

# Path to Self-care: A Playful Experience to Promote Health for Elderly People

Caminho do Autocuidado: Uma Experiência Lúdica para a Promoção da Saúde de Pessoas Idosas

Camino al Autocuidado: Una Experiencia Lúdica para Promover la Salud de las Personas Mayores

## RESUMO

**Introdução:** O envelhecimento populacional demanda estratégias educativas acessíveis e eficazes para a promoção do autocuidado e da saúde entre idosos. Os jogos educativos surgem como ferramentas inovadoras nesse contexto, ao aliarem ludicidade, engajamento e aprendizagem significativa. O objetivo deste trabalho é apresentar a experiência de desenvolvimento e aplicação do jogo de tabuleiro *Caminho do Autocuidado*, voltado à educação em saúde de forma lúdica, participativa e reflexiva. **Método:** A proposta foi elaborada por discentes do Mestrado Profissional em Gerontologia da Universidade Federal da Paraíba, como produto acadêmico da disciplina “Fundamentos de Inovação Tecnológica e sua Aplicação na Promoção da Saúde da Pessoa Idosa”. O jogo, com 25 casas e cartas de perguntas em formatos diversos, foi aplicado em contexto extensionista com idosos, sendo observados aspectos de usabilidade, interação, compreensão e engajamento. **Resultados:** A aplicação demonstrou que os participantes compreenderam os conteúdos abordados, refletiram sobre suas práticas cotidianas de autocuidado e interagiram com entusiasmo ao longo da dinâmica. O formato acessível e a linguagem adaptada favoreceram a participação ativa, a troca de saberes e o fortalecimento de vínculos sociais. **Conclusão:** O jogo Caminho do Autocuidado mostrou-se eficaz como estratégia educativa, contribuindo para o protagonismo da pessoa idosa e promovendo a saúde de forma dialógica, inclusiva e prazerosa. Destaca-se seu potencial de replicabilidade em contextos comunitários e educativos.

**DESCRIPTORIOS:** Autocuidado. Envelhecimento. Jogo educativo. Saúde do idoso. Educação em saúde. Gerontologia.

## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Population aging demands accessible and effective educational strategies to promote self-care and health among older adults. Educational games emerge as innovative tools in this context, combining playfulness, engagement, and meaningful learning. This paper presents the experience of developing and applying the board game *Caminho do Autocuidado* (“Path of Self-Care”), designed for health education in a playful, participatory, and reflective way. **Method:** The game was developed by graduate students of the Professional Master’s Program in Gerontology at the Federal University of Paraíba, as an academic product of the course “Foundations of Technological Innovation and its Application in the Promotion of Older Adult Health.” The board game, consisting of 25 spaces and diverse question cards, was implemented in an extension activity with older participants, focusing on usability, interaction, comprehension, and engagement. **Results:** The intervention showed that participants understood the topics addressed, reflected on their daily self-care practices, and interacted enthusiastically throughout the activity. The accessible format and adapted language facilitated active participation, knowledge sharing, and the strengthening of social bonds. **Conclusions:** The Path of Self-Care board game proved to be effective as an educational strategy, contributing to older adults’ protagonism and promoting health in a dialogic, inclusive, and enjoyable manner. Its potential for replication in community and educational settings is noteworthy.

**DESCRIPTORS:** Self-care. Aging. Educational game. Older adult health. Health education. Gerontology

## RESUMEN

**Introducción:** El envejecimiento poblacional exige estrategias educativas accesibles y eficaces para la promoción del autocuidado y la salud entre las personas mayores. Los juegos educativos surgen como herramientas innovadoras en este contexto, al combinar ludicidad, participación y aprendizaje significativo. El objetivo de este trabajo es presentar la experiencia de desarrollo y aplicación del juego de mesa Camino del Autocuidado, orientado a la educación en salud de forma lúdica, participativa y reflexiva. **Método:** La propuesta fue elaborada por estudiantes del Máster Profesional en Gerontología de la Universidad Federal de Paraíba, como producto académico de la asignatura “Fundamentos de la Innovación Tecnológica y su Aplicación en la Promoción de la Salud de la Persona Mayor”. El juego, compuesto por 25 casillas y cartas de preguntas en diversos formatos, fue aplicado en un contexto extensionista con personas mayores, observándose aspectos de usabilidad, interacción, comprensión y participación. **Resultados:** La aplicación demostró que los participantes comprendieron los contenidos abordados, reflexionaron sobre sus prácticas cotidianas de autocuidado e interactuaron con entusiasmo durante la dinámica. El formato accesible y el lenguaje adaptado favorecieron la participación activa, el intercambio de saberes y el fortalecimiento de los vínculos sociales. **Conclusión:** El juego Camino del Autocuidado se mostró eficaz como estrategia educativa, contribuyendo al protagonismo de la persona mayor y promoviendo la salud de manera dialógica, inclusiva y placentera. Se destaca su potencial de replicabilidad en contextos comunitarios y educativos.

