

O DISPOSITIVO DA COMPETÊNCIA DIGITAL NA EDUCAÇÃO EM DOCUMENTOS DA OCDE E DO BRASIL: UMA RESPOSTA À URGÊNCIA DIGITAL

EL DISPOSITIVO DE COMPETENCIA DIGITAL EN LA EDUCACIÓN EN DOCUMENTOS DE
LA OCDE Y DE BRASIL: UNA RESPUESTA A LA URGENCIA DIGITAL

THE DIGITAL COMPETENCE DEVICE IN EDUCATION IN OECD AND BRAZILIAN
DOCUMENTS: A RESPONSE TO DIGITAL URGENCY

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ABSTRACT: This article problematises the integration of technologies in education by investigating it as an effect of the digital competence device. The main objective is to map the traces of this device in documents from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the Brazilian Ministry of Education. The theoretical foundation is grounded in the post-structuralist perspective and the thought of Michel Foucault, specifically in the concepts of *dispositif* and discourse. Methodologically, a Foucauldian-inspired discourse analysis is conducted on a *corpus* comprising two transnational OECD reports (2020 and 2023) and two Brazilian normative documents: the National Curriculum Guidelines (2013) and the National Common Core Curriculum (2017). The results show that the device operates by articulating imperatives of economic security and neoliberal productivity. While the OECD constructs a scenario of imminent risk associated with automation, the Brazilian documents rearticulate this logic by hybridising it with discourses on democratic values and critical citizenship. It is concluded that the device

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normalises the distinction between functional and unfit subjects, positioning the school as an institution that must adapt to a technological reality presented as external and inevitable. The research contributes to denaturalising contemporary pressures for digitisation, taking technology as an instrument of power aimed at the production of human capital.

KEYWORDS: Discourse. Digital Capitalism. Digitisation. Education. Human Capital.

RESUMO: Este artigo problematiza a integração das tecnologias na educação ao investigá-la como efeito do dispositivo da competência digital. O objetivo central é mapear os rastros desse dispositivo em documentos da Organização para a Cooperação e Desenvolvimento Econômico (OCDE) e do Ministério da Educação do Brasil. A fundamentação teórica ancora-se na perspectiva pós-estruturalista amparada no pensamento de Michel Foucault, especificamente nos conceitos de dispositivo e discurso. Metodologicamente, realiza-se uma análise do discurso de inspiração foucaultiana sobre um *corpus* composto por dois relatórios transnacionais da OCDE (2020 e 2023) e por dois documentos normativos brasileiros: as Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais (2013) e a Base Nacional Comum Curricular (2017). Os resultados demonstram que o dispositivo opera articulando imperativos de segurança econômica e de produtividade neoliberal. Enquanto a OCDE constrói um cenário de risco iminente associado à automação, os documentos brasileiros rearticulam essa lógica ao hibridizá-la com discursos sobre valores democráticos e cidadania crítica. Conclui-se que o dispositivo normaliza a distinção entre sujeitos funcionais e inaptos, posicionando a escola como instituição que deve adaptar-se a uma realidade tecnológica apresentada como externa e inevitável. A pesquisa contribui para desnaturalizar as pressões contemporâneas pela digitalização, tomando a tecnologia como um instrumento de poder voltado à produção de capital humano.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Discurso. Capitalismo Digital. Digitalização. Educação. Capital Humano.

RESUMEN: Este artículo problematiza la integración de las tecnologías en la educación investigándola como un efecto del dispositivo de competencia digital. El objetivo principal es mapear los rastros de este dispositivo en documentos de la Organización para la Cooperación y el Desarrollo Económicos (OCDE) y del Ministerio de Educación de Brasil. La fundamentación teórica se basa en la perspectiva posestructuralista y en el pensamiento de Michel Foucault, específicamente en los conceptos de dispositivo y discurso. Metodológicamente, se realiza un análisis del discurso de inspiración foucaultiana sobre un corpus compuesto por dos informes transnacionales de la OCDE (2020 y 2023) y dos documentos normativos brasileños: las Directrices Curriculares Nacionales (2013) y la Base Nacional Común Curricular (2017). Los resultados muestran que el dispositivo opera articulando imperativos de seguridad económica y productividad neoliberal. Mientras que la OCDE construye un escenario de riesgo inminente asociado a la automatización, los documentos brasileños rearticulan esta lógica hibridándola con discursos sobre valores democráticos y ciudadanía crítica. Se concluye que el dispositivo normaliza la distinción entre sujetos funcionales e inaptos, posicionando a la escuela como una institución que debe adaptarse a una realidad tecnológica presentada como externa e inevitable. La investigación contribuye a desnaturalizar las presiones contemporáneas por la digitalización, asumiendo la tecnología como un instrumento de poder orientado a la producción de capital humano.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Discurso. Capitalismo Digital. Digitalización. Educación. Capital Humano.

