

Teaching Portuguese as L2 to deaf students: A case study on bilingual approximations in an inclusive school /

Ensino de português como segunda língua para estudantes surdos: um estudo de caso sobre aproximações ao ensino bilíngue em uma escola inclusive

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ABSTRACT

This research analyzes teaching and learning strategies for Portuguese as a second language (L2) for deaf students enrolled in a municipal school in the interior of Minas Gerais. The study aimed to describe the development of Portuguese language learning through the use of bilingual teaching methods approximations. It is a qualitative, descriptive field study conducted as a case study, with data collection involving participant observation, field journals, and document analysis. The results indicated that adopting strategies aligned with the bilingual perspective—such as having teachers fluent in Libras (Brazilian Sign Language) and a specialized Libras team at the school—fosters the development of Portuguese writing skills among deaf students by making classes more accessible and enabling the identification of their linguistic difficulties. The study also highlighted the need for a holistic view of these students' context and for coordinated efforts between the school community and public authorities to facilitate the implementation of such projects. Finally, it was found that the inclusive school does not structurally constitute a bilingual school—which would entail specific theoretical foundations, methodological organization, and dedicated instructional time for deaf students. However, given the lack of bilingual schools in towns in the interior of Minas Gerais, the study underscores the importance of adopting pedagogical practices that approximate this perspective to ensure greater linguistic accessibility.

KEYWORDS: Deafness; Accessibility; Writing Portuguese; Bilingual approximations.

RESUMO

Esta pesquisa analisa estratégias de ensino e aprendizagem de português como segunda língua (L2) para estudantes surdos matriculados em uma escola municipal do interior de Minas Gerais. O estudo teve como objetivo descrever o desenvolvimento da aprendizagem de português por meio da utilização de aproximações ao método de ensino bilíngue. Trata-se de uma pesquisa de campo, qualitativa, de caráter descritivo, desenvolvida por meio de um estudo de caso com coleta de dados por observação participante, diário de campo e análise documental. Os resultados indicaram que a adoção de estratégias alinhadas à perspectiva bilíngue, como a atuação de professores fluentes em Libras e a presença de uma equipe especializada em Libras na escola, favorece o desenvolvimento da escrita de português por estudantes surdos, ao tornar as aulas mais acessíveis e possibilitar o mapeamento de suas dificuldades linguísticas. Evidenciou-se, ainda, a necessidade de um olhar holístico para o contexto desses estudantes e de um trabalho articulado entre comunidade escolar e poder público, a fim de viabilizar a implementação de projetos dessa natureza. Por fim, constatou-se que a escola inclusiva não se configura, estruturalmente, como uma escola bilíngue a qual dispõe de fundamentação teórica, organização metodológica e carga horária específica para o ensino de estudantes surdos. Entretanto, diante da ausência de escolas bilíngues em cidades do interior de Minas Gerais, ressalta-se a importância da adoção de práticas pedagógicas que se aproximem dessa perspectiva, de modo a garantir maior acessibilidade linguística.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Surdez; Acessibilidade; Português escrito; Aproximações bilíngues.

1 Introduction

This study sought to investigate the context of teaching Portuguese as a second language to deaf students in a city in the interior of Minas Gerais, given that in Brazil, most deaf students are exposed to the same methods employed to teach Portuguese to hearing students, which have not proven effective (Quadros, 2008; Pereira *et al.*, 2016). This is because, for these students, studying Portuguese involves learning a second language (L2) rather than a first language, as is the case with hearing students.

The acquisition of reading and writing skills in Portuguese among deaf students is a matter of concern for educators of the deaf, since mastery of the first language is essential for a second language to be processed properly. Therefore, it is necessary to develop an approach that provides these students with the opportunity to acquire explicit knowledge of their first language (L1). In Brazil, they first develop Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) and, using it as their linguistic foundation, are able to learn Portuguese as a second language (L2), a process known as bilingualism (Baldo & Iacono, 2009; Pereira *et al.*, 2016; Quadros, 2008).

