

Perceptions of Language students about training as Portuguese for Foreigners teachers in the context of university internationalization /

Percepções de estudantes de Letras sobre a formação em Português para Estrangeiros no contexto da internacionalização universitária

*Luhema Santos Ueti*¹

Luhema Santos Ueti holds a Bachelor's degree in Languages (Portuguese and English) from the Universidade Norte do Paraná (2008), a degree in Pedagogy from the Universidade Nove de Julho (2017), and a Master's degree in Philology and Portuguese Language from the University of São Paulo (2013). Currently, she is pursuing her doctorate in Foreign Languages and Translation at the University of São Paulo. Her expertise lies in the field of Portuguese as an additional language.

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0955-2410>

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ABSTRACT

The context of the internationalization of Brazilian universities is primarily characterized by the plurilingual and intercultural interaction between students and faculty members who engage across various spheres of the academic environment. This new configuration of higher education institutions, in addition to impacting the development of students' plurilingual and intercultural competencies, also influences the training of additional language teachers, particularly the training of Portuguese as a Foreign Language (PFL) teachers, given the increasing interaction with exchange students and visiting professors. In this context, it is essential for Language and Literature students to receive robust training in the field of PFL so that they can not only teach this audience, but also understand and mediate intercultural relations while developing linguistic and cultural skills to reflect on Portuguese as an international language for fostering coexistence within the university environment. The aim of this article is to reflect, based on questionnaire responses, on the perceptions of undergraduate Language and Literature students specializing in Portuguese at the University of São Paulo regarding the field of PFL. This reflection seeks to reconsider teacher training practices in PFL at the university and contribute to the institution's internationalization efforts.

KEYWORDS: Internationalization; Plurilingualism; Interculturality; Training of Portuguese as a Foreign Language Teachers; Portuguese as an International Language.

¹  uetiluhema@gmail.com

RESUMO

O contexto de internacionalização das universidades brasileiras traz como característica principal a interação plurilíngue e intercultural entre discentes e docentes que circulam em diferentes esferas do meio acadêmico. Esta nova configuração das instituições de ensino superior, além de ter reflexos no desenvolvimento de competências plurilíngues e interculturais dos estudantes, tem reflexos também na formação de professores de línguas adicionais, especialmente, a formação de professores de português para estrangeiros (PE) dado o crescente contato com estudantes estrangeiros intercambistas e professores visitantes. Neste contexto, é fundamental que os estudantes de Letras tenham uma formação sólida na área de PE para que, não apenas ministrem aulas para esse público, mas também possam compreender e mediar as relações interculturais e desenvolver habilidades linguístico-culturais de reflexão sobre a língua portuguesa como uma língua internacional para a convivência dentro do ambiente universitário. O objetivo deste artigo é refletir, a partir de respostas a um questionário, sobre as percepções que os estudantes da graduação em Letras com habilitação em Português, da Universidade de São Paulo, têm sobre a área de PE a fim de repensar as práticas de formação de professores de PE na universidade e contribuir para ações de internacionalização da instituição.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Internacionalização; Plurilinguismo; Interculturalidade; Formação de professores de português para estrangeiros; Português como língua internacional

1 Introduction

The internationalization of Brazilian universities is an ongoing process. In recent years, this phenomenon has developed more steadily and intensively, driven by factors such as globalization, the expansion of international agreements between Brazilian and foreign Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), and the growing interest of students and faculty in participating in mobility programs. Although it is not a recent process, its progress became more evident in the 1990s, with the inclusion of the topic in international forums (Stallivieri, 2017).

Within the context of the internationalization of higher education, there is an emphasis on raising awareness about the development of intercultural and multilingual skills through experiences with other languages and cultures across the entire university community (students, faculty, and staff), who alternately host foreign individuals at the university or participate in exchange programs abroad. In this respect, the provision of language courses to meet the demand for additional language knowledge across the academic community (both for Brazilians studying abroad and for foreigners conducting research in Brazil) is of great importance in the context of internationalization. Moreover, there is a notable need to train additional language teachers, particularly Portuguese for Foreigners (PFL) instructors², equipping them to deliver lessons that integrate plurilingualism and intercultural education.

² I chose the use of the term Portuguese for Foreigners since this research is based solely on teaching and learning activities aimed at foreign students participating in academic mobility programs at HEIs.

This article aims to analyze the perceptions of undergraduate Language and Literature students specializing in Portuguese at the University of São Paulo (USP) regarding the field of PFL, based on their responses to a questionnaire³. This analysis reveals a pressing need for the training of PFL teachers, highlighting the importance of providing theoretical and methodological support to ensure that these future professionals are prepared to work in the field. This preparation for working in PFL not only contributes to the university's internationalization policy but also encourages undergraduate Language and Literature students to develop plurilingual and intercultural competencies, which are essential both for teaching practice and for participating in the international academic community.