1 INTRODUCTION

The growing pressure to integrate digital technologies into educational contexts is a striking feature of policies across countries worldwide (Almeida, 2025; Castro, 2025; Garbin & Ferreira, 2025). This movement is also frequently presented in documents from transnational organisations as a necessary evolution, a crucial step towards the modernisation of schools in the 21st century (OECD, 2020, 2023, 2023b). In this paper, however, we seek to problematise this understanding by investigating the incursion of technology into education not as a self-evident advance, but as a strategic effect of a powerful discursive machinery.

A significant body of research has explored the urgency of digitising the educational experience as a kind of truth to be achieved. Works such as Almeida (2025), Castro (2025), and Garbin and Ferreira (2025) address the integration of digital culture in the Brazilian educational context, arguing that, although grounded in robust normative guidelines aligned with international standards, substantial challenges arise in translating theory into pedagogical practice.

The above-mentioned studies converge on the understanding that Brazilian steering documents for basic education provide up-to-date technical support for promoting critical citizenship and computational thinking. However, the investigations indicate that the effectiveness of this implementation is often hampered by infrastructural precariousness and an excessively instrumental view of technology. In particular, the works of Almeida (2025) and Garbin and Ferreira (2025) emphasise that the success of this integration depends on a 'renormalisation' of teaching practices and the adoption of transdisciplinary approaches that bridge the gap between official objectives and the reality of classrooms, transforming digital culture into 'powerful knowledge' capable of fostering autonomy and ethics in the school context.

This article, in turn, aims to advance the current academic discussion, shifting the analytical focus from the implementation and technical effectiveness of digital policies to a discursive investigation of the digital competence device in education. Although recent literature mainly examines the 'renormalisation' of pedagogical practices amid infrastructural challenges or compares the technical robustness of the Brazilian steering documents to international references, such as Finland (Castro, 2025), these studies often treat the digitisation of education as an obvious necessity of the 21st century.

Similarly, although Almeida (2025) explores the transformative potential of 'web curricula' to overcome instrumental views of technology, the broader 'digital urgency' remains largely unproblematised. By analysing documents from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and Brazil as sites of negotiation, this research seeks to highlight how an exercise in transnational governmentality is received at the national level, mapping the traces of neoliberal rationality that frames schools as producers of human capital¹ with digital competence.

In this sense, our objective is to examine, based on discourse analysis inspired by Michel Foucault's theories, documents from the OECD and the Brazilian Ministry of Education to map the traces of what we understand, in this study, as a device of digital competence in the incursion of digital technologies in the educational context. To this end, we selected, as empirical evidence for this work, key OECD policy documents that embody transnational discourse, as well as national education guidance documents: National Curriculum Guidelines (DCN) and the National Common Core Curriculum (BNCC), which act as a space for negotiating this discourse in the Brazilian context.

This article is organised into six sections, the first of which is this. In the second section, we present theoretical paths that deepen Michel Foucault's concept of device and contextualise the emergence of technoscience and digital capitalism as the ground on which the digital competence device is built. The third section details the methodological configurations, grounding the discourse analysis inspired by Foucault's thinking and describing the *corpus* composed of OECD and Brazilian documents. The subsequent sections are devoted to empirical analysis: first, investigating how the OECD articulates digital education with economic security and, second, examining how Brazilian policies articulate these imperatives in a language that blends economic viability and democratic values. Finally, the conclusion summarises the findings and presents final considerations on the digital competence device.

2 THEORETICAL PATHS: ON THE EMERGENCE OF THE DIGITAL COMPETENCE DEVICE IN EDUCATION

The concept of *dispositif* emerges in what has become known as Michel Foucault's genealogical phase, consolidating itself in works such as *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*, Volume I: An Introduction (Castro, 2022). Unlike the notion of *epistémè*, developed in his archaeological phase, which is limited to the discursive domain, the device is defined as a network of relationships established between markedly heterogeneous elements, which encompasses both 'the said' and 'the unsaid'. It constitutes a whole that encompasses discourses, scientific statements, philosophical and moral theses, as well as institutions, architectural

¹ Drawing on Foucauldian discussions of biopolitics and governmentality, Costa (2009) highlights that neoliberal rationality intervenes in the constitution of contemporary subjects, disseminating the idea that the logic of capital must be incorporated into the very existence of the individual, who is called upon to take themselves as capital. By recognising themselves as micro-enterprises that need to make constant investments in themselves, individuals subject themselves to the logic of the business world, which enters, among other areas, the sphere of education. This form of business life has branched out into schools, producing effects on the curriculum, teacher training and educational policies, such as those examined in this article.

organisations, regulatory decisions and laws (Foucault, 1979; Castro, 2022). The nature of the device, however, does not lie in the sum of these components, but in the complex and changing interplay among them.

