, there, I keep fighting (14).

Moreover, in this context, they showed some limitations in the use of technologies. They reflected on the feelings of anguish and suffering due to the misinformation that is passed on, the lack of clarity of this information, associated with the aspects that transgress the feelings, culminating in problems of manual dexterity, such as writing / typing on the cell phone, the use of the broker spelling and inability to use applications without the help of their children.

The dialogue between the participants was favorable so that they could mention the situations of limits by which they had already been through not using current technologies in the same intensity as their children and grandchildren.

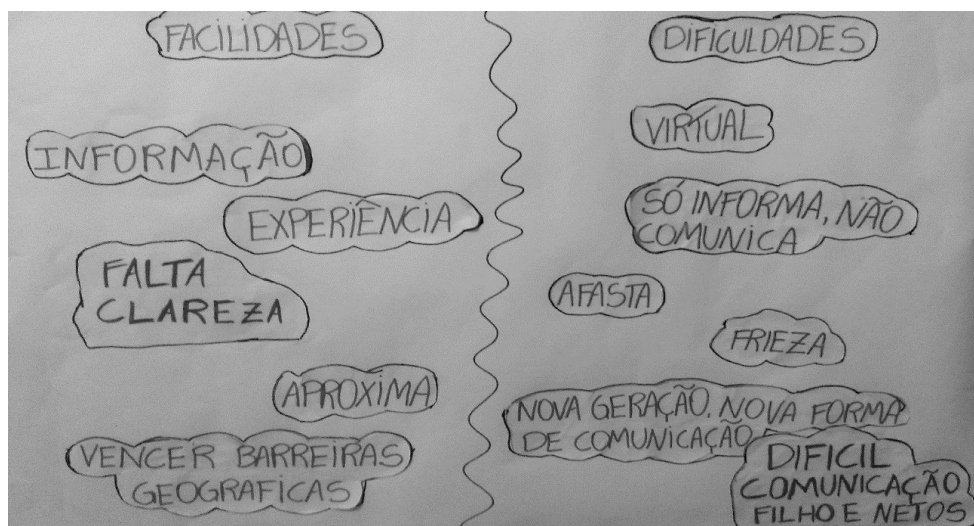


Figure 2. Facilities and difficulties in the use of Information and Communication Technologies

And there's the ridicule thing. Sometimes we feel ridiculous, we feel like we are in the Stone Age. Sometimes my daughter asks me one thing and I go looking in the books, and she already rebukes me and says: "Mother, for God's sake! What world are you in?!" Then pick up the cell phone and find it quickly. I'm already feeling ridiculous (I3).

It's because, for us, I do not know for my generation, but we do not have much use, right [...]. My daughters are always tuned in. There, I'm going to stay on the side, but I do not ask too much. Now that I retired, I wanted to go to college. It is my dream! My daughters support me, they tell me to do it, only that, for me, I'm going to disrupt a classroom because I'm going to have to learn how to move (in technology). Nowadays, it's everything on my cell phone, on the computer; it's going to be difficult, I'm blocked (I8).

Critical unveiling

The stage of unveiling took place in the last Culture Circle, with the participation of all those involved in the study. At this stage, it was observed that, of the two themes coded and decoded, the unveiling occurred on technologies and their impact on the communication of the elderly. In order to enrich the reflection with the participants, they were presented with images that refer to the ICTs, as well as the applications available in this equipment. Subsequently, they were asked to choose those who used or who had already used (Figure 3).

From the dialogue in the Culture Circle and the resumption of the themes, the elderly reflected on the transformations and the evolution of the communication, with regard to the ICTs, revealing that it becomes necessary the appropriation of these technologies.

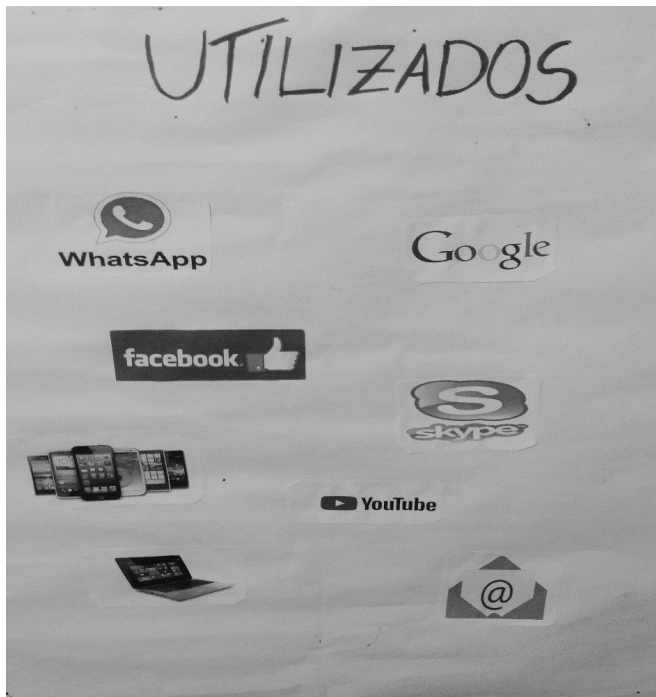


Figure 3. Equipment and applications used

The dialogue developed in the face of the group's motivation to seek to expand their knowledge, as well as to insert in moments of appropriation of these technologies to resume the dialogue (even if computerized) with friends and / or family. Emphasis was placed on the importance of new learning that will keep them active and preserve their autonomy so that they can be seen as people with skills and abilities to learn how to handle equipment.

