

Programming web-course analysis: how to introduce computer programming?

Romenig Ribeiro¹, Tulio Faria², Leônidas Brandão¹ and Anarosa Brandão³

¹Institute of Mathematics and Statistics - IME - USP

²School of Arts, Sciences and Humanities - EACH - USP

³Polytechnic School - USP

{romenig, leo}@ime.usp.br, tuliofaria@usp.br, anarosa.brandao@poli.usp.br

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Institute of Mathematics and Statistics (IME)



Polytechnic School (POLI)



School of Arts, Sciences and Humanities (EACH)

Overview

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Experiment
- 3 Discussion, conclusions and future work

Context: logical reasoning and computer programming

Proposed as fundamental abilities and their introduction in early stages of education has been adopted in an increasing rate.

Problems: introducing it earlier may adress some challenges

- Challenges that are currently faced by teacher and students of STEM courses:
 - new software environment (programming environment)
 - new way of describing a problem and it's solution (programming language)
 - new way of thinking (to solve problems computationally)

Proposals to overcome some of these problems

- There are some proposals of using visual systems to support the learning of introductory programming (e.g. Raptor [1], Greenfoot[2], Scratch [3] and Alice [4]).
- Most of Visual Programming (**VP**) systems allows students to:
 - compile and execute their algorithm with a single click
 - build programs without any concern related to the textual programming language syntax
 - consequently, they may focus their attention to the problem solution

This paper approach

An experiment to evaluate the mental workload during the learning process (VP versus textual) in a web-course context.

To accomplish the analysis we:

- created two similar web-courses of Introductory Programming
 - delivered through Moodle
 - same instructional material with differences only concerning the tools
- created a NASA Task Load Index (NASA-TLX) Moodle module for evaluating mental workload

Background: iVProg, VPL and NASA-TLX

iVProg

The screenshot displays the iVProg graphical programming interface. At the top, there is a toolbar with icons for settings, a list, undo/redo, and a checkmark. Below the toolbar, the main workspace is titled "Principal".

Under the "Principal" tab, there is a section for "Variáveis" (Variables) with three input fields: `num = 1.0`, `soma_pos = 0`, and `soma_neg = 0`. Each field has a small wrench icon and a minus sign.

Below the variables, there is a block labeled "Leia um dado e guarde em" (Read a value and save in) with the variable `num` selected.

Following this is a loop structure "Enquanto" (While) with the condition `(num ≠ 0)`. Inside the loop, there is a conditional block "Se" (If) with the condition `(num ≥ 0)`. The "Se" block contains two sub-blocks:

- A block labeled "soma_pos recebe" (soma_pos receives) with the expression `(soma_pos + num)`.
- A block labeled "Instruções" (Instructions) with a plus sign icon.

Below the "Se" block is a "Senão" (Else) block containing:

- A block labeled "soma_neg recebe" (soma_neg receives) with the expression `(soma_neg + num)`.
- A block labeled "Instruções" (Instructions) with a plus sign icon.

At the bottom of the interface, there is a console window showing the output of the program:

```
> 2.0  
> 0.0
```

Virtual Programming Lab - VPL

```
Arquivo  Editar  Opções  Ajuda
ex2-4.c
1  #include<stdlib.h>
2  #include<stdio.h>
3  int main() {
4      int N;
5      scanf("%d", &N);
6      int Soma;
7      while (N!=0) {
8          if (N%2==1) {
9              Soma=Soma+N;
10             }
11             scanf("%d", &N);
12         }
13         printf("%d", Soma);
14         return 0;
15     }
16

Console 1 - conexão fechada
1
2
3
0
4|
```

NASA-TLX Protocol

- Objective: measure workload during the execution of an activity
- Workload: defined in [5] as a hypothetical construct that represents the cost of someone finishing a task and reaching a certain level of performance.
- How: by filling up a questionnaire with six scales, giving them values and then conducting a pairwise choice between the scales giving them weights
- Scales:
 - Mental Demand (MD)
 - Physical Demand (PD)
 - Temporal Demand (TD)
 - Own performance (OP)
 - Effort (EF)
 - Frustration (FR)

NASA-TLX Protocol

Line Meu "Painel de Bordo" Cursos Você acessou como Romenig Ribeiro (Sair)

PÁGINA INICIAL / MEUS CURSOS / MODC / PROG2014-T2 / 1. ALGORITMOS / NASA-TLX - COMO FORAM AS PRIMEIRAS ATIVIDADES?

Responda ao questionário

Questionário sobre a tarefa - Parte 1

Clique em cada escala no ponto que melhor representa sua experiência durante a tarefa

Demanda mental

Quanto das atividades mental e perceptual foram exigidas (por exemplo: pensar, decidir, calcular, lembrar, observar, procurar, etc)? A tarefa foi fácil ou difícil, simples ou complexa, rigorosa ou tolerante?

Baixa Alta

Demanda física

Quanto esforço físico foi exigido (por exemplo: empurrar, puxar, virar, controlar, ativar, etc)? A tarefa foi fácil ou exigente, morosa ou rápida, leve ou pesada?