From a strategic perspective, the device functions as a formation that, at a given historical moment, responds to a specific issue, a historical urgency, and is inscribed in a power-knowledge relationship (Foucault, 1979). According to Foucault:

The *dispositif*, therefore, is always inscribed in a power game, yet always linked to one or more configurations of knowledge that arise from it but also condition it. And this is the device: strategies of power relations sustaining types of knowledge and being sustained by them. (Foucault, 1979, p. 139)²

Regarding the historical genesis of a device, it is characterised by processes of functional overdetermination and constant strategic fulfilment, in which each effect resonates or contradicts the others, maintaining a complex articulation of power strategies.

By deploying Foucault's theorisation of the *dispositif* to the analysis of digital competence in education, it is possible to demonstrate that it functions, in practice, as a device. In the realm of the 'said' there is a broad network of discourses that encompasses pedagogical definitions in curricula and research, public policies for digital inclusion, and moral justifications that link technological competence to citizenship and professional success, as in the discussions proposed by Almeida (2025), Castro (2025), and Garbin and Ferreira (2025). At the same time, the device manifests itself in the 'unsaid' through non-discursive elements, such as the architectural organisation of distance learning platforms and laboratories, or even administrative assessment techniques and certification measures that classify and rank individuals in data systems, as argued by Grimberg and Armella (2023) when analysing the pedagogies of the future, emerging from the intersection of digital technologies and the field of education.

To understand the conditions of existence of the digital competence device and how it operates in the field of education, it is necessary to carry out a brief exercise in historical genesis to delimit, at least in part, the ground on which it emerges. According to Channel (2017), in the 21st century, technoscience emerges as a concept that synthesises scientific and technological activities, which are increasingly indistinguishable. Due to the interconnection between these areas, it is challenging to characterise many of the developments that underpin the modern world as exclusively scientific or technological. On many occasions, such developments are described as outstanding scientific achievements, while on others, they are labelled as outstanding technological or engineering achievements.

Beyond a symbiotic relationship between two fields of knowledge, it is important to highlight that technoscience also emerges as a sign of the inseparability between technologies, scientific production, and capital. Furthermore, it is necessary to consider the centrality of digital technologies in contemporary society, which now occupy a place of truth-power (Knijnik, 2018). With the transformations that digital technologies promote across multiple aspects of life, they are positioned as elements of progress and prosperity in a neoliberal organisation. Whereas science was previously guided by discovery and the construction of knowledge, it is now taking a new direction: technoscience faces the challenge not only of generating knowledge, but also of transforming it into wealth, so that the validity of knowledge is conditioned by economic parameters and the laws of the transnational market (Bocasanta, 2013).

Complementing this discussion, the concept of digital capitalism, established by Schiller (2000), posits that the emergence of the internet and digital networks does not constitute a break with traditional economic structures, but rather an intensification of neoliberal market logic on a global scale. Schiller (2000) argues that cyberspace has developed as a commercial ecosystem, in which digital culture has been permeated by market interests and connectivity has become inseparable from consumption and social participation.

This rationality has profoundly reconfigured higher education, especially in the United States. Schiller (2000) details how universities reoriented themselves towards the labour market after the economic crisis of the 1970s, transforming themselves from

² The translations of excerpts from the texts in Brazilian Portuguese into English are the responsibility of the authors.

places of critical analysis into producers of human capital for corporate giants such as AT&T and IBM. This change subordinated academic principles to market dynamics: faculty productivity is now measured by commercial indicators, and students are treated as consumers. Schiller (2000) warns that this transformation threatens the role of education as a public good and argues that the 'information age' is used as a discursive strategy to redesign the learning process to serve profit-making interests, often without significant social resistance (p. 200–201).

Contemporary research expands on Schiller's critique of the era of *big data* and artificial intelligence. Fuchs (2021) states that digital capitalism now operates through algorithmic platforms that extract value from everyday digital practices, in which user activity is framed as digital labour, the exploitation of which becomes even clearer in the development of AI. Tubaro et al. (2025) show how regional asymmetries in Latin America are exploited to provide data labelling, transforming highly skilled professionals into a reservoir of informal labour for the global AI economy. These arrangements reinforce the inequalities identified by Schiller decades ago, now embedded in the very infrastructure of emerging technologies.

Although not directly addressing the reception and intersections of digital technologies in education, in the book *L'école n'est pas une entreprise*, Laval (2003) argues that the project of universalising access to education, designed to create subjectivities that function well within the social scheme organised by the state, has failed to achieve the promised social progress. Instead, 20th-century liberal policies intensified social disparities by promoting competition and marginalising those without the means to excel, profoundly altering the role of the school.