The research premise of this article is based on the idea that bilingualism is the most effective approach to teaching Portuguese to deaf students, although it still needs to be further explored in the context of an inclusive school environment. This study has some limitations because bilingual education is not a reality everywhere, due in part to the shortage of professionals (Barbosa, Barbosa, & Neves, 2013). Many teachers lack training or experience in both languages, which is essential for this process (Fernandes, Pereira, & Ribeiro, 2024).

Against this background, the need arises to develop strategies that provide these students with the opportunity to develop more fully through a learning process that values their own culture and language (Campos & Santos, 2013). One proposal is to use bilingual teaching methods approximations in inclusive schools, where, according to each context, the goal is to adopt a literacy-based perspective (Soares, 2004) linked to bilingualism, which considers Libras as L1 and Portuguese as L2 (Quadros, 2008).

In this regard, this article addresses the following issue: How is the teaching of Portuguese to deaf students carried out in an inclusive school in a city in the interior of Minas Gerais? This question was investigated through the creation and implementation of a Portuguese as an L2 course for deaf students in a city in the interior of Minas Gerais, with the aim of incorporating the bilingual method, using sign language as the language of instruction. For this teaching and learning process, we drew on authors who discuss the teaching of Portuguese as an L2 to deaf learners (Barbosa, Barbosa, & Neves, 2016; Baldo & Iacono, 2009; Pereira *et al.*, 2016; Fernandes, Pereira, & Ribeiro, 2024).

In light of this, the overall objective of this study is to describe the process of learning Portuguese as an L2 among deaf students, using bilingual teaching methods approximations. The specific objectives are as follows: (I) to describe the development of the process of learning Portuguese

as an L2 in a case study; (II) to analyze the contributions of using Libras as an L1 to the teaching of Portuguese as an L2 to deaf students; and (III) to interpret the data collected in order to understand the Portuguese learning process of deaf students at an inclusive school in a city in the interior of Minas Gerais.

To conduct this research, a qualitative, descriptive field study was carried out through a case study at a municipal school in the interior of Minas Gerais. Data was collected through participant observation, field notes, and document analysis. This analysis made it possible to identify bilingual adaptations that can be implemented in inclusive schools. To provide a better understanding of the context of the data analysis, the following section will address aspects of the reality faced by deaf students in inclusive schools.

2 Contextualizing Portuguese language learning among deaf students in inclusive schools

Over the past two decades, significant legislative advances have been made in the education of deaf individuals. Among these, the following stand out: the recognition of Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) as a legal means of communication and expression, reaffirming its role in the educational development of deaf people (Law No. 10.436, Brazil, 2002), and the amendment to the Law on Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDB), which now recognizes bilingual education for deaf individuals as a teaching modality (Law No. 14.191, Brazil, 2021). These changes have spurred the adoption of the bilingual model by various educational institutions, particularly with regard to the process of learning written Portuguese.

Lacerda (1998) explains that, under this approach, both languages, Portuguese and Libras, are taught. In this way, deaf children can learn in a manner better suited to their specific linguistic needs. Campos and Santos (2013) point out that, in reality, not all schools adhere to this perspective and that the teaching of the predominant language of hearing people, Portuguese, is still prioritized in the curriculum for deaf students, without promoting visual experiences or Libras.

The same authors point out that the discourse on educational inclusion still overlooks the perspective of deaf people as members of a linguistic community with their own culture, but instead views them predominantly as disabled. This situation reveals that there are still issues that must be

addressed regarding the understanding of the role of deaf students in Brazilian schools. In inclusive schools, deaf students are often left in the care of an interpreter, without the school immersing itself in the field of deafness or the responsibilities surrounding the specific needs of these students; as a result, many of these students' needs go unmet (Campello, 2014; Oliveira & Gomes, 2025).