Baixa Alta

Demanda de tempo

Quanta pressão em relação ao tempo você sentiu no ritmo de execução da tarefa? O ritmo era lento e vagaroso ou rápido e frenético?

Baixa Alta

Desempenho

Quão bem sucedido você se considera ao realizar os objetivos da tarefa? Ficou satisfeito com o seu desempenho no cumprimento dessas metas?

Bom Ruim

Esforço

O quão duro você teve de trabalhar o (mental e fisicamente) para alcançar o seu nível de desempenho?

Baixo Alto

Frustração

Quão inseguro, desencorajado, irritado, estressado e aborrecido versus seguro, gratificado, satisfeito, relaxado e complacente você se sentiu durante a tarefa?

Baixa Alta

[Continuar >>](#)

ADMINISTRAÇÃO

- nasatlx administration
 - Editar configurações
 - Funções designadas localmente
 - Permissões
 - Verificar permissões
 - Filtros
 - Logs
- Administração do curso
- Mudar papel para...
- Minhas configurações de perfil
- Administração do site

[Buscar](#)

NAVEGAÇÃO

NASA-TLX

(scales)

NASA-TLX Protocol

LinE Meu "Painel de Bordo" Cursos

Você acessou como Romenig Ribeiro (Sair)

PÁGINA INICIAL / MEUS CURSOS / MOOC / PRÓG2014-T2 / 1. ALGORITMOS / NASA-TLX - COMO FORAM AS PRIMEIRAS ATIVIDADES?

Responda ao questionário

Questionário da tarefa - Parte 2

Clique no fator que representa o fator de maior contribuição para o cargo de trabalho da tarefa.

Demanda mental

Quanto das atividades mental e perceptual foram exigidas (por exemplo: pensar, decidir, calcular, lembrar, observar, procurar, etc)? A tarefa foi fácil ou difícil, simples ou complexa, rigorosa ou tolerante?

ou

Esforço

O quão duro você teve de trabalhar o (mental e fisicamente) para alcançar o seu nível de desempenho?

ADMINISTRAÇÃO

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NAVEGAÇÃO

NASA-TLX (pairwise choice)

Curriculum

Theoretical and practical content were presented in four modules:

- **Block 1:** "Algorithms- definition of algorithms and basic concepts of programming (variables and their types, data input and output etc.)"
- **Block 2:** "Selection" and it is composed of comments about the previous module, definition of selection with examples.
- **Block 3:** "Looping Constructs" and it is composed of comments about the previous module, definition of the looping constructs while, for and repeat
- **Block 4:** "Closing" and it is composed of complex activities involving the content of the previous modules and discursive activities related to the course as a whole and a final NASA-TLX activity

Enrollment

Volunteers registered through web. The propaganda was performed for a short period of time (4 weeks), and mainly restricted to the University of São Paulo (USP).

Group	System	With experience	Without experience	Total
G1	iVProg	31	41	72
G2	VPL	31	41	72
Total		62	82	144

Enrollment: no show

The number of students that never accessed the system

Group	System	With experience	Without experience	Total
G1	iVProg	9	16	25
G2	VPL	7	14	21
Total		16	30	46

Experiment setup

Enrollment: last week of the course

A really small number of students had concluded the course and made the activities

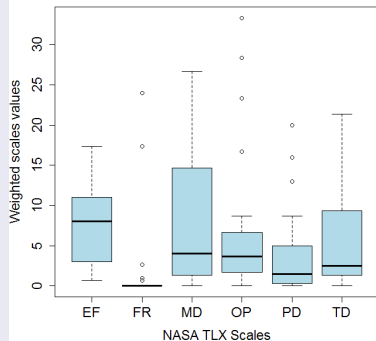
Group	System	With experience	Without experience	Total
G1	iVProg	3	3	6
G2	VPL	2	8	10
Total		5	11	16

Data analysis

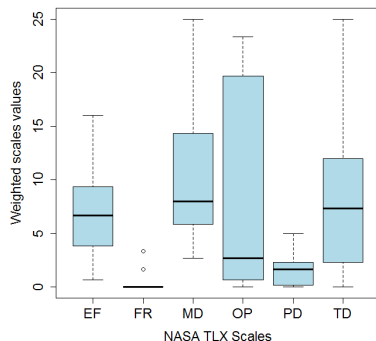
- NASA-TLX: Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney (WMW) test and comparisons with medians
 - reason: low number of respondents, besides the apparent nonsymmetrical distribution of data
 - brief: WMW test consists of defining ranks based on the samples values. The higher the sample ranks, the higher is the values in the distribution
 - hypothesis:
 - $H_0 : \text{distribution}_{G1} = \text{distribution}_{G2}$
 - $H_1 : \text{distribution}_{G1} < \text{distribution}_{G2}$
 - exception: scale *Own Performance* (OP), where $H_1 : \text{distribution}_{G1} > \text{distribution}_{G2}$
- Activities: quantitative analysis describing the number of attempts