The much-heralded crisis in education is exacerbated by the emergence of mass media and profound cultural transformations, which have redefined the socialisation of young people and challenged the traditional authority of both school and family. In this context, the state often resorts to reform to reorient the course of education. However, Laval (2003) questions the motives behind these changes and argues that a neoliberal rationality has permeated the education debate over the past few decades. This has led to a new school system that seeks to adapt the educational machine to market demands, treating education as a private good rather than a social right. As Laval (2003) observes, this model posits that it is individuals who must capitalise on private resources whose future return will be guaranteed by society (p. 17).

The strategic function of this device responds to the historical need to adapt the social body to the new production regime of digital capitalism. Digital competence does not arise randomly: it is imperative for meeting market demands and controlling new forms of communication. In this scenario, the device shapes the power relations among the production system, educational institutions, and individuals, aiming to develop skills helpful to capital while blocking or reinterpreting forms of knowledge not aligned with this logic of technological productivity.

Finally, the digital competence device functions as a disciplinary and regulatory technology, aimed at producing ways of organising and conducting the educational process. Thus, it establishes a scientific field that defines what is considered 'true' or 'qualified' in education and excludes what falls outside this norm, acting as a standardisation mechanism whose focus shifts from simple prohibitions to the distinction between the normal (competent) and the abnormal (incompetent). Through testing, training, and strict control of bodily operations and digital activity, the device manufactures 'functional subjectivities' and individualised subjects, a kind of 'digital citizen', who become the object-effect of constant domination and analytical observation.

Thus, having established what we understand by the digital competence device, we must proceed to map its effects in the OECD and Brazilian documents selected for this study. To do so, however, we must explain the methodological operation outlined for this study. In the following section, we present the methodological configurations used to develop this work.

3 METHODOLOGICAL CONFIGURATIONS: DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AS AN INVESTIGATIVE TOOL

This work is situated in a post-structuralist perspective, understanding that this mode of thinking is not an anti-structuralist approach, nor does it intend to deny structuralism, but rather to expand and problematise the way research is conducted in the

humanities. According to Peters (1996), post-structuralist thinking problematises the structuralist need to analyse the problems of study in order to establish systems and reveal their internal laws, which, through scientific pretension, would reveal a universal pattern, an 'absolute truth' about the phenomena studied, pointing to a supposed structure that would evidence a coherent whole. It is also important to note that post-structuralism is not a homogeneous field of thought, but rather a way of thinking constructed from different currents and a complex interdisciplinary network. According to the author:

[...] Post-structuralism cannot simply be reduced to a set of shared assumptions, a method, a theory, or even a school. It is better to refer to it as a movement of thought – a complex network of thought – that embodies different forms of critical practice. Post-structuralism is decidedly interdisciplinary, drawing on many different currents. (Peters, 1996, p. 29)

That said, it should be noted that, precisely because it is a mode of thought that emerges within (and in criticism of) structuralism, post-structuralist thought also presents a set of assumptions shared with it, some of which are particularly relevant to the development of this work. For example, according to Peters (1996), both forms of thought cast doubt on the assumptions of rationality, individuality, autonomy, and self-presence that underlie the humanist subject. That is, they question the idea that individuals are born in a naturally free condition and can develop into morally controlled adults, possessing autonomy and self-determination. Thus, both recognise that sociocultural structures play an important role in the formation of self-awareness, casting strong suspicion on the Hegelian idea of self-knowledge. However, while structuralism proposes to take the subject as subject to a system that decentralises it and acts to demarcate its practices, post-structuralism "[...] emphasises the discursive constitution of the self – its corporeality, its temporality and finitude, its unconscious and libidinal energies – and the historical and cultural location of the subject" (Peters, 1996, p. 36).

The selection of evidence was intended to map documents that address the historical urgency of educational systems' adherence to the inclusion of digital technologies. As an example of discursive configurations in a transnational context, OECD documents were chosen because the organisation exerts significant influence on the design of national policies in its member countries and in countries aspiring to join the bloc, such as Brazil.

Regarding the guiding documents for basic education and initial teacher training, we justify our choice based on their normative character within the Brazilian educational organisation. Thus, we intend to map, in these documents, the effects of meaning that delimit, organise and bring together ways of educating associated with what, in this work, we call the digital competence device.

Four documents were selected for analysis: two transnational and two national, which we will now present. The report *Digital Strategies in Education Across OECD Countries* (OECD, 2020) aims to map and analyse the national strategies of OECD countries for the use of digital technologies in education, especially in the period prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The document shows that, despite growing technological infrastructure, challenges remain in integrating digital innovations into consistent pedagogical practices.