It also revealed aspects related to the ridicule and the stigmatization of the elderly as individuals who are oblivious to the learning process and the search for new knowledge. Participants discussed the relevance of a healthy and empowered aging for the improvement of quality of life.

It is that the elderly are seeking empowerment of their situation. There is much suffering from those who do not leave home and do not participate in social life (I1).

My thinking is that we, seniors and retirees, cannot think that there is no time or time for anything else. We have to have schedules to do our exercises, walks, sleep, we have to find new things for us, to include us, to learn more. We cannot accommodate ourselves. I think that with passing age, our mind is slowing down and we have to stimulate more and more (I10).

The dialogue over the changes that have taken place in the communication process over the years has provided a reflection on all the changes that the participants have already undergone, which has led to the emergence of, for example, communication through letters and the evolution that has since followed.

I came to live here at the age of 17 and my family is from the interior of the state; I did not have a phone in my city, so I stayed for two years only communicating with my family when I had a holiday or letters. I have piles of letters from those two years; I went through this and saw this evolution (I3). I, too, have piles and piles of letters that I would exchange with my fiancé who lived far away ... sometimes the second letter we sent arrived before the first. The phone and these things that we can use today are a very big growth (I6).

Imagine what the phone bill would be like if we did not have it (tech support) (I3).

The learning and the use of the technologies were associated by the participants with the quality of life. The possibilities brought by these media could provide individuals with moments of pleasure and new knowledge, reflecting positively in moments of well-being.

I, last week, learned how to research Google® and found it interesting. I even found recipe (referring to the cuisine) (I2).

I liked to remember old songs, so I was digging it on my own because my daughters did not have time to teach and I was able to learn how to play the cell phone on that ... YouTube®. Then I discovered those old songs. It was very cool. I listened for hours (I8).

The moment of discussion in the Culture Circle was conducive for the participants to share personal experiences in the use of technologies, as well as for the exchange of knowledge with the mediators of the research. During the meetings, it was possible to assist the elderly in solving some doubts regarding

the use and handling of their equipment and applications. As recommended by Freire, in his itinerary, he started from the learning process characterized by the exchange of knowledge among the people⁽⁸⁾.

Through the dialogue relationship established with the participants, it was possible to verify that, in addition to the interaction factor, the use of these technologies provided opportunities for leisure and personal satisfaction, as it was possible to observe in moments of knowledge exchange with the researchers, because the elderly had doubts about the handling of equipment and applications, demonstrating motivation and satisfaction.

Through the reflective process carried out throughout Cultural Circles, the importance of the elderly's appropriation in the use of ICTs was strongly highlighted as a means of potential communication. Participants visualized their insertion in the technological environment as a way of approaching and maintaining ties with family members, reducing the distance between generations. Moreover, this appropriation was referred to as a necessity, being recognized as one of the means by which they can keep in the process of learning as autonomous individuals, active and recognized for their potentialities.

DISCUSSION

During the aging process, the ability to communicate becomes a valuable aspect, given that the elderly population undergoes a series of changes that have an impact on their lives and can lead to social exclusion^(10,11).

In the speech therapy scope, the presence of presbycusis, presbylarynx, presbyphonia, and aspects related to language and cognition, which can affect the communication process, can be highlighted within the natural aging process³. However, when discussing the theme of this research, participants did not limit their reflection to communication in the aging process, associating it with pathologies or functional losses. The change in the ideology of aging was observed, with the focus on a stage naturally present in the life cycle, emphasizing the health process as opposed to the disease. In this way, the discussion became broad, bringing a sense of communication linked to social interaction.

Regarding the group, the word communication comprised relationships of personal interaction, which refer to feelings, such as affection, sharing and moments of well-being, in which one individual shares information with the other. The development of new standards for the communication process has resulted in difficulties in this interactive process by the elderly public, who may feel unmotivated and disinterested in using ICTs^(12,13).

With the development of the research and the Culture Circles, it was evident that, in relation to the communication, the difficulty of the participants in their relations with the advances of the ICTs was highlighted. The presence of technologies in daily life is undeniable, as well as its accelerated and large-scale evolution, expanding and consolidating as a means of relationship between people and, of these, with the world⁽¹³⁾.

The intensive use of new technologies and the increase in the establishment of virtual relationships can culminate in the presence of complaints of loneliness, especially in the elderly population⁽¹⁴⁾. Loneliness is defined by the dictionary Michaelis⁽¹⁵⁾ of the Portuguese language as: "State or condition of person who feels or is alone; isolation. Sensation or condition of person living

isolated from his group". Given this context, in this research, this feeling of loneliness did not refer only to being alone, but also to situations in which one has the perception of solitude, even if in the company of another person or family members.

