Reflections on policies which guide English language teaching to the deaf in Brazil

Reflexões sobre políticas que orientam o ensino de inglês para surdos no Brasil

DOI:10.34117/bjdv6n10-546

Recebimento dos originais: 08/09/2020
Aceitação para publicação: 26/10/2020

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ABSTRACT
Although the discussion about Brazilian education and language policies has been gaining ground in research, the issue of teaching a foreign language to deaf people still does not seem to occupy due space in the concern of researchers. In this sense, we intend to outline reflections about the teaching of the English language for deaf people in Brazil, investigating (in)congruences between what the official texts propose. To achieve our goal, we based our discussions on Bhaskar (1998), Luke (2009), Moutinho (2016), Quadros (2017), Moraes (2018) and Tílio (2019), among others. The adopted methodology followed the guidelines of Gil (2010) for bibliographic and documentary research. For the exploratory/qualitative discussion, we approach official documents about deafness and English language teaching. The data point to an erasure of the differences in documents that guide the teaching of English to the deaf and to the fact that there are no favourable conditions for the full linguistic development of the deaf.

Keywords: Education policies, bilingualism, teaching, English, deaf.

RESUMO
Embora a discussão sobre a educação e as políticas linguísticas brasileiras venha ganhando espaço nas pesquisas, a questão do ensino de língua estrangeira para surdos ainda não parece ocupar o devido espaço na preocupação dos pesquisadores. Nesse sentido, pretendemos traçar reflexões sobre o ensino da língua inglesa para surdos no Brasil, investigando (in)congruências entre o que propõem os textos oficiais. Para atingir nosso objetivo, baseamos nossas discussões em Bhaskar (1998), Luke (2009), Moutinho (2016), Quadros (2017), Autor (2018) e Tílio (2019), entre outros. A metodologia adotada seguiu as orientações de Gil (2010) para pesquisa bibliográfica e documental. Para a discussão exploratória / qualitativa, abordamos documentos oficiais sobre surdez e ensino de língua inglesa. Os dados apontam para o apagamento das diferenças nos documentos que norteiam o ensino da Língua Inglesa para surdos e para o fato de não haver condições favoráveis ao pleno desenvolvimento linguístico dos surdos.
Palavras-chave: Políticas educacionais, bilinguismo, ensino, inglês, surdos.

1 INTRODUCTION

School spaces are peculiar means of socializing, enabling learning in living with diversity and promoting the formation of conscious and plural people in the exchange of knowledge. It is in these spaces that the construction of autonomous, critical human personalities takes place and where children and young people can learn to be and respect people.

From this understanding of a school for all, it is clear that the rights to education of people with disabilities are urgent and necessary since, despite significant advances in the design of laws, normative instruments and auxiliary documents, the rights of people with disabilities are not effective, especially in the face of attitudinal and human barriers.

In this context, studies on education policies have been gaining evidence in Brazilian research regarding minority languages, educational linguistic policies, policies in the media, among others. Furthermore, as Dillenburg and Messerschmidt (2020) put it, it is essential for education professionals to resume all official documents that regulate the implementation of management actions in school spaces.

Therefore, we are especially interested in questions about minority languages, foreign languages, and teaching. Thus, we intend to outline reflections about the teaching of the English language for deaf people in Brazil, a little known and discussed theme by Brazilian universities.

To this end, we follow the guidelines of Gil (2010) for an exploratory/qualitative bibliographic and documentary methodological approach. The theoretical basis used to support the article is based on documents such as: National Curriculum Parameters of a foreign language, laws and decrees on the recognition of the Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) as an official Brazilian language and its regulations, policies, among others. For the discussion of documents, we sought to work with books, articles, and official documents.