This article is organized into four main sections. Initially, I contextualize the process of internationalization and its relationship with the teaching and learning of additional languages. Next, I address the field of PFL and, specifically, the training of PFL teachers within the undergraduate Language and Literature program at USP. Subsequently, I present the methodological design of the data collection. Finally, I analyze the responses of Language and Literature students specializing in Portuguese at USP to a questionnaire regarding their knowledge of the field of PFL.

2 Internationalization and the importance of teaching and learning additional languages

When considering internationalization, it is common to associate the process solely with the mobility of students and faculty engaging in activities abroad. However, academic mobility is just one of the aspects of internationalization.

According to Knight (2003), the term internationalization refers to the process of integrating the university in such a way that there is a sense of international, intercultural, or global dimension in the institution's purposes and actions. In other words, to participate broadly in a global community,

³ This article is the result of investigations conducted as part of the author's doctoral thesis, affiliated with the Graduate Program in Foreign Languages and Translation at the University of São Paulo. The research was conducted with ethical approval from Plataforma Brasil, through the Research Ethics Committee of the University of São Paulo, under Ethics Review No. 5.388.881, issued on May 4, 2022.

contributing to society through research and the development of actions aimed at a global and international context.

Thus, the process of internationalization is understood as a set of actions aimed at broadening perspectives on the world and approaches to conducting science, with the goal of impacting various groups, including those beyond the immediate academic community.

As previously mentioned, the internationalization of universities can occur even without the mobility of the institution's members. For example, this can happen through cooperation between universities via video conference seminars or by incorporating individuals into the university environment who promote internationalization in its broadest sense, such as migrants and Indigenous peoples.

In addition to globally disseminating the research conducted within the university, internationalization aims to build collaborative actions to develop interactional competencies in and across diverse language-cultures, thereby fostering a university education that respects differences and works toward a more inclusive society. For this to occur, it is important that participants in this process develop skills aligned with these objectives, such as intercultural and plurilingual competencies.

According to Beacco and Byram (2007), intercultural competence can be understood as the combination of different factors (knowledge, attitude, behavior) that enables individuals to recognize and understand, to varying degrees, the ways of living and thought patterns of others beyond their own culture. Within the process of internationalization, the university community needs to develop this competence to ensure that interactions with people from different cultures are respectful and enrich academic experiences.

In turn, plurilingual competence is described in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) as the ability of an individual to speak different languages and engage with various cultures, to varying degrees, in such a way that these languages and cultures interrelate to enable effective performance in a given situation (Council of Europe, 2001).

These two competencies, when incorporated into the teaching and learning of additional languages, can help foster relationships between individuals from different language-culture backgrounds. It is therefore essential for HEIs to promote teaching and learning initiatives for various

languages within the university setting so that, through exposure to diverse ways of perceiving the world, the linguistic and cultural landscape of the academic environment is broadened.

However, it is worth emphasizing that these actions must go beyond the individual scope of each student and be integrated into the broader university policy. This means that such actions need to consider the heterogeneity of the academic community and not solely focus on those participating in academic mobility activities. It is therefore crucial that the training of additional language teachers is grounded in guidelines that promote internationalization, whether through raising awareness of the process or by preparing teachers to engage directly in initiatives for teaching and learning additional languages.

Within this context, teacher training in the field of PFL is a necessity in light of internationalization initiatives, which, according to Abreu-e-Lima, Furtoso, and Francisco (2021), represent a strategic action for universities and also contribute to expanding knowledge about Brazil on the global scene. After discussing the importance of teaching and learning additional languages in the context of internationalization, I present the context of PFL teacher training within the Portuguese specialization of the Language and Literature program at USP.

3 Portuguese for foreigners at USP: from course offerings to teacher training initiatives

In 2023, USP welcomed over 1,700 exchange students into its undergraduate and graduate programs (USP, 2024). To meet the demand of foreign students, several institutionalized initiatives offering in-person and virtual courses for this audience are carried out by different entities and agents: the Interdepartmental Language Center (CIL) of the Faculty of Philosophy, Languages, and Human Sciences (FFLCH)⁴, the USP Interdepartmental Working Group on Language Policies – PoLínguas through the Teaching Initiation and Improvement Program in Languages (PROIAD)⁵, and the USP Agency for National and International Academic Cooperation (AUCANI)⁶.

⁴ To find out more about the courses offered by CIL-FFLCH, see: <https://clinguas.fflch.usp.br/cursos-portugues-2o-sem2024-0>.