Next, considering the environment where this study took place, we will present an overview of the reality faced by deaf children in inclusive schools, as well as the characteristics of an approach based on bilingual teaching methods approximations in this context.

2.1 The reality of deaf children in the school context and in the language acquisition process

Currently, reading and writing are two of the areas of greatest concern for educators of the deaf (Souza & Lacerda, 2023). Unlike hearing students, most deaf students enter school with no knowledge of Portuguese. Despite this, this language, which will be learned almost entirely in a formal education setting, is taught using first language teaching methodologies, which do not meet the needs of deaf students (Baldo & Iacono, 2009). While Portuguese is the first language of hearing people and, therefore, this language acquisition process occurs naturally, as they are immersed in various situations where the language is used, this is not the case for deaf people, whose L1 is sign language (Pereira *et al.*, 2016; Quadros, 2008). For this reason, in the context of deafness, Portuguese exhibits characteristics of a second language. In this regard, proficiency in the first language is essential for the second language to be processed properly. This requires an approach that provides deaf individuals with the opportunity to acquire explicit knowledge of their L1, in this case, Brazilian Sign Language, and use it as a foundation to develop their learning of Portuguese as an L2 (Peixoto, 2006). Based on the assumption that sign language must take center stage in the learning process and cannot be merely used as support, it is essential that second language teachers be fluent in both the sign language and the spoken language, as Barbosa, Barbosa, and Neves (2013, p. 133) state:

It would not be possible for a teacher with an intermediate command of Libras to help deaf students properly understand a text in Portuguese; likewise, this process would not be possible if the teacher did not have explicit knowledge of the spoken language.

The authors argue that proficiency in both languages is necessary, given the essential aspects involved in learning, such as the creation of a natural dialogic relationship in the educational setting and the opportunity for deaf students to develop metalinguistic proficiency in both languages.

In this regard, Barbosa, Barbosa, and Neves (2013) emphasize that the teaching of both Portuguese and Libras in Brazilian schools is still inadequate, despite the existence of laws and decrees designed to guarantee students' right to education (Brazil 2002; 2005; 2021). According to Favorito *et al.* (2024), this is due to the lack of formal or continuing education programs for teachers of the deaf, as many education professionals recognize this gap in their training (Oliveira, 2006; Fernandes, Pereira, & Ribeiro, 2024).

Such statements run counter to the rights of deaf individuals guaranteed by Decree 5.626, which, in Article 22 (Brazil, 2005), establishes that basic education institutions must ensure the inclusion of deaf students through bilingual schools and classes, alongside specialized educational support.

However, there is still much work to be done due to the various obstacles in the education of deaf students in Brazil, particularly the shortage of bilingual schools (Fernandes, Pereira & Ribeiro, 2024). There are significant challenges to implementing this model properly and efficiently. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to employ strategies that approximate the perspective of bilingualism for deaf individuals.

2.2. Bilingual teaching methods approximations in inclusive schools

Teaching through bilingual teaching methods approximations aims to minimize the negative impacts caused by the lack of bilingual schools. For this to happen, it is necessary to create strategies that provide deaf students with the opportunity to develop more effectively through a learning process that values their own culture and language (Campos & Santos, 2013). This can be achieved by designing projects and courses aimed, for example, at implementing an approach that treats Libras as an L1 and Portuguese as an L2, while incorporating a literacy perspective (Soares, 2004).

The author explains that literacy aims at “the development of behaviors and skills for the competent use of reading and writing in social contexts” (Soares, 2004, p. 97). The literacy perspective,

along with bilingualism, encompasses the acquisition of techniques for basic reading and writing, as well as the social aspects and habitual use of reading and writing (Pereira *et al.*, 2016). This means that, when using this method, Portuguese is introduced to the student in a context as close as possible to their own reality, enabling them to learn the language more effectively.

It is necessary to develop strategies to improve the teaching and learning of Portuguese as an L2 for deaf students in Brazilian schools, since the methodologies currently in use have been insufficient to prepare them to enter literate society, which affects these individuals over an indefinite *continuum* of time (Baldo & Iacono, 2009).