2 ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND TEACHING IN BRAZIL

Foreign language teaching is politically motivated (Rajagopalan, 2013). According to Luke (2009, p. 179), regarding educational policy:

While at the strategic, ideological level (1) educational policy is about socially and culturally consequential narratives, in bureaucratic practice (2) it entails the selective regulation of flows of material and human resources, knowledge and discourse. These flows, in turn, are translated by teachers (3) into the enacted curriculum, the face-to-face construction of versions of subjectivity and identity, skill and practice, knowledge and competence with material consequences for students and communities.
In the case of the English language, its importance for today's society is extreme, since it constitutes a tool that allows exchanges and/or relationships in the current world due to the openness in the commercial, cultural, scientific, political and even tourist spheres (Silva, 2005). This appreciation of the language was initially manifested, in our country, between the 16th and 18th centuries due to the commercial relations established between Brazil and England - the Britons were interested in brazilwood (Moraes, 2012).

After constant visits due to the interest in our greatest wealth, in 1703, the Anglo-Saxons imposed the signing of the Methuen Treaty, which stipulated that the Portuguese would commit to buying British textiles and Britons to consume Portuguese wines (Nogueira, 2007; Moraes, 2012).

With the end of Portuguese colonial rule, John VI signed the decree that initiates the formal teaching of English in Brazil on June 22, 1809, culminating in the creation of the first English language school (Nogueira, 2007). In the following centuries, the world took on the study of issues related to language acquisition and development (Moraes, 2012).

Between 1976 and 1986, associations of language teachers emerged, offering teachers possibilities in in-service training. In this sense, Falcomer and Rodrigues (2008) emphasize that the field of foreign language teaching has its own identity and that, therefore, the teacher needs continuous quality education that contributes to the updating of knowledge and to preparing them for work with adversities brought to the classroom by the students, in order to adapt the teaching/learning of languages to the demands of each social and economic context. However, these institutions do not yet provide knowledge for teachers who deal with several differences in the classroom, such as deafness.

In 1996, the then President of the Republic signed Law No. 9,394, which establishes the guidelines and bases of Brazilian education. In the document, it is envisaged that educational institutions will be able to organize classes with students from different grades, but who have equivalent levels of knowledge for teaching foreign languages, arts, or other curricular components. For work with the English language, this fact is extremely important since classes organized by level and by pedagogical objectives are more likely to succeed in the teaching-learning process.

The document also defines the sixth grade of elementary school as the starting point for offering the English language course (Brazil, 2017a). This point was changed from the wording of Law No. 13,415, of 2017. In the original/previous text, the Law of Guidelines and Bases provided for the teaching of a foreign language, chosen by the school community, from the old fifth grade. This fact illustrates the issue of political motivation in language teaching, since the English language
becomes mandatory, a time when Spanish loses space in Brazilian education due to the weakening of relations in MERCOSUR and the maintenance of North American hegemony.

Another amendment to the Law of Guidelines and Bases regarding the foreign language, also in charge of Law No. 13,415, of 2017, concerns the mandatory provision of English in high school. However, it makes room for the offer of a second foreign language, on an optional basis, suggesting Spanish most likely due to our neighbourhood.

The National Curriculum Parameters, in turn, placed foreign language learning as a possibility to increase the student's self-perception as a human being and as a citizen. And they suggested that their teaching should take place through a discursive engagement of the student, that is, in their ability to engage and engage others in the discourse in order to be able to act in the social world (Brazil, 1998) – which characterizes teaching within the theories of Bakhtin and Vygotsky. These ideas are similar to the dialogic model for language teaching proposed by Johnson (2004).

However, this document that guided Elementary Education (Brazil, 1998) placed reading as the main skill to be stimulated in students, which opens space for a teaching closer to the traditional one from an instrumental perspective.

The Parameters of Elementary Education (Brazil, 1998) and High School (Brazil, 2000), therefore, are outdated since they lead to confusion regarding the skills to be worked on. In addition, they document a fact that needs to be revised: the graduate program's focus on reading. In a globalized world, the need to know foreign languages to interact with knowledge is latent and is not limited to written forms of the language. Proof of this are the international events gaining evidence in the Academy and the internationalization of the Postgraduate Programs being stimulated.