The report *Shaping Digital Education: Enabling Factors for Quality, Equity and Efficiency* (OECD, 2023) provides an analytical framework to guide governments in creating policy ecosystems that enable the effective and equitable use of digital technologies in education. The document highlights that these technologies can improve the quality of teaching, promote equality and optimise systems, provided they are implemented with planning and support.

The *National Curriculum Guidelines for Basic Education* (DCN) (Brazil, 2013) are a set of guidelines for the development and implementation of school curricula for Early Childhood Education, Primary Education and Secondary Education. The guidelines aim to ensure quality education that meets the needs of students and society as a whole. In addition, the document emphasises the need to prepare for the use of digital technologies as educational tools to develop essential skills and competencies for contemporary life, such as researching, analysing, and interpreting information, as well as communicating and collaborating.

The *National Common Core Curriculum* (BNCC) (Brazil, 2017) is a normative document that establishes the essential competencies and skills that students must develop at each stage of Basic Education, including Early Childhood Education, Primary Education,

and Secondary Education. The objective of the BNCC is to guide the development of school curricula nationwide, ensuring the quality and equity of education. The document also emphasises the need to prepare for the use of digital technologies as educational tools, aiming to develop essential skills and competences for contemporary life, such as the ability to research, analyse and interpret information, as well as to communicate and collaborate.

Drawing inspiration from Michel Foucault's discursive analysis means understanding discourse not as a mere expression of ideas, but as a practice that produces and organises ways of understanding and interpreting the world. From this perspective, discourse is a producer and legitimiser of truths, situated historically and culturally, and regulated by norms that define what can be said and who can speak (Foucault, 1996). Instead of focusing solely on linguistic materialisation, this approach emphasises the order that structures the emergence of concepts, objects of knowledge, and subjective positions in a given field of knowledge (Diaz-Bone, 2006). Thus, discourse analysis, from this perspective, aims to reconstruct the conditions of possibility necessary for what is said to be said.

Each utterance – considered a ‘serious speech act’ – produces concrete effects and is part of networks of relationships that stabilise or challenge the order of knowledge. It is important to note that these networks are dynamic: although regularities maintain discursive practices, ruptures and changes can reorganise the system of rules, enabling new forms of knowledge (Foucault, 1996). Consequently, discourses structure social reality while remaining open to dispute and transformation (Fischer, 2001). Methodologically, this means that discourses are not simple reflections of a predetermined reality, but practices that constitute the objects they speak about. Such an approach provides researchers with tools to investigate how knowledge is produced, legitimised, and disseminated in historical and cultural contexts, constituting a robust research methodology in the field of education sciences. Diaz-Bone (2006) systematises this perspective by outlining a sequence of operational steps. The process begins with fieldwork and the identification of relevant actors, institutions and materials – such as ministries, authorities, documents and interviews with actors in the area under investigation. Next, the researcher constructs an analytical *corpus* and formulates heuristic questions that serve as interpretive lenses. These questions concern recurring objects (e.g., ‘competence’, ‘innovation’, ‘performance’), guiding concepts, and the institutional positions of the subjects (e.g., teacher, student, headteacher). The subsequent interpretative analysis aims to reconstruct the regularities, resonances, and contours that underpin pedagogical discourse and to highlight how specific concepts, such as ‘effectiveness’, ‘time’, and ‘evidence-based learning’, become central, while others are marginalised. In this work, this procedure guides the analysis of the guidelines that regulate the use of digital technology in education.

Based on these assumptions, in the following section, we proceed to the analysis of the empirical material gathered. Thus, we intend to point out how the device of digital competence in education produces effects in the construction of documents that guide public policies at the transnational level, as well as those that standardise educational policies at the national level.

4 THE DIGITAL COMPETENCE DEVICE IN OECD DOCUMENTS: A DEFENCE OF DIGITISED EDUCATION FOR ECONOMIC SECURITY

The documents published by the OECD that seek to inform the debate on the development of policies for the use of digital technologies, as well as those that promote an overview of what the countries in the bloc are doing in terms of educational policies for the inclusion of digital technologies in school curricula, converge in pointing to the inevitable nature of technologies for the society of the future. The discussion highlights that the incorporation of digital technologies into the schooling process is not optional, but rather a strategic response to the social and economic demands of the future. Thus, it is of utmost importance that education systems align with the predictions of international organisations that envisage an increasingly automated and digitised world, producing individuals capable of coping with the unpredictability of change and remaining economically active and viable. The excerpt below illustrates this context.