As noted earlier, one of the main barriers is the communication difficulty that exists among teachers, deaf students, and hearing students. To minimize this obstacle, the government has implemented language policies such as the National Education Plan (PNE), which sets as a goal and strategy the expansion of the staff that assists deaf students, including paraeducators, Libras translators and interpreters, Libras teachers, and bilingual teachers.

However, most teachers in basic education have not had access to training on bilingualism in deaf education (Fernandes, Pereira, & Ribeiro, 2024). This is one of the reasons why many challenges remain regarding the provision of bilingual education, consequently generating a need to develop approaches to provide the deaf community with access to reading and writing in Portuguese.

Finally, based on the authors cited above, it is clear that projects enabling bilingual teaching methods approximations for the education of deaf students are highly relevant. To achieve this, it is necessary to put it into practice and seek ways to improve it, in accordance with the realities of both the students and the school.

3 Methodological aspects of bilingual education approximations in an inclusive school

This study is characterized as qualitative, grounded in the premises of bilingualism (Quadros, 2008; Pereira *et al.*, 2016; Fernandes, Pereira, & Ribeiro, 2024). In this context, Tomitch and Tumulo (2009) note that, in qualitative research, the emphasis is on understanding the intentions and meaning

of human actions. This aligns with this investigation, which sought to interpret the reality of teaching Portuguese as an L2 through immersion in a dynamic environment, in this case, the classroom.

The source of information was obtained through a case study, which, as Gil (2009, p. 54) notes, “is the most appropriate design for investigating a phenomenon within its real-world context”, in this case, the use of bilingualism approximations in the context of deaf education at an inclusive school in the interior of Minas Gerais. To accomplish this task, this study adopts a descriptive approach; that is, by explaining how learning takes place in this setting, it sought to better understand the current state of basic reading and writing, as well as literacy education for the deaf in Brazil.

This is also an exploratory field study, as it required the presence of the researchers in the environments under analysis to obtain more accurate information about the deaf students investigated and, based on this specific case, to identify properties applicable to other contexts within inclusive schools (Gil, 2009). For a better understanding, the following sections will explain the characteristics of the participants (3.1); the relationship between the research and the school (3.2); and the data collection and analysis process (3.3).

3.1 Characteristics of the participants

The presented study was conducted at a full-time municipal inclusive school, where a research project on teaching Portuguese as an L2 to deaf students was launched. This initiative was established through a partnership between researchers from a public university and the Municipal Department of Education in a city in the interior of Minas Gerais¹. Two deaf participants² took part in the study: José, a 10-year-old fourth-grade student, and Fátima, a 17-year-old eighth-grade student³. Both had their

¹ Since this research involved human participants, it was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee (CEP) of the Viçosa campus of the Universidade Federal de Viçosa (UFV), and its execution was approved under the consolidated opinion number 7.775.662, issued by the aforementioned committee.

² These two students were selected because they were the only deaf students enrolled in the school, which, being located in a small countryside town, is characterized by a smaller presence of deaf students in its student body.

³ Pseudonyms were used to protect the participants' identities.

first contact with Libras at school, since sign language was not used in their family context due to their relatives' lack of knowledge or fluency in the language.

José began learning Libras as soon as he started school. He had interpreters from the beginning of his basic reading and writing development until the third grade, as well as a deaf Libras instructor. For this reason, he had a greater command of both sign language and Portuguese. Despite this, he still had some difficulty expressing himself in Libras and putting his thoughts on paper in written Portuguese.

Fátima, on the other hand, only came into contact with the Libras staff in the seventh grade, one year before this study began, due to the late diagnosis of her deafness. She was in the early stages of the acquisition process for both languages, but already showed good communication skills.