These arguments are dated and have their time counted. The globalized world shows an expansion of national and international markets, generating a latent need for professionals fluent in a foreign language or more. In addition, as Dourado (2008) put it, the interests of young Brazilians themselves in video games, films, bands, and in getting to know and even relating to people from abroad via the internet or engaging in programs such as Young Ambassador etc.

Dourado's (2008) and Moraes' (2012; 2018) beliefs regarding the importance and uses of the English language were correct, and the Common National Curriculum Bases (Brazil, 2017b; 2017c), despite being complex and confusing in some aspects, illustrate this well. In this regard, Tílio (2019, p. 9) explains the socio-historical context in which the Bases are produced and promulgated:
Written in little less than four years, between the publication of the law that institutes it and its promulgation, it crossed the management of six Ministers of Education (in addition to 1 interim) in two governments. Initiated in a democratically elected government, it was completed in a government in which the vice president assumed the post of his incumbent [...] due to political articulations [...].

In the Elementary School document (Brazil, 2017b), the Bases value the teaching of the four skills, organized in four axes: orality, reading, writing, and linguistic and grammatical knowledge from the practices of use, analysis and reflection on the language in a contextualized. It focuses on the inductive mode for discovering regularities and irregularities in the functioning of English as a system (Brazil, 2017b).

In addition to this interactionist perspective, the Bases (2017b) also bring the following specific English language competence for the Elementary School: “Identify similarities and differences between the English language and the mother tongue/other languages, articulating them to social, cultural and indemnities, in an intrinsic relationship between language, culture and identity” (Brazil, 2017b, p. 244) - which indicates the presence of more than one language in the classroom.

The High School document (Brazil, 2017c), in turn, indicates that the English language should be understood as that of worldwide use, diverse and varied, as the Bases of the final years of Elementary School define. Furthermore, the possibility of approaching and integrating with multilingual and multicultural groups through this language in the globalized world.

The Base (Brazil, 2017c) also indicate that, while, in elementary school, interculturality and the “deterritorialized” vision of lingua franca are considered, high school expands students' linguistic, multisemiotic and cultural repertoires in order to promote critical awareness of and reflection on the functions and uses of English in the contemporary globalized society.

Moutinho (2016) reaffirms this view when he mentions that elements and topics of daily life are no longer used in the classroom, such as: sequentiality; reflexivity; knowledge co-construction; negotiation of meanings, and cultural differences. This set must be brought to the classroom, although it is not an easy task.

We believe, therefore, that more schools should organize their English language classes by level and using methodologies and strategies more commonly used in language institutes, appropriate for working with a foreign language, which differs from what is done with the first language.

When commenting on the learning of a foreign language, Moutinho (2016) states that little has been reflected on the creation of a context in the classroom for learning to occur. The author
brings as a reference for such reflection “the institutionalized environment that the classroom offers, and the methodological limitation often imposed by planning concentrated on ineffective didactic series” (Moutinho, 2016, p. 197).

This condition leads teachers to a ritualization of the interactive dynamism of classes, limiting the student in their interaction with the new language. In this situation, the focus of learning becomes the form, neglecting the other important aspects for social interaction.

From the reflections outlined in this topic, we move towards reflections on the policies that guide the teaching of English to the deaf in Brazil.

3 POLICIES THAT GUIDE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING TO THE DEAF IN BRAZIL

With regard to policies that influence the education of the deaf, in addition to the documents already mentioned, guiding education in general, we have another set of laws and decrees on the recognition of Libras as an official Brazilian language and its regulation and on the legitimation and exercise of the profession of translator and interpreter of Brazilian Sign Language (Libras).