Digital innovation has created a major challenge for education to prepare students for increasingly automated economies and societies. The OECD Employment Outlook 2019 estimates that 14% of existing jobs could disappear as a result of automation in the next fifteen to twenty years, and another 32% is likely to change

radically as individual tasks are automated. (OECD, 2019, p. 15[31]) This prospect has tremendous effects on the set of skills that people need to make a living in the future, and requires a critical eye on education rather than esthetical adjustments. (Digital strategies in education across OECD countries – OECD, 2020, p. 18) ³

Among the meanings that emerge from the excerpt, we highlight the enunciative construction of an uncertain future that requires urgent attention, given that estimates indicate that ‘14% of existing jobs may disappear ([...] and another 32% are likely to change radically’ in the face of automation (OECD, 2020). Thus, if students do not develop the skills and abilities necessary to transition into a digitised world, they may have difficulties ‘earning a living in the future’. The context described, therefore, is that of a race for employability in a challenging future, in which individuals are either in or out.

Given the urgency outlined in the document, education is positioned as a space and institution whose responsibility is to act as a bridge to the future, responding to this demand. Since it is necessary to ‘prepare students for increasingly automated economies and societies’ (OECD, 2020), it will be up to states to develop policies that fill the gaps and accelerate the pace of adaptation of educational training to the voracious demands of the market, given that these rapid socio-economic transformations produce ‘tremendous effects on the skill set’ needed for the future (OECD, 2020).

In general terms, this means positioning digital technologies as tools whose mastery is crucial for future economic participation. At the individual level, this means surviving in the world of work. At the state level, it means competitiveness. Producing a population capable of facing the challenges of capitalism is, above all, ensuring the survival and prosperity of an entire society within the neoliberal logic. It is therefore necessary to produce individuals who are not only competent and skilled in the use of digital technologies, but also subjugated and convinced that this dynamic is part of what it means to exist and live in society. It is also, among other phenomena, a matter of sanctioning normality in a dynamic, uncertain, rotating world of work with fluid foundations, without any guarantee of stability for the worker.

It is important to highlight, in this context, that what we call the digital competence mechanism in education is the element that mobilises the creation of transnational instruments for the conduct and guidance of educational policies, such as the OECD documents analysed in this study. In the field of the unsaid, the mechanism organises power relations in order to produce effects aligned with the rationality that sustains it. Furthermore, in the field of the said, the device creates and delimits the competences and behaviours to be developed by school actors, as well as normalising what it means to be fit or unfit to operate in the new socio-economic arrangement.

In this sense, by guiding states to produce subjectivities functional to the contemporary arrangement through education, OECD documents also suggest ways to catalyse and optimise educational processes themselves, redefining their purposes. It is imperative to ‘capitalise’ on the digital transformation of education in order to make it a field governed by more robust evidence, produced in the context of the digitisation of the school experience, as exemplified in the excerpt below.

Another direction for policy would be to capitalise on the process of digital transformation itself to strengthen the evidence base of effective digital education. Education data mining (i.e. the application of data analytics to answer education research questions) and learning analytics (i.e. the use of data analytics to understand and improve teaching and learning) have been recognised as an emerging field of research for more than a decade (Romero and Ventura, 2013[86]), and methodology continues to improve, along with access to research datasets. The use of digital tools, including educational software in the classroom thus generates a range of potentially valuable data, providing new insights into usage patterns, how they might link to user profiles and lead to different learning outcomes (OECD, 2023, p. 232)

By suggesting ‘capitalising on the digital transformation process itself to strengthen the evidence base for effective digital education’ (OECD, 2023), it is evident not only the ‘said’ that discursively constructs contemporary education, permeated by digital

³ To differentiate between citations that emerge from the empirical *corpus* and those originating from the theoretical framework, we will mark the fragments of the examined material in italics.

technologies, but also the ‘unsaid’, which reorganises the relations of knowledge-power in the conduct of the educational process. It will no longer be up to the teacher’s watchful eye or the school’s analogue instruments to monitor and guide students; digital artefacts will come into play, collecting data and producing diagnoses, albeit preliminary and subject to human interpretation.

The mining and analysis of educational data are described as new school technologies, ‘digital tools, including educational software in the classroom’, which have the potential to produce ‘a range of potentially valuable data’ that can be used to promote ‘different learning outcomes’ (OECD, 2023). This means that digital technologies are positioned in the document not only to compose the literacy horizon of the school experience, but also to guide the configuration of the school experience itself (Grinberg & Armella, 2023).

The functioning of the digital competence device, however, cannot be taken as producing well-calibrated effects that move in the same direction. Given that devices, according to Foucault (1988), produce a strategic filling (*remplissement*), it is necessary to recognise that the device’s functioning has unforeseen effects. For example, various studies have documented the dispersive effects of digital technologies in the classroom. Works such as those by Wu (2020) discuss how digital technologies catalyse the competition for attention, converting it into consumption. By introducing digital technologies into its space, which is still built on a rationality that emphasises discipline and attention (Varela & Alvarez-Uria, 1992), the school ends up witnessing a kind of ‘rebound effect’: the digital artefact that should catalyse their work is the same one that distracts students’ attention, undermining the educational indicators verified in large-scale assessments (OECD, 2024).