NASA-TLX Block 1

NASA TLX Weighted scales G1 Block 1



NASA TLX Weighted scales G2 Block 1



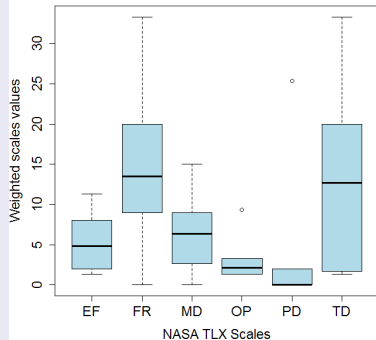
	EF	FR	MD	OP	PD	TD
<i>p</i> -value	0.6409	0.6676	0.1167	0.3002	0.8272	0.1132

Attempts Block 1

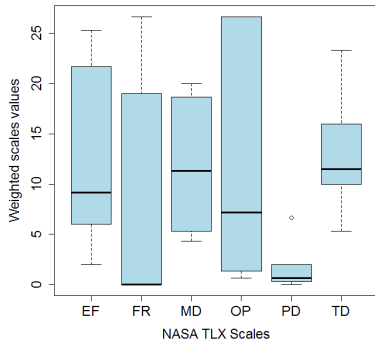
- G2 group: (C+VPL, textual programming), were up to 15 times and it was not uncommon to find a number greater than five attempts
- G1 group: (iVProg) used 4 attempts at most (only 1 student), more than that, the most common situation was the student submit the correct answer in first trial

NASA-TLX Block 2

NASA TLX Weighted scales G1 Block 2



NASA TLX Weighted scales G2 Block 2



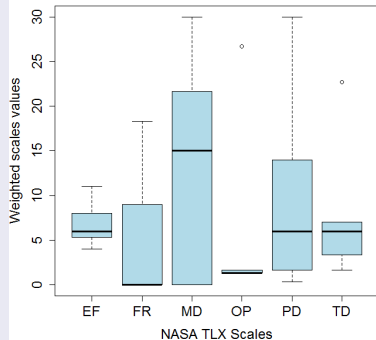
	EF	FR	MD	OP	PD	TD
<i>p</i> -value	0.07441	0.8935	0.1473	0.2071	0.2023	0.532

Attempts Block 2

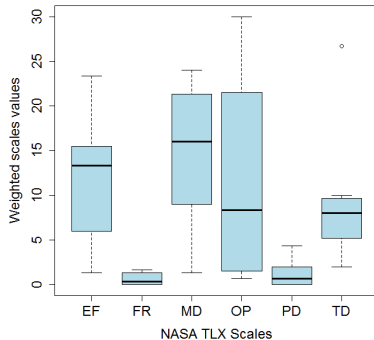
- G2 group: the maximum number of attempts to solve a problem was 12 and the most common situation is the use of 5 attempts
- G1 group: maximum number of attempts was 4 and the most common situation was students sending the correct answer in their first trial

NASA-TLX Block 3

NASA TLX Weighted scales G1 Block 3



NASA TLX Weighted scales G2 Block 3



	EF	FR	MD	OP	PD	TD
<i>p</i> -value	0.1452	0.6028	0.4353	0.7435	0.9642	0.6028

Attempts Block 3

- G2 group: the number of submissions was slightly higher, however, the number of attempts reached the maximum of 17
- G1 group: regarding the number of submissions for G1 few students did the activities, however, their submission was correct on only 1 attempt

Discussion: NASA-TLX

The NASA TLX also showed that, in some cases, users have shown a little bit frustrated during the execution of the proposed tasks. In order to understand this phenomenon and, moreover, to collect qualitative data about the web-course we designed a simple online survey

- (unfortunately) the number of NASA TLX submissions for the forth block were not sufficient to make any comparison
- NASA TLX also showed that, in some cases, users have shown a little bit frustrated during the execution of the proposed tasks

To understand this phenomenon and, moreover, to collect qualitative data about the web-course we designed a simple online survey

Discussion and future work

Discussion: online survey

- 1 If you have not accessed the course system or did not accomplished the module I could share the reason with us? If yes, fill out the form below telling us why.
- 2 If you did the activities and read the instructional material, do you have any suggetion of improvement to the environment or to the material?
- 3 What is your opinion about the tool used to create algorithms?

Discussion: answers

The survey questionnaire was answered by 26 students (23 accessed the system and 3 did not). The main reason to frustrations were problems with the Java applet technology and the difficulties with its configuration.

Discussion: perceptions and considerations

Considering all collected data, from NASA TLX, activities log, and the survey, we can observe that visual programming is a good model to teach algorithms and programming. However the low number of respondents do not allow stronger assertions.

Future work

- Since the reduced number of enrolled students prevented us of any statistical conclusions, we intend to perform a new course edition, this time as MOOC
- Analyse if a new version of iVProg, now implemented using HTML5 technology can reduce the students frustrations with Java security issues
- Besides, this first course edition comparing visual with textual programming arose several questions that must be investigated in future.
 - One of them is how to compare the effective learning. Is it possible to compare both models?

Questions?

Presenter

Leônidas de Oliveira Brandão

leo@ime.usp.br

DCC - IME - USP

Room 212 - Block C - 55 11 3091 9691

Rua do Matão, 1010 - Cidade Universitária - São Paulo - SP

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