The student also had spastic diplegia⁴, which caused some limitations in her movements. However, it should be noted that individuals with these conditions do not typically exhibit significant differences in vocabulary, as pointed out by Lamônica *et al.* (2015); therefore, at the outset, spastic diplegia cannot be identified as a factor affecting the student's language acquisition process.

3.2 Relationship between the research and the school

To begin the research, a planning phase was carried out to ensure that the school administrators, the Libras staff, and the university all agreed on the activities to be developed.

First, the school and the students' guardians were contacted and introduced to the research and the proposal for the Portuguese language course. After these initial discussions, a collaborative effort began among the course coordinators, the school, the professor-researchers, the Libras instructor, and the interpreters to organize the lesson plans. This planning was organized on a weekly basis by the course coordinators along with the professor-researchers.

⁴ It is defined as a motor disorder characterized by a velocity-dependent increase in muscle tone, associated with the exaggeration of the myotatic reflex. The main causes of spasticity are stroke, traumatic brain injury (TBI), and spinal cord injury (SCI) in adults, and cerebral palsy (CP) in children. It is associated with a reduction in functional capacity and limitation of joint range of motion (Brazil, 2009).

Before the course began, it was necessary to access the students' Individualized Development Plan (PDI) ⁵. Based on these plans, the first lessons and the teaching materials to be used were created. The proposal was then shared with the school's Libras staff so that adjustments could be made, if necessary. Thus, classes began alongside data collection.

3.2 Data collection and analysis process

For data recording purposes, a field journal was used, which is an effective tool for detailed descriptions of both observations and reflections arising from lived experiences. These two activities are essential in qualitative research (Peixoto, 2006). In addition to meticulous notes on the progression of the classes, the journal also contains photographs⁶ and the professor-researchers' perceptions of the school environment.

The research was conducted over a five-month period, during which the researchers, in addition to teaching the course to deaf children, also collected data for use in the analysis. The teaching and analysis method consisted of Portuguese classes for the deaf students, with one individual session and one group session, totaling two classes per week for each student. In total, 24 fifty-minute classes took place. To conduct the study, it was necessary to plan the classes based on an assessment of the deaf students' acquisition levels in Portuguese and Libras. The Portuguese classes were conducted using speech genres (Costa, 2008; Bakhtin, 2016) as well as visual resources⁷, which are essential for these students (Quadros, 2008; Fernandes, Pereira, and Ribeiro, 2024).

⁵ According to Resolution CEE 460 of December 12, 2013, which consolidates standards for Special Education in Basic Education within the State Education System of Minas Gerais, the Individualized Development Plan (PDI) is a mandatory instrument for monitoring, evaluation, learning regulation, and pedagogical intervention planning, aiming at the full development and learning of students with disabilities, global developmental delay (GDD), and high ability/giftedness (Minas Gerais, 2013)

⁶ Photographic records were previously authorized through Informed Consent Forms and Informed Assent Forms. They were included in the field journal to exemplify the descriptions and showcase the teaching materials used.

⁷ The Ministry of Education (Brazil, 2021) developed booklets to guide this process, which did not address the context presented; therefore, it was necessary to create a specific teaching sequence.

After collecting the data, the researchers reviewed the records and, using *Google Docs*, color-coded the information related to two main categories: the relationship between the school community and the students (1) and the process of learning Portuguese as an L2 (2). Based on the information gathered, an interpretive analysis of the collected data was conducted.

4 Results and Discussion

The results and discussion section presents the school's perspective regarding the students (4.1); the process of linguistic mapping and student learning (4.2); the strategies applied (4.3); and the school's role in teaching Portuguese as an L2 to deaf students (4.4).