It is in this context that countries such as Sweden⁴, which had adopted a cutting-edge model of digitisation, are moving towards the de-digitisation of basic schooling stages to recover performance in large-scale assessments. In addition, the quest for students’ attention leads many schools to restrict the use of mobile phones in the classroom, as is the case in Brazil⁵.

In short, the effects of the digital competence device in the OECD documents analysed result in tension between the promise of economic security and the uncertainties of pedagogical practice. While transnational discourse positions digitisation and data analysis as urgent actions for the production of subjectivities suited to new socioeconomic arrangements and economically viable states, the school context reveals cracks in this project. The encounter between the urgency of technological innovation and recent policies restricting digital technologies in the school context indicates that the strategic implementation of this device is not linear. Thus, the proposal for a digitised education for economic security not only reorganises the relations of knowledge-power in everyday school life but also produces escapes and paradoxes that challenge the very neoliberal rationality that seeks to govern the future of education.

To this end, in the following section, we explore how the digital competence device produces effects in Brazilian education and how the documents organise and define the limits and formats for the use of digital technologies in education.

5 THE DIGITAL COMPETENCE DEVICE IN BRAZILIAN EDUCATIONAL POLICIES: DIGITAL EDUCATION THAT PROMOTES DEMOCRATIC VALUES AND ECONOMIC VIABILITY

Understanding discourse as a historical practice in a constant process of negotiation implies that it does not operate in a monolithic manner (Foucault, 1996). The OECD’s discursive production of digital urgency is not a permanent structure that can be imposed. Its dynamic nature requires an analysis of how it is effectively received, interpreted, and rearticulated in various microcontexts.

Transnational discourse, as embodied in OECD documents, is therefore reconfigured when it enters a national context. The Brazilian policy documents analysed here demonstrate this process, intertwining economic imperatives with a distinct local

⁴ <https://g1.globo.com/educacao/noticia/2023/08/07/por-que-a-suecia-desistiu-da-educacao-100percent-digital-e-gastara-milhoes-de-euros-para-voltar-aos-livros-impressos.ghtml>

⁵ <https://www.gov.br/mec/pt-br/assuntos/noticias/2025/fevereiro/restricao-ao-uso-do-celular-nas-escolas-ja-esta-valendo>

pedagogical language. On the one hand, they echo the OECD's economic logic, linking technological change directly to labour market demands:

From the 1980s onwards, new forms of work organisation and management began to undergo increasingly profound structural changes. A new economic and productive scenario began to take shape. It became established with the development and use of complex technologies in production and service provision, and with the growing internationalisation of economic relations. As a result, there was an increasing demand for a solid general education base for all workers; basic vocational education for the unskilled; professional qualifications for technicians; and continuing education for the updating, improvement, specialisation, and retraining of workers. From the 1970s and 1980s onwards, there was a proliferation of studies on the impact of new technologies, which revealed the need for increasingly versatile professionals capable of interacting in new and constantly changing situations. (National Curriculum Guidelines - Brazil, 2013, p. 208)

We highlight how the National Curriculum Guidelines articulate the need for educational changes in line with developments in the world of work. This 'new economic and productive scenario' outlined in the document is established through 'complex technologies added to production and service provision and the growing internationalisation of economic relations'. This recognises the role of technologies in the face of these changes, which are associated with an increasingly collaborative international scenario, creating an inevitable need not only for transnational alignment of development policies, but also for a body of workers who are 'with a solid general education base' to preserve their competitiveness in this scenario. Education, therefore, is positioned in its potential for 'updating, improving, specialising and retraining workers', which seems to align with the OECD's discursive configurations in predicting the need to align the educational process with future market demands.

The response provided by the digital competence mechanism in both contexts stems from the same common ground: producing individuals who can circulate proficiently in the new socioeconomic arrangements. They differ, however, in the *modus operandi* of their enunciative constructions. While the OECD documents focus on defending digitised education for economic security, the Brazilian documents add to this construction the promotion of digital education that develops democratic values. Although the proposal seems, at first glance, justifiable, it must be analysed for the normalising effect it produces, since it establishes which individuals function and which do not function within the scheme outlined in the documents. The excerpt below illustrates this analysis.