Maintaining the discussion about the influence of educational and linguistic policies that guide bilingualism, we bring some recent reflections presented by Quadros (2017). Quadros (2017) comments on the relationship between deaf children and hearing parents, bringing successful and frustrated ways of communication in her recent writings. According to the researcher, hearing parents of deaf children reveal that the task of raising their children in environments where two languages are spoken is not easy.

In this scenario, Quadros (2017) brings up an issue linked to what she calls “heritage language”. Heritage speakers are bilingual children. As already analysed by Grosjean (2010), bilingualism is a reality in many countries for children, whether in contact with different contexts or in specific social groups.

In Brazil, the bilingualism that operates is different, since the country functions as being monolingual, in which only the Portuguese language circulates. In the case of Brazilian deaf people, Libras was banned for many years, for political reasons, assuming, with most countries, the attitude of devaluing sign languages. For this reason, although sign languages began to reappear in educational spaces in the 1980s, the effects of the relationship established between sign languages and the “official languages” of each country are reflected in the bilingual development of children until today (Quadros, 2017, p. 13).
Also, according to this author, in Brazil, Libras is a heritage that, facing Portuguese, impacts bilingual development in different ways. In this regard, Steyer (2020) highlights that the Brazilian Sign Language, the language through which the deaf understand the world, has a visual-spatial modality.

However, further discussion is needed, and new proposals must be made in order to provide deaf students with better opportunities of acquiring a foreign language, aiming at emancipating these subjects. According to Bhaskar (1998), emancipation cannot be achieved only through the change of consciousness, it is necessary that it occurs in practice. In this sense, as (trans)formation agents, teachers need to make didactic choices, for example, that allow the deaf to learn the English language in order to expand their access to information. The more languages a subject knows, the greater the range of information to which he has access, especially when it comes to the English language, which is hegemonic and mediates various activities of the human sphere in a globalized world. And these choices, as already mention, are influenced by educational policies, their ideologies, bureaucracies and discourses (Luke, 2009).

Moving forward in the discussion, it is worth noting that the Salamanca Declaration (Spain, 1994) provoked reflections that led to the search for better conditions of inclusion for people with some disability. This new vision that influenced education was promoted by the Government of Spain, through a partnership with UNESCO for the World Conference on Special Educational Needs.

The Declaration (Spain, 1994) arose from the need to recognize people with disabilities as people who deserve respect and quality education. The document suggests that schools adapt their spaces and their political-pedagogical projects to the needs of all enrolled students - which encouraged several institutions and countries to take steps towards inclusion.

In Brazil, the Law of Guidelines and Bases, Law No. 9,394/96, brings in its body Chapter V totally dedicated to Special Education - our first official steps towards an education that encompasses people with disabilities, global development disorders and high skills or giftedness. According to the document, educational assistance will be provided in specialized classes, schools, or services, when it is not possible to integrate students into the regular classes of regular education due to their specific conditions (Brazil, 1996).

As of 2013, Law No. 12,796, the document received a new wording of the sole paragraph of article 60, according to which the government will preferentially adopt the expansion of assistance to students with disabilities, global developmental disorders and high skills or over-giftedness in the
regular public school system, which further accentuated the decline of institutions, associations and federations dedicated to different disabilities.

Another important document for the education of the deaf concerns Law 10.436/02, regulated by Decree No. 5.626/05, which provides for the Brazilian Sign Language (Libras), recognizing it as a legal means of communication and expression, and other measures, such as register the duty of the public authorities and service concessionaires to guarantee ways to support the use and diffusion of Libras - which does not seem to be happening yet in its entirety.

Another important point of the same law says that the federal educational system and the state, municipal and Federal District educational systems must guarantee the inclusion of Libras as a curricular component in Special Education, Speech Therapy and Teaching courses (Brazil, 2002). Unfortunately, the reality is that the various courses usually offer a single curricular component/discipline with a workload ranging from 30 to 60 hours, which is not enough to learn the language. At most, and with effort, teachers are able to raise students' awareness of the issue of deafness; from then on, expect them to be interested in seeking to expand their knowledge of the language.