**DESCRIPTORIOS:** Autocuidado. Envejecimiento. Juego educativo. Salud del adulto mayor. Educación en salud. Gerontología.

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## INTRODUCTION

Population aging represents one of the greatest contemporary challenges for public health systems. Projections from the World Health Organization (WHO) indicate that by 2050, the global population aged 60 and over will reach 2 billion, which will require innovative and inclusive strategies to ensure quality of life and well-being in this stage of life. Among these strategies, the promotion of self-care stands out as a central axis for active, healthy, and autonomous aging<sup>(1)</sup>.

However, educational practices aimed at the elderly still face methodological, communicational, and cultural limitations. The use of technical language, unattractive formats, or unwelcoming environments can compromise the engagement of this audience, making it necessary to rethink the ways in which health knowledge is mediated. In this sense, the use of interactive educational games emerges as a promising

and expanding approach in the specialized literature<sup>(2,3)</sup>.

Studies show that educational games contribute not only to learning but also to strengthening self-esteem, memory, socialization, and empowerment of older adults in relation to their health<sup>2,3</sup>. When adapted to the visual, cognitive, and symbolic abilities of this group, these resources become catalysts for care practices based on autonomy and dialogue. A notable example is the use of theater and simulations as light technologies for discussing sensitive topics such as falls, nutrition, and mental health.

Health promotion in old age represents a growing challenge in the face of demographic transition that accentuates population aging. Strategies that encourage autonomy, socialization, and self-care are increasingly valued in the field of gerontology, especially when they incorporate playful elements that are accessible to the reality of older adults. The literature has shown that interactive educational approaches can

be more effective than traditional methods because they facilitate meaningful learning and promote active engagement among participants<sup>(5)</sup>.

Based on this perspective, the board game Caminho do Autocuidado (Path to Self-Care) was developed, an educational tool designed to act as a mediator of health knowledge. The game combines content essential to quality of life in old age with visual resources, accessible language, and participatory dynamics, seeking to integrate cognitive, social, and emotional aspects into the learning experience. The methodology adopted aims to enable older adults to take the lead in the process of building knowledge about self-care, strengthening their critical and preventive capacities.

Even so, it is necessary to ask: how can we develop educational experiences that go beyond the transmission of content and manage to generate real changes in the perception and daily practice of care? How can we transform the elderly from passive

spectators into active agents in their aging process?

The objective of this study is to present an experience report on the development and application of the board game *Caminho do Autocuidado* (Path to Self-Care), designed as an educational tool aimed at promoting health among older adults. The proposal combines thematic content with playful and participatory elements, based on the premises of educational gerontology and empowerment. The study starts from the following research question: how can a board game contribute to health learning and the strengthening of self-care among older adults?

## METHODOLOGY

### Context and objective

This experience report was developed within the scope of the Professional Master's Program in Gerontology at the Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB), during the course "Fundamentals of Technological Innovation and its Application in Health Promotion for the Elderly." The main objective was to create a playful-pedagogical resource for promoting health and encouraging self-care among older adults, through the construction and application of an educational board game.

### Game description

The game, entitled *Path to Self-Care*, was developed based on World Health Organization guidelines and scientific evidence on healthy aging. Its content addresses topics such as nutrition, fall prevention, medication use, mental health, hygiene, physical activity, and sleep. The structure of the game consists of:

- A board with 25 squares representing stages of the self-care journey;
- Cards with multiple-choice and true or false questions, classified into three levels of difficulty (easy, medium, difficult);
- A scoring system based on correct answers (1 to 5 points);
- Special squares that activate edu-

cational actions (such as advance, return, or pause);

- Printed material with enlarged fonts, high visual contrast, accessible language, and potential use of QR codes for digital accessibility;
- Recommended for playing in groups of three, encouraging collaboration and knowledge exchange.

### Application of the experience

The game was applied in an outreach activity with a group of elderly people in a collective and accessible environment. Three master's students participated as facilitators. Before the activity, the rules were explained, and the participants formed small groups. Direct observation, with recording of statements, reactions, and interactions, was used as a qualitative method to capture impressions and evaluate the impact of the tool.