⁵ Information about the program and the courses offered can be found at: <https://sites.usp.br/polinguas/proiad/>.

⁶ For more information about the courses offered, see <https://internationaloffice.usp.br/index.php/cursos/aucani-idiomas/>.

In general, the courses cater for different levels and study objectives. They are mostly delivered in person at various times throughout the academic year. However, even with various initiatives, they do not fully meet the demand of exchange students at the university due to the limited number of spots offered compared to the number of exchange students (Ueti; Albuquerque-Costa).

Although the institution offers courses aimed at foreign exchange students, as mentioned above, regarding the training of PFL teachers, an analysis of the curriculum for the Portuguese Language specialization reveals no courses specifically addressing this field⁷. Therefore, there is no specific training for this field within the Language and Literature program.

It is observed that the training of PFL teachers at USP is not part of the teaching framework within the Language and Literature program but rather occurs through university extension initiatives, such as PROIAD, the Virtual Exchange Teletandem Project – USP, and activities conducted by CIL-FFLCH-USP. As occurs in other universities, as pointed out by Furtoso (2015), the field of PFL has been initiated and expanded through extension programs that directly involve practice, namely PFL classes, as demonstrated in the activities highlighted below.

PROIAD is a program that involves various teacher education courses in collaboration with the Office of the Vice Provost for Culture and University Extension (PRCEU). Regarding the Language and Literature teacher education program, the initiative involves faculty members associated with CIL-FFLCH and CEPEL-FE. The program was launched in 2022 and aims to promote linguistic and plurilingual education in alignment with the institution's internationalization efforts. To achieve this, scholarships are offered through a specific call for applications to undergraduate students at the university who, among other possible activities, participate in planning and teaching courses or workshops in various foreign languages under the guidance of supervising professors. While more language courses are offered to the academic community, there is also the opportunity of expanding the training of the teachers involved in these courses, including PFL teachers for foreign students in academic mobility programs.

The Virtual Exchange Teletandem Project is an initiative present in various universities; however, at USP, it began in 2021. Its goal is to promote the development of linguistic, intercultural,

⁷The full list of courses can be found at: <https://uspdigital.usp.br/jupiterweb/jupCarreira.jsp?codmnu=8275>.

and pedagogical skills among undergraduate Language and Literature students through interactions with foreign or Brazilian university students who are also learning foreign languages⁸. In the case of foreign students, virtual interactions take place in different languages. For instance, a student specializing in Spanish at USP engages in conversations with a Portuguese language student from a university in a Spanish-speaking country. As part of the interaction is conducted in Spanish and part in Portuguese, the Brazilian Language and Literature undergraduate both learns Spanish and teaches Portuguese to the foreign student⁹.

Regarding the initiatives for PFL teacher training at CIL-FFLCH, it is worth noting that the institution has fostered spaces that provide opportunities for PFL training at USP over the decades since its creation. In addition to extension activities, teaching and research initiatives are also part of the set of actions carried out by CIL-FFLCH, including publications, conferences, courses, and the administration of proficiency exams for foreign candidates applying to postgraduate programs.

The publication of journals featuring academic research on the teaching and learning of PFL in the *Cadernos do Centro de Línguas* was carried out in 1997 and 2007 (*Caderno do Centro de Línguas*, 1997; *Caderno do Centro de Línguas*, 2007)¹⁰. There are also records of conferences titled "*Meeting on Portuguese Studies for Speakers of Other Languages*," which took place in 2010 and 2015¹¹.

In terms of teaching, under the coordination of an educator in the field, the hiring of Language and Literature students as Portuguese teaching assistants enables direct engagement with practical teaching activities for exchange students or proficiency assessment tasks for foreign candidates who need to demonstrate their Portuguese language skills to enter postgraduate programs.

Extension activities for PFL teacher training are also featured in the institution's catalog through courses, workshops, and events organized by CIL-FFLCH. In some cases, these offers are not limited

⁸ To find out more about Teletandem at USP, see: <https://clinguas.fflch.usp.br/projeto-teletandem-usp>.

⁹ For more information on how Teletandem interactions take place, see: <http://www.teletandembrasil.org/>.

¹⁰ The publications consist of articles by researchers from various universities, including USP.

¹¹ Although there are no historical records of PFL training initiatives available on the CIL *website*, event announcements can be found online. Such as for the I and II Meetings on Portuguese Studies for Speakers of Other Languages, held in November 2010 and 2015, respectively. Information available at: <https://alb.org.br/encontro-de-estudos-de-portugues-para/> and <https://plataforma9.com/congresso/2o-encontro-de-estudos-de-portugues-para-falantes-de-outras-linguas/>. Accessed on: September 10, 2024.

to undergraduate Language and Literature students at the university but are also open to the external community, such as the workshop held in 2016 titled "*Development of PFL Materials for Refugee Groups*"¹².