Goal 4.7 of the National Education Plan also plays a fundamental role in the education of the deaf as it seeks to guarantee the offer of bilingual education in Libras (L1) and written Portuguese (L2) to deaf and hearing-impaired students, in inclusive bilingual schools and classes (Brazil, 2014). However, it is worth reflecting that there is no point in offering education mediated by Libras and the Portuguese language if the institution does not offer Libras as a curricular component, so that the deaf can deepen their knowledge of their own language, or Portuguese as a second language, with appropriate methodology.

In turn, Law 12.319/10 regulates the profession of Libras-Portuguese Translator and Interpreter. The provision states that the translator and interpreter must have the competence to perform interpretation of both languages (Libras and Portuguese), simultaneously or consecutively, and proficiency in translation and interpretation of Libras and Portuguese. Unfortunately, this is not the reality found in schools in general, where we observe professionals with little knowledge of languages and with little knowledge of translation and interpretation.

Another document we would like to comment on is Law No. 13,146/15, which institutes the Brazilian Law for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities. Initially, reflecting on inclusion refers to the work developed by Vygotsky (1929/1993), since he brought important contributions to see people with disabilities in a different way than many people do. For him, the human being is complex and multifaceted.
Based on his vision, he seeks to show that individuals develop in different ways and that it is necessary to seek to understand their distinct characteristics at the organic and psychological levels (Vygotsky, 1929/1993). Thus, it contributes to improving reflections on the participation of all in society and in education regardless of their condition.

The Brazilian Inclusion Law, according to Gabrilli (2015), is a document which changes some existing laws in order to bring them into harmony with the UN International Convention. In other words, reformulation of laws that did not meet the new paradigm for people with disabilities or that simply excluded them from their scope (Gabrilli, 2015).

Thus, despite the anguish caused by the subject, it is accepted that, in the absence of the interest of the Brazilian population, laws and decrees have a disciplinary and coercive role in the search for respect for diversity.

In this sense, diversity has been allowed to enter school (Moraes, 2018). The Inclusion Law for Persons with Disabilities defends this right, and it is up to all bodies to monitor it, that is, the “police power” belongs to all of us. The judiciary and the executive, through notification from the municipality, are responsible for charging the application of this basic right (Brazil, 2015).

However, in most cases, there is no possibility, conditions, for some students to remain in school. We attribute this situation to the guiding documents of education - and we add that we do not see possibilities for change soon as the Bases leave out differences. As pointed out by Dillenburg and Messerschmidt (2020), it is necessary to promote permanence actions to guarantee access, permanence, and promotion of students' learning, so that withdrawal is a personal decision, and not due to the absence of institutional conditions.

In the words of Tílio (2019, p. 12), the Bases suggest that “there must be a single national curriculum for learning to be supposedly homogenized throughout the country, regardless of the specificities and difficulties of each region, each context and each institution”.

From reading the document, we can make some considerations about the education of the deaf in the context of this new national curriculum basis. At first, it should be noted that the text recognizes Libras as the official language of the deaf community, referring to Law No. 10,436, of April 24, 2002. Such recognition, however, is limited to mere mentions, which, in most cases, have an exemplary character of the types of visual languages.

Thus, we can affirm that, however much Libras has been mentioned in certain points of their text, the Bases do not recognize, in fact, the importance of sign language for the community. This statement holds when we are faced with the area of Languages, foreseen for High School and for Elementary School, and we do not find sign language as an autonomous and specific curricular
component, as in the case of Portuguese and English languages. In this sense, "how can we visualize the true inclusion of the deaf in the Common National Curricular Base in the area of Languages if Libras was not contemplated?" (Silva, 2018).