### Results observed

The results were remarkably positive. Participants showed a high level of engagement, curiosity, and enthusiasm for the proposal. The playful dynamics facilitated

understanding of the content covered and allowed for lighthearted and reflective discussion of everyday practices. Spontaneous comments such as "I never imagined that drinking coffee at night would interfere with sleep" or "I need to wear better shoes inside the house" stood out.

The clear language, visual elements, and mechanics of the game allowed even people with less education to become actively involved. The special houses served as educational triggers, provoking questions and reinforcing good practices. In addition, the activity promoted socialization and appreciation of the participants' life experiences, aligning with the principles of empowerment and dialogic education in health.

At the end of the experiment, the elderly reported satisfaction with the activity and suggested repeating it in other spaces, such as community groups, long-term care facilities, and health centers. The data indicate that the *Self-Care Path* game has great potential for replicability and applicability in different health education contexts.

Figure 1 – Images from the game:



Source: Authors, 2025.

The positive results observed during the application of the Self-Care Path game are in line with several studies that recognize the pedagogical value of games as health education tools for the elderly. Playfulness, combined with accessible language and group interaction, has been pointed out by several authors as a key factor in promoting engagement, facilitating learning, and stimulating participants' autonomy<sup>(6,7)</sup>.

A study<sup>2</sup> on educational games focused on the health of the elderly demonstrated their potential to consolidate knowledge and promote changes in habits, especially when used in collective environments and mediated by educators who are sensitive to the reality of the target audience. The proposal of games as symbolic mediators of self-care practices, such as nutrition, fall prevention, and medication adherence, was also recognized in a study<sup>(9)</sup>, which highlights the importance of symbolic language and "learning through play" for aging audiences.

In addition, the promotion of autonomy and protagonism of the elderly in the process of self-care is also supported by research that addresses the concept of empowerment in health. According to authors<sup>4</sup> dialogical education based on active methodologies stimulates a sense of belonging and recognition of the experiential knowledge of the elderly, values clearly perceived in the reported experience.

Figure 2 – Images from the game:



Source: Authors, 2025.

Figure 3 – Images from the game:



Source: Authors, 2025.

Another relevant aspect observed was the socialization among participants, who felt valued when sharing their experiences and collectively building knowledge. This affective and

intersubjective dimension is widely discussed by these authors<sup>10</sup> who indicate that collaborative and affective environments increase adherence to educational actions and favor sustainable behavioral changes.

Figure 4 – Images from the game:



Source: Authors, 2025.

In addition, a study<sup>11</sup> emphasizes that the use of visual resources, multiple-choice questions, and scoring dynamics contribute to the cognitive stimulation of older adults and to the retention of learned content. By adopting these strategies, the Self-Care Path game has proven to be sensitive to the particularities of this audience, enabling not only access to information but also the critical construction of health knowledge.

Finally, the observation of the participants' appropriation of the content, expressed in their statements and attitudes during the activity, confirms that meaningful learning occurred at both cognitive and affective levels.

## CONCLUSION

The experience reported with the board game Caminho do Autocuidado allowed us to validate, albeit in an exploratory way, the pedagogical potential of playful tools in the health education process aimed at the elderly population. The game proved to be capable of promoting engagement, favoring the exchange of knowledge, and stimulating critical reflection on daily self-care practices. These effects point to the fulfillment of the proposed objectives, both in terms of encouraging the autonomy of the elderly and creating a participatory, accessible,

and meaningful experience.

The activity also proved effective in addressing content in a light and understandable way, even among participants with different levels of education and prior access to health information.

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Adapted language, visual stimuli, and collaborative dynamics were crucial aspects for the success of the proposal. In addition, the socialization provided by the game amplified the expected benefits, strengthening social bonds and generating a sense of belonging in the participating group.

Among the challenges faced, the need to adjust the duration of the activity and the number of participants per group stands out, in order to ensure everyone's active participation. Limitations related to digital accessibility, still in the implementation phase through QR Codes, and the need to expand the validation of the game in different contexts, such as rural communities, long-term care institutions, and health centers, were also identified.

As a result, the team proposes conducting future studies with more robust methodological designs, such as tests with control groups, cognitive assessments, and longitudinal impact analyses, in order to more accurately measure the effects of the game on the health behavior of the elderly. There is also an intention to create thematic versions of the game, specific to populations with different needs, such as people with visual impairments or early-stage dementia.

Thus, it is concluded that the Caminho do Autocuidado game represents a relevant and replicable contribution to interdisciplinary practices in Gerontology and Health Education, opening up possibilities for the development of new active methodologies based on listening, playfulness, and valuing older adults as agents of their own care.

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