After providing context on PFL teacher training initiatives at USP, the data collection process for this research will be detailed below. Subsequently, the analyses conducted based on the selected *corpus* will be presented.

4 Data collection

In this article, I analyze responses from undergraduate students specializing in Portuguese in the Language and Literature program at USP to a questionnaire aimed at identifying their knowledge of the field of PFL. This questionnaire was sent to undergraduate Language and Literature students with a single specialization (Portuguese only) and a dual specialization (Portuguese and other languages or Linguistics)¹³. All participants in this research were students enrolled in the Bachelor's and/or Teaching Degree programs, spanning various semesters, from initial to final stages.

The questionnaire, created using *Google Forms*, served as the data collection instrument. It consisted of a set of probing questions designed to identify students' interest in the field of PFL¹⁴.

The questions in this instrument were related to the knowledge of the field of PFL and digital information and communication technologies (ICT). For this article, I selected question number 7 from the form: "*What do you know about being a specialist teacher in Portuguese as a Foreign Language – Portuguese for Foreigners?*"¹⁵, as it allowed the undergraduates to articulate their perceptions of the field.

¹² For more information, see: <https://clinguas.fflch.usp.br/oficina-elaboracao-de-material-de-ple-para-grupos-de-refugiados-2016>.

¹³ For more information about the different specializations, see: <https://uspdigital.usp.br/jupiterweb/jupCarreira.jsp?codmnu=8275>.

¹⁴ The questionnaire was emailed in July 2022 to 5,198 undergraduate Language and Literature students specializing in Portuguese at USP.

¹⁵ I chose to use "Portuguese as a Foreign Language" and "Portuguese for Foreigners" as I consider them as the most familiar terms to Language and Literature students.

A total of 114 questionnaire responses were collected; however, for analysis purposes, I considered only 79 responses, which correspond to the total number of students who answered the previously mentioned question. Of this total, 39 students were in their initial semesters, and 40 were in their final semesters of the course¹⁶. The analyses of these data are presented below.

5 USP Portuguese Language and Literature students' knowledge of the PFL field

Based on the analysis of the responses provided by undergraduate students specializing in Portuguese in USP's Language and Literature program to the previously presented question, it was evident that these students generally have limited knowledge about the field. This is due to the fact that 34 responses included expressions indicating minimal knowledge of the field, such as “I only know that...,” “I have little knowledge,” “I don’t know much,” “I haven’t heard much,” “no knowledge,” “nothing.” In other words, nearly half of the respondents indicated having a superficial understanding of the field.

When analyzing the 79 responses collected, it was possible to group them into five different categories, considering that some responses contained elements from more than one category. These are:

- 1) Common knowledge: refers to the attempt to identify the field based on personal knowledge or experience with another foreign language;
- 2) Career in the field: refers to the identification of career opportunities in the field of PFL;
- 3) Different teaching and learning demands and contexts: refers to the recognition that there are specific demands for different PFL contexts;
- 4) Practical experience: refers to practical experiences with PFL teaching and learning activities, either by the respondents themselves or through reports from other people;

¹⁶ For this study, I consider the bachelor's degree with a single specialization in Portuguese as a reference. According to the Political-Pedagogical Project of USP's Language and Literature program, the minimum number of semesters required is eight, and the maximum is twelve. Therefore, for this article, I consider the first six semesters as the initial ones and the last six semesters as the final ones. For more information, see: <https://uspdigital.usp.br/jupiterweb/jupCarreira.jsp?codmnu=8275>.

- 5) Lack of training and resources: refers to the absence of training, information, or teaching materials.

To illustrate the defined categories, an analysis of excerpts from the responses collected in the questionnaires is provided below. After this point, the reflections derived from these analyses will be discussed.

5.1 Common knowledge

There were 15 responses indicating that knowledge about the field was based on common knowledge. In other words, the respondents explained the field or believed that, just as other languages can be native or foreign, Portuguese can also be a foreign native language.

- A) "A teacher who teaches Portuguese to people whose first language is not Portuguese";
- B) "Teachers who graduate in Language and Literature and teach Portuguese to foreigners whose first language is not Portuguese";
- C) "I only know that this modality exists, but I don't even know if this type of class is taught in interlanguage or entirely in Portuguese";
- D) "Not much, only that it is a modality and that the methods are different from those used in schools in Brazil."