Educational institutions must preserve their commitment to stimulating reflection and in-depth analysis, and contribute to the development of a critical attitude among students towards the content and the multiplicity of media and digital offerings. However, it is also essential that schools understand and incorporate new languages and their modes of operation, uncovering possibilities for communication (and also manipulation), and that they educate for more democratic uses of technologies and more conscious participation in digital culture. By harnessing the communication potential of the digital universe, schools can establish new ways to promote learning, interaction, and the sharing of meaning between teachers and students. (National Common Core Curriculum - Brazil, 2017, p. 61)

This preservation of the central function of urgency in Brazilian documents deserves further emphasis. Although national policy seeks to align itself with transnational discourse to articulate economic imperatives with sociocultural and pedagogical discourse, the result is not questioning but rather an effective modulation of discourse. The inclusion of local pedagogical issues, such as the importance of 'stimulating reflection and in-depth analysis' in order to contribute to 'the development, a critical attitude in students towards the content and multiplicity of media and digital offerings' functions as a technique of power, since the conflict is quickly resolved by the conclusion that schools need to 'educate for more democratic uses of technologies and for more conscious participation in digital culture'. This articulation contributes to the digital competence device maintaining its primary strategic function: positioning the school as an institution that urgently needs to adapt to a technological and economic reality defined as external and inevitable. In short, Brazilian documents show that the power relationship in the transnational context remains stable in the local context.

Thus, an urgency emerges that permeates contemporary educational policies and operates through a sophisticated process of articulation between transnational imperatives and local modulations. At the global level, documents from organisations such as

the OECD function as institutions that manufacture the very urgency they seek to remedy. As analysed, by framing the digital condition and automation as fields of imminent economic risk, the OECD constructs a dramatic future whose main consequence is the need for immediate intervention in education, aiming at the survival of individuals in the future labour market.

National guidance documents, such as the National Curriculum Guidelines (Brazil, 2013), echo transnational economic logic, justifying educational reform by the need to respond to 'structural changes' and the 'new economic scenario' that requires "[...] increasingly versatile professionals capable of interacting in new and constantly changing situations" (Brazil, 2013, p. 208). Here, the statements align global urgency with the national development agenda, preserving the nexus between technology, economy, and education.

The National Common Core Curriculum (Brazil, 2017) complicates this discursive resonance by articulating future economic urgency with present sociocultural urgency. The BNCC recognises that digital culture already poses immediate challenges to everyday school life, citing the immediacy of responses, superficial analyses and new languages (Brazil, 2017, p. 61). In doing so, the urgency is doubled: schools are called upon to change radically now, not only to prepare students for the dangerous future of the labour market (the logic of the OECD), but also to manage the disruptive present of digital culture in which students are already immersed.

In this scenario, the digital competence device articulates knowledge of a neoliberal rationality that urges the constant formation of human capital (Dardot & Laval, 2016), as well as normalising the distinction between the digitally competent (normal) individual and the digitally illiterate (abnormal) individual. The process of normalising this grid of intelligibility emerges from an exercise of power that aims to create the notion of economic and social risk, evident in both OECD and Brazilian documents, which urge the techno-scientification of the population through schools (Bocasanta, 2013; Knijnik, 2018).

6 CONCLUSION

The main objective of this research was to conduct a Foucaultian-inspired discourse analysis of documents from the OECD and the Brazilian Ministry of Education to map the traces of the digital competence device in education. We sought to investigate the integration of technologies not as a natural or neutral advance, but as a strategic effect of a discursive machinery that responds to the historical urgency of the digitisation of life. Based on the selection of documents that comprised the empirical data, it was possible to highlight how transnational discourse is received and negotiated in the national context.

The analysis points out that the digital competence device operates as a network that articulates imperatives of economic security and neoliberal productivity. While the OECD constructs a scenario of imminent risk, in which digitisation is the only way to survive in an automated labour market, Brazilian documents rearticulate this logic by hybridising it with discourses on democratic values and critical citizenship. The device's functioning, therefore, normalises the distinction between competent and unfit subjects, positioning the school as an institution that must urgently adapt to a technological reality presented as external and inevitable. Despite the efforts made in constructing this analysis, many elements still deserve further exploration in future work. We highlight in particular the discussion of the 'rebound effect' of digitisation, including the dispersion of attention and recent trends towards de-digitisation observed in international contexts. Furthermore, we suggest that future studies empirically investigate how this transnational governmentality is negotiated in everyday classroom life, beyond documentary analysis. It is necessary to explore how the 'enormalisation' of teaching practices has been received and interpreted in the school context, thereby generating alternative ways of positioning teaching.

Finally, this study has contributed to the educational debate by shifting the focus from the technical effectiveness of digital tools to the political problematisation of their very existence as an imperative. By denaturalising the 'digital urgency', the research has provided educators and researchers with tools to understand technology not only as a pedagogical resource but also as a technology of power aimed at the production of subjectivities functional to digital capitalism. We hope that this analysis will foster a more critical stance towards the processes that seek to shape the future of education.

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Recebido em: 29 de abril de 2026.

Aceito em: 26 de setembro de 2026.

Publicado em: 15 de outubro de 2026.