The criticism made in the previous paragraph is justified within our research by the fact that, as we have already explained, Libras constitutes an essential element in mediating the learning of the English language by the deaf. After all, it is the natural language of these people. In this context, the lack of effective recognition of this language as well as the absence of proposals that include sign language in the school curriculum are factors that directly influence the teaching of English to the deaf community. Thus, we realized that the Bases missed the opportunity to bring in their text a truly inclusive curriculum for the deaf when referring to Libras as a simple example of language.

Schools and educational systems face complex problems of new student identities and increasingly socially stratified outcomes, new workplace and civic cultures, digital technologies and new dominant modes of representation, globalised economies and volatile patterns of work, and a new dynamics of shifting state, community and religious value systems. These sit within a larger challenge of what might constitute a critical education for species survival, biosocial sustainability and human justice in the face of a social, political and economic order dominated by the new leviathan of the multinational corporation (Luke, 2009, p. 196).

Another noteworthy point, and here we turn specifically to the teaching of English, concerns the fact that, in the English Language curriculum of Elementary School, we found the Bases carry out a division into axes, among which is the orality. It is clear that the existence of such an axis makes sense when thinking about hearing students who need to develop this linguistic skill in learning English. However, there is no concern in the text of the document with the reality of the deaf student who, in most cases, has the learning of the English language aimed at the development of reading and writing skills due to the absence of hearing.

In fact, the omission of the text regarding the aspect mentioned in the previous paragraph, may lead us to think that learning English is the same for everyone, regardless of differences. This fact is even more aggravating for the deaf population, since it leads us to the idea that it is necessary to develop speech to have full knowledge of a language and to communicate. In other words, the homogeneous treatment of language teaching in terms of the orality axis reminds us of the period of oralization, when it was believed that the only way for the deaf to communicate and be inserted in society was from the development of speech.

It is important to say that by omitting in relation to aspects so relevant to the education of the deaf, the Bases fail to comply with the laws mentioned in this article. It is necessary to understand the Bases as an instrument for implementing educational policies for all students. In this
sense, the document ends up being more of an abstract plan that does not bring concrete changes to the teaching and learning process of the deaf, who continue to expect effective measures to materialize the rights they have been granted.

Furthermore, since the laws we studied are mandatory standards, it is expected that documents that are said to be national and common for the curricula of schools in the country would bring, instead of silence, express provisions for the observance of normative commands that have already been in place for over ten years.

Finally, an interesting observation we made when searching the document for the word “inclusive” was that this term is mentioned ten times. The curious thing is that in nine of these mentions the word appears only as a final adjective to characterize society, always accompanied by the terms "just" and "democratic". Thus, regarding the aspect of inclusion, we realize that the Bases are another official document that values a discourse with beautiful and well-articulated words over the proposal of effective instruments for changes in the educational process and that result in the construction of a “fair, democratic and (truly) inclusive society”.

It is necessary, then, to get to the roots of social problems, to identify their structures, mechanisms and powers and, thus, to envision an explanatory criticism that can generate critical arguments in favor of social transformation (Bhaskar, 1998).

4 FINAL REMARKS

Given all of the above, we can conclude that the research developed has an estimated social and pedagogical value since it targets a portion of the population that is commonly overlooked in the teaching and learning process. In this sense, seeking to give protagonism to the deaf in a fundamental point so that they can, in fact, be included in contemporary society, we rescued legislative documents currently in force in Brazil that deal with inclusion, accessibility and educational policies.

After the shared reflections, without the intention of exhausting such a wide and still little explored theme in the Academy, we noticed an erasure and/or silencing of the deaf in the National Common Curriculum Bases and in other policies. The guiding document for Basic Education is limited to citing Libras as an example of language without giving it autonomy as a linguistic system.

In addition, knowing the importance of learning English and understanding how this process takes place in the reality of the deaf population, we realize that the Bases do not make any kind of prediction of how this approach should be done in the school environment.
Thus, the silence of these documents makes them a national base that is far from being, in fact, common to all students, since it excludes the deaf community from the educational process.

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