In excerpts *A* and *B*, the participants explained what it means to be a PFL teacher, specifying that it refers to someone who teaches individuals who do not have Portuguese as their first language. From these responses, it becomes clear that they are unaware of all the demands of the field or the particularities of the different PFL contexts. Conversely, in response *C*, the participant demonstrates awareness of the existence of the field but is unsure how the classes are conducted, whether in a common language or the target language. Thus, they recognize the specificity of the field but lack any knowledge of how it is structured.

In response *D*, the participant explains what they know about the topic by comparing it to the teaching of Portuguese as a native language. They acknowledge that there are differences in the ways native and foreign languages are taught and learned, but they lack further information about the field.

Based on the excerpts from the responses provided, it is evident that the participants recognize a difference in PFL teaching and learning, distinguishing it from the approach used for Brazilian students. However, despite being exclusively Language and Literature students, it is noticeable that they lack the theoretical or specific knowledge to explain the characteristics of each approach.

The differentiation of the field is made through a comparison with the teaching of the Portuguese language in regular schools in Brazil. Moreover, it is acknowledged that, just as other languages can be taught to foreigners, Portuguese can also occupy this space, as is the case with all the languages offered in the Language and Literature program, which are taught to Brazilians.

Furthermore, although there is recognition of PFL, there is little understanding of how it is taught and learned in classes. Based on these responses, it is possible to determine that the participants only perceive pedagogical actions related to the way they learned Portuguese, i.e. as a native language. They are not familiar with the pedagogical and methodological approaches required to teach PFL.

In the context of the internationalization of HEIs, it is worth noting that, as highlighted by Abreu-Lima, Furtoso, and Francisco (2021), the field of PFL is part of the strategic pillars of internationalization. Therefore, although Language and Literature students may not obtain a specific specialization in PFL, it is essential that, throughout their undergraduate studies, they acquire knowledge about the field based on language teaching and learning theories and methodologies, to move beyond common knowledge.

5.2 Career

In this category, the responses indicate knowledge about careers in the field of PFL, including information about job opportunities and wages. Fourteen responses addressing the theme of career were identified. This indicates that these respondents, although having greater familiarity with the field compared to the previous category based on common knowledge, still lack an in-depth understanding of PFL. Some of the responses are presented below:

A) "I haven't heard much, but I know it's a career possibility";

- B) "I've heard that it's a good opportunity for foreign language students";
- C) "I've heard about opportunities to work as a Portuguese teacher for foreigners";
- D) "The work is usually international and offers good financial reward."

In the first response, item *A*, even without having in-depth knowledge about the field's demands, the participant indicates awareness of this option as a career path for Language and Literature graduates. Response *B*, on the other hand, suggests that it is an option for those specializing in other foreign languages, implying that a specialization in Portuguese alone is not sufficient to pursue this career; additional training in another language besides Portuguese is necessary.

In response *C*, the participant is aware of the demand in the job market for specialized teachers in this field. Finally, response *D* indicates that the field extends beyond the context of PFL teaching and learning in Brazil, linking it to an international context. Additionally, the respondent mentions that there is good financial compensation for PFL teachers.

Still regarding response *D*, it is observed that the respondent perceives PFL as a subject geared toward teaching in international contexts abroad, rather than as part of an internationalization process within the university. For example, the respondent does not consider situations in which the institution hosts exchange students. In other words, the internationalization initiatives do not seem to be recognized within the context of the university itself.

Overall, the analyses in this category indicate that the respondents view a career as a PFL teacher as a viable option within the Language and Literature program. They acknowledge that there is a demand for qualified professionals to teach PFL, both in Brazil and abroad. Additionally, the respondents mention that the career can offer favorable financial rewards, making it appealing to many professionals.

The combination of growing demand and the possibility of competitive compensation can be seen as a factor that makes the field of PFL an appealing and potentially lucrative career choice. However, the answers indicate that the respondents still have limited information about the field to confidently pursue a career in it.

5.3 Different demands and contexts

The responses related to the demands and contexts of the PFL field reveal various possibilities for professional practice. Among the work environments mentioned, notable opportunities include positions abroad in universities or specific programs, as well as roles as volunteer teachers for migrants in crisis. This category gathered the largest number of responses, totaling 25. Some of these responses are presented below:

- A) "[...] I am also aware of the possibility of teaching Portuguese at universities in other countries, such as China";
- B) "I have seen announcements for volunteer work, and I know there is a program for young undergraduate students to teach Portuguese in France";
- C) "Working with refugees, exchange students, and teaching in other countries (online or face-to-face)";
- D) "A teacher who teaches Portuguese as a Welcoming Language for refugees in Brazil";
- E) "As there are many immigrants in Brazil, numerous programs offer Portuguese classes for foreigners, focusing on immigrants";
- F) "Everything is very precarious and voluntary. As if the teacher is just filling a gap."