A study by Azeredo and Afonso⁽¹⁴⁾, dealing with the elderly's perception of loneliness, pointed out that 78.1% of the elderly have the most significant person in their life represented by relatives, being these, son and grandson. This data is in agreement with the reports of this study, in which the participants mentioned the importance of being able to communicate with the other generations, also emphasizing the presence of children and grandchildren.

The intergenerational relationship provides moments of learning with the approximation and exchange of experiences, which can positively affect the family or social nucleus. Thus, the reflection of the elderly on the young (children and adolescents) and vice versa is fundamental for the valorization of the new generations and resignification of the aging, considering the stereotyped vision of old age⁽¹⁶⁾.

In addition to these factors, low frequency in the use of new technologies, inability to handle, and the fact that the elderly still refer to older ways of communicating can lead to situations of ridicule and embarrassment, as mentioned by participants in this study, contributing to the decrease of their self-esteem and the feeling of belonging.

The presence of these negative feelings was pointed out by Sousa⁽¹⁷⁾ when referring that situations of incomprehension to the elderly public refer to feelings of discrimination. The study also pointed out that most elderly people experience these situations without manifesting themselves and, consequently, are led to experience negative feelings added to insecurity by the loss of their position in the family and society.

The increase in the use of ICTs is a significant factor at the global level, since technologies have mediated the relations between human beings, so that those who remain outside this new pattern tend not to be included in social processes⁽⁶⁾. When it comes to the elderly population, socialization becomes a crucial factor for the maintenance of quality of life^(10,11).

Given the importance of communication and interactive processes in all age groups⁽¹⁰⁾, it is interesting that the elderly public empowers themselves with the possibilities that these new processes bring, impacting their communication, in order to remain participative and active in society and, therefore, improve their quality of life, as demonstrated by the participants of this research. Becoming active in their process and remaining dynamic in society has made participants aware of the need for empowerment, the search for stimulation and healthy ways of living, to experience the aging process. It is understood in this context that communication is an important element because it relates to the capacity to establish an intelligible dialogue, which will contribute to the real access to information, by anchoring a movement of autonomy and empowerment of the group⁽¹⁸⁾.

Understanding that contemporary society is mediated by the use of technological tools, one has the concept of digital literacy, which has been used to refer to such practices. Digital literacy refers to the practice of using technological tools in digital media and brings a broad concept, encompassing the use of digital media such as computers and the internet, and the skills of planning, conducting research on the internet, bill payments on-line, use of e-mail messages, among others, for solving daily problems^(6,19). In addition, the use of such media was proven by Xavier⁽¹⁹⁾ as an important tool against cognitive

decline, reducing the incidence of dementia processes. Literacy can enable a more active and participatory action in daily social relations⁽⁶⁾. Thus, it is necessary to think about aging associated with the process of digital inclusion, with the help of mediators who may be the family members themselves, minimizing the sense of exclusion and strengthening the intergenerational relationship punctuated in the participants' speech.

Through the established dialogical process, the participants were able to reconstruct their paradigms, broadening their points of view and talking about the possibilities of remaining active and recognized. In this sense, in Freire's perspective, dialogue allows us to objectify subjectivities, opening space for a process of awareness, bringing to the surface the world where the individual relates and in this context, man is led to form a world consciousness, comprising as the subject that re-elaborates and transforms him, assuming the role of author of his own history⁽¹⁸⁾.

In view of the above, the actions directed at those who grow older are in line with the National Health Promotion Policy, since they focus on changing styles and living conditions, based on social, economic, political, cultural determinants and environmental issues. In addition, they are based on the expanded concept that defines health not only as the absence of disease or infirmity, but as a complete physical, mental and social well-being^(20,21). The understanding of health is added to such conceptions as the result of various aspects related to it, such as quality of life, opportunities for lifelong education and social support⁽²²⁾.

In light of what is advocated by public policies aimed at guaranteeing the rights of the elderly, the promotion of digital literacy practices is a necessity in order to reduce the distance of the elderly to access and use of technological means, that its non-insertion has been negatively affecting its interactive processes⁽²³⁾.

CONCLUSION

The process of communication in aging was not related to any type of pathology or functional loss. When dealing with communication, the main component referred to as difficult was the adaptation to the New Information and Communication Technologies, because, from the consolidation of the use of these technologies, the communication process became more digitized, differing greatly from the reality of the participants.

Thus, through the methodology adopted, it was possible for the elderly to reflect and conclude that there is a need to appropriate these technologies in order to foster improvements in their communication and interaction relationships, associated with an active aging process.

This work represents the perception of participants in the Culture Circles and highlights the importance of methodologies, such as that of Paulo Freire, in the discussion of topics that relate to the reality and the daily life of people. This methodological process enables the participants to reflect on the themes addressed, making them protagonists of their lives, through a process of action-reflection-action.

It should be emphasized that further studies should be carried out, taking into account the socio-cultural context of other elderly people, such as those living in regions lacking such technologies. The emancipatory and transformative approach

of thought through dialogue can be a means of expanding the studies and activities developed by Speech Therapy in order to know, in greater depth, the reality experienced by the elderly.

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