The responses address information about the different PFL teaching and learning contexts. They highlight the demand from foreigners both within and outside Brazil who want to learn Portuguese in universities and programs, as seen in excerpts A, B, and C. Supporting this, in addition to the specific PFL teaching and learning programs at universities worldwide mentioned in the responses, it is important to highlight that, since the 1950s, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MRE) has promoted the readership program. This initiative consists of sending Brazilian teachers to teach PFL at various universities or Guimarães Rosa Institutes around the world (Coelho; Almeida, 2023).

Responses B, C, D, E, and F address the context of teaching and learning PFL as a Welcoming Language for migrants and refugees in Brazil. This context appears to be the most well-known among participants—of the 25 responses, 15 address the theme of teaching Portuguese to this audience. In such cases, scholars in the field prefer to use the term Portuguese as a Welcoming Language (PWL) to specify the context and its particularities (Grosso, 2010; Amado, 2013; Lopez; Diniz, 2019). This terminology does not seem to be recognized by the respondents, suggesting a lack of awareness of the divisions within the PFL field and the specificities of PWL. This suggests that the respondent tends

to view PWL merely as a change in the student profile, without considering the political, economic, and social aspects involved, particularly in the case of refugees (Amado, 2013).

In responses *B* and *C*, different contexts of PFL teaching and learning are mentioned within a single excerpt. In response *B*, both the teaching of PFL in another country and the teaching of refugees are highlighted. In response *C*, the context of teaching PFL to exchange students is added, along with presenting both in-person and remote teaching and learning modalities as possibilities for different scenarios. These elements indicate that the knowledge of these respondents about the field is more comprehensive compared to other responses.

It is worth noting that the respondent in answer *B* recognized the differences between teaching PFL to foreigners in France and teaching it to crisis migrants in Brazil. These differences go beyond location (whether or not the language is spoken in the country) and are linked to the valuation of the activity and the language policies involved. While teaching refugees in Brazil is carried out by volunteer teachers in Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), teaching in France takes place through an institutionalized program resulting from a partnership between the two countries.

The undervaluation of PWL teaching is also evident in response *F*, which criticizes the way volunteer work is perceived, describing it as merely "filling a gap." The use of this expression highlights the notion that teaching Portuguese to migrant communities is often treated as a temporary solution, limited to volunteer initiatives organized by NGOs, without a robust governmental structure to adequately address this demand.

The answers in this category indicate that the participants have a broader understanding compared to those in the other categories. Some express critical reflections, particularly about the context of PWL and the lack of appreciation for professionals who meet this growing demand. These reflections align with what scholars in the field have emphasized in their research, which highlights how PWL teaching initiatives remain largely confined to assistentialism actions, contributing to the precarization of teaching work (Bizon; Camargo, 2018; Lopez, 2020; Cursino, 2023).

5.4 Practical experiences

Of the responses collected, 15 include practical experiences either lived by the participants themselves or reported by other people. In this first section, excerpts from the responses that describe the participants' own experiences are presented, followed by excerpts that reference third-party experiences.

- A) "I don't know much about the subject; I've only very superficially followed a Portuguese Language Teaching program for Congolese immigrants";
- B) "I haven't heard much, but I know there are people working in this field, and it seems quite interesting to me. I have taken part in a few projects like this, but it was informal education";
- C) "I teach PFL to Ukrainian refugees; I am learning through practice and with my colleagues";
- D) "Theoretically, not much, although I have worked as a Portuguese as a Foreign Language teacher and have studied theories about foreign language teaching due to my dual specialization";
- E) "I've only heard about this possibility, but without any further information, as I worked in a multinational company, and it was common for us to seek Portuguese teachers for expatriates."

Excerpts *A*, *B*, and *C* present accounts from individuals who engaged in the context of PWL, even if they were not teaching classes. In excerpt *D*, it is not possible to identify the context in which the respondent worked, as they did not specify the audience of their classes.

In excerpts *C* and *D*, it is indicated that, although the participants were already working in the field of PFL, they had not received specific theoretical training. In excerpt *C*, the respondent states that they are learning how to teach Ukrainian migrants through practice and with the support of colleagues. In excerpt *D*, the respondent reveals having limited theoretical knowledge, even after studying this subject during their undergraduate program with a dual specialization (Portuguese and a foreign language). This indicates that, despite their practical involvement in the context of PFL or PWL, the respondents did not receive adequate theoretical training for this within the Language and Literature undergraduate program.

In excerpt *E*, it is observed that the respondent did not have direct experience with PFL teaching but demonstrates an understanding of the field's specificity due to having worked in a company that hired teachers to assist foreign employees. In this context, the respondent acknowledges

the existence of a career dedicated to teaching Portuguese to foreigners, based on their professional experience.

This category also includes those who indicated having knowledge through indirect experiences or conversations with professionals working in the field.

- F) "An old friend of my mother was a Portuguese teacher for refugees";
- G) "I only heard about a project from my Phonetics and Phonology professor, nothing more";
- H) "Very little information, just some posts from teachers in the Letras-FFLCH Facebook group";
- I) "[...] I only had contact with a teacher who teaches Portuguese as a Foreign Language. The qualifications required for this position, the field of work, or studies on the subject are all unknown to me."

The previous responses indicate that the information the research participants had about PFL came from interactions with people working in the field who shared their experiences with the respondents.

In response G, the fact that a university professor described her involvement in a project related to PFL is the only reference based on information derived from learning at the university. However, the response does not provide additional details about the project, such as the target audience or objectives. Furthermore, there is no mention that the Phonetics and Phonology course addresses aspects related to teaching and learning content for PFL classes.

In excerpt H, the social media group is not officially linked to USP's Language and Literature program; it is composed of Language and Literature students and others interested in learning more about this degree program¹⁷.

In turn, in response I, the respondent indicates having had contact with a PFL teacher, although this interaction was not sufficient for them to gain the necessary training to work in the field. In other words, they are aware of the field but do not know how to pursue a career in it due to the lack of specific training. This aligns with other categories, highlighting that the knowledge about PFL among undergraduate Language and Literature students at USP is superficial.

¹⁷ For more information on the group, see: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/letras.fflch>.

5.5 Lack of training and resources

The last category includes the 10 responses that indicate a lack of teacher training, teaching materials, and information regarding the field of PFL. Although this topic has already been addressed in some excerpts from previous categories, the excerpts that more clearly discuss this issue are presented below:

- A) "I've heard that there is little ready-made material for us to work with";
- B) "I've only heard that it is a field with the creation of teaching materials in progress; I always read colleagues asking for support resources and where these classes can be offered";
- C) "I know that there is no specialization in this area at USP, and teaching materials are scarce compared to other languages; in other words, those working in the field learn through practice. However, I wish to start as a PFL teacher, even without having the teaching degree, and I believe that due to the lack of this subject in USP's curriculum, I won't have the necessary foundation to enter the field. That's why this research is important, so that this reality can be changed at the best university in Latin America."
- D) "[...] I know that being a PFL teacher is not the same as being a Portuguese as a native language teacher. I know that at USP they don't teach this, there is no specialization, nor any courses, at least in the undergraduate program. I know there are 2 or 3 places in Brazil that train PFL teachers";
- E) "Nothing, the content I had access to was through personal searches; I was never presented with the actual issue. As a Korean language student (which is very different from Portuguese), I became interested in methods that could facilitate my learning of this specific language. I ended up finding some comments related to language teaching on the internet and came across the topic of Portuguese teachers for Korean students (which is also an area of interest for me as a university student)";
- F) "I used to visit websites before I started my degree to look for specific courses for teaching Portuguese to foreigners. I didn't get much information; the websites were more focused on the classes themselves, that is, aimed at foreign students seeking to learn Portuguese."

Responses A, B, and C show that there is a shortage of available teaching materials and the need to develop more resources, such as handouts, for PFL classes. This is not a new issue, as previous research has shown (Pacheco, 2006; Lopes, 2009; Ueti, 2013), which highlights the lack of specific materials for the field. Moreover, as mentioned in response B, this difficulty is a recurring

complaint among teachers, and it is often debated in social media groups of professionals in the field (Santos, 2019).

In responses *C*, *D*, *E*, and *F*, the participants express, with a sense of frustration, that the Language and Literature program at USP does not offer specific training for the PFL field. In excerpt *C*, in particular, the respondent's more in-depth knowledge of the subject becomes evident as they highlight issues such as the lack of teaching materials and theoretical training. Furthermore, the participant emphasizes the importance of this research as the foundation for creating initiatives aimed at developing the field.

Still regarding response *C*, there is a sense of indignation about the lack of space for PFL within the Language and Literature program at USP, especially considering that the university is a large institution and a reference not only in Brazil but also in Latin America. Although the current pedagogical project of the Language and Literature program¹⁸ does not include actions focused on PFL training, it is clear that, in light of the internationalization process, a reformulation of the curriculum would be necessary to meet this demand.

Corroborating Chagas' studies (2024), which highlight that internationalization is a new mission of the university, it is important to note that in order for it to be accomplished, a reformulation of course curricula is necessary, especially in the Language and Literature program. This revision should lead to the inclusion of subjects that build knowledge that aligns with the concepts of internationalization, including the conception of Portuguese as an international language.

In response *D*, the participant expressed interest in deepening their knowledge about the field and, through research, identified that there are no undergraduate courses in Language and Literature focused on this training, in addition to finding that few HEIs offer this specialization¹⁹.

In excerpt *E*, the respondent suggests that PFL training could provide another opportunity for their specialization in Korean, as they identified a demand for PFL teachers for speakers of that

¹⁸ The complete Pedagogical Political Project can be accessed at: <https://uspdigital.usp.br/jupiterweb/jupCarreira.jsp?codmnu=8275>.

¹⁹ Currently, the specific specialization in Portuguese for Foreigners is offered by the University of Bahia, the University of Brasília, the University of Campinas, and the University of Latin American Integration.

language. Thus, in addition to expanding opportunities in the field of Portuguese, knowledge of foreign languages would also contribute to working in contexts that integrate both specializations.

Finally, in excerpt *F*, the respondent's research led them to information aimed at the audience seeking PFL classes rather than information for teachers in training. Thus, it is evident that the scarcity of PFL teacher training is not limited to USP, but extends to other areas, including the internet itself, where, despite the vast amount of available content, there is little specific information on this topic.

By associating the responses, it is possible to analyze that there is a lack of information regarding the professional development of PFL teachers in the country. And that, specifically within the context of the Language and Literature program at USP, the field of PFL is little known by undergraduates, despite the growing demand for PWL and exchange student contexts.

6 Discussing the responses

The analysis of the responses from Language and Literature students specializing in Portuguese revealed a significant gap in knowledge about PFL teaching. It was observed that, in most cases, the knowledge acquired about the field comes from experiences outside the university, such as volunteer activities in Portuguese courses for migrants and refugees.

This situation reflects a predominant view of Portuguese as a native language to be taught exclusively to Brazilians, rather than recognizing it as an international language. By viewing language as something restricted to a country or nationality, this conception goes against the concept of internationalization advocated by Knight (2003), which involves the integration of international, intercultural, and global dimensions into different aspects of the HEI.

To strengthen the internationalization process and promote the development of intercultural and plurilingual competencies, it is essential that the Language and Literature program curriculum be expanded to incorporate the view of Portuguese as a language that can also be learned by speakers of other languages. Although students show interest in the theories and methodologies of PFL teaching and recognize the demand for teachers in this field, the lack of access to specific knowledge within the university limits their opportunities, especially within the undergraduate curriculum.

Even with recent initiatives focused on the training of PFL teachers—among them, courses offered by institutional agents such as CIL-FFLCH and teaching support programs, primarily in pedagogical practices—these actions are still limited and linked to extension activities. Moreover, the insufficient dissemination of information among undergraduates further restricts Language and Literature students' access to these opportunities or other university extension courses.

This fact was highlighted by Furtoso (2015), who pointed out that when actions related to PFL are exclusively within the scope of extension activities, it can result in a lack of visibility and access for the academic community.

To promote the development of the PFL field and contribute to the internationalization of the institution, it is necessary to implement a language policy that recognizes Portuguese as an international language (Zoppi-Fontana, 2009; Faraco, 2016) in the Language and Literature programs with specific courses. This will allow future Language and Literature professionals to develop a broader understanding of Portuguese and integrate this perspective into their teaching practices.

Additionally, students with dual specializations in Portuguese and foreign languages will be able to relate the study of these languages and work with speakers of specific foreign languages. This could foster the integration of specializations and the development of relationships between native and foreign languages.

The inclusion of courses focused on teacher training for the teaching and learning of PFL in the Language and Literature program curriculum will allow all interested students to access this knowledge, not limited to the opportunities offered solely through extension activities. With such measures, knowledge about PFL will be more widely disseminated among students, opening new career possibilities and strengthening the role of Portuguese as an instrument of internationalization, in addition to helping develop linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical skills.

7 Final considerations

The aim of this research was to identify the perceptions of Language and Literature students specializing in Portuguese at USP regarding the field of PFL. The analysis revealed the absence of

specific courses on the topic in the program, which limits the professional and academic opportunities for these students. Furthermore, the limited integration of content related to PFL teaching and learning in the curriculum reinforces the limitations in the training provided.

In light of these limitations, to contribute to the process of internationalization, it is imperative that language policies be adopted that address the teaching of Portuguese, recognizing it as a international language and not just a national one. These policies can impact not only students in the Language and Literature program but also students from other undergraduate programs at the university.

By implementing these changes, academic training will not only align with global demands but also open new career opportunities for students, strengthening the role of Portuguese as a language of international importance.

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