4.1 The school's perspective regarding the students

Throughout the course of this research, it became apparent that in an inclusive school setting, deaf students are often compared to hearing students and are expected to perform at a similar level, even though they have not had the same opportunities to learn Portuguese. Nascimento and Costa (2014) state that simply grouping people with different needs together does not lead to inclusion and that “offering the same education to everyone guarantees neither access nor quality” (Nascimento & Costa, 2014, p. 164). This reality can be observed throughout the students' Individualized Development Plans, which describe the process of acquiring Portuguese. One of the accounts regarding the limitations of the student José involves the difference in his proficiency level compared to his hearing peers:

Field of knowledge: Portuguese

Difficulties: “does not read Portuguese *like a hearing student*; does not know the meaning of many words.”

(Excerpt from the PDI transcribed into the field journal on June 26, 2025, emphasis added)

In line with Pereira (2009), it is evident that deaf students are exposed to the same concepts and practices used with hearing students. This is a misconception because these students are learning their second language, rather than refining their first, as is the case with the others (Pereira, 2009;

Barbosa, Barbosa & Neves, 2013; Fernandes, Pereira & Ribeiro, 2024). Despite this, they are compared, and the difference stemming from their status as speakers of another language is often not taken into account. In some cases, Libras is even linked to difficulties in the process of second language acquisition, as documented in the Individualized Development Plan for the student Fátima:

Field of knowledge: Portuguese

Difficulties: Presents basic reading and writing difficulties. *Because activities are always mediated through Libras, the student has difficulty understanding reading concepts.* Needs to learn Portuguese as an additional language but is still in the language acquisition process, which makes teaching it difficult.

(Excerpt from the PDI transcribed into the field journal on June 26, 2025, emphasis added)

The statement in the excerpt above linking basic reading and writing difficulties to language mediation through Libras demonstrates a lack of understanding among professionals regarding literacy development in deaf students (Pereira, 2009; Baldo & Iacono, 2009; Barbosa, Barbosa & Neves, 2013; Pereira *et al.*, 2016; Fernandes, Pereira & Ribeiro, 2024). In the teaching of Portuguese as an L2 to deaf individuals, the acquisition of Libras is an essential step for the learning of reading and writing in Portuguese to occur. (Fernandes, Pereira, & Ribeiro, 2024).

This corroborates the assertion by Martins and Agrella (2013, p. 63) that “Speaking a sign language does not carry the same prestige as being bilingual in a language that has social relevance and weight, such as English, for example.”. This misconception of assigning different values to languages hinders the deaf student’s learning process, as well as his interaction in the classroom. Because sign language is the language of a minority group, very few school professionals had any knowledge of it, as reported in the PDI for the student José:

Cognitive/metacognitive skills: Does not exhibit any cognitive difficulties, but due to the use of Libras in communication, some are able to understand him, while at other times he is not understood (...).

(Excerpt from the PDI transcribed into the field journal on June 26, 2025)

Most of the school staff only came into contact with the reality of deafness and the students’ needs after their enrollment, which likely reverberated in the communication issues between students and teachers. This reality is consistent with the explanation offered by Fernandes, Pereira, and Ribeiro

(2024, p. 117) when they highlight that “there are different Brazils within Brazil”; that is, in a country with such diverse realities, there are also massive regional and educational inequalities. The combination of these factors culminates in a lack of knowledge among many education professionals regarding the reality of deafness and how these students learn Portuguese.

Despite the issues raised, it is important to emphasize that the school is committed to developing initiatives aimed at the inclusion of these students, seeking ways to improve and comply with the Law on Guidelines and Bases of National Education (1996), which guarantees education as a right for all. The institution supports the work of the Libras staff and welcomes projects that help integrate deaf students, in addition to promoting awareness within the school community. These efforts enabled the research and contributed to the students’ learning, demonstrating that the school administration is open to new perspectives and willing to include deaf students. Considering its character as an inclusive school, this is a major differentiator in ensuring effective learning for deaf children in these settings.

The analysis further demonstrates that the use of Libras made classes more accessible, breaking down communication barriers and, consequently, facilitating deaf students’ access to the knowledge presented to them, which could be observed through their linguistic mapping and learning process.

4.2 Linguistic mapping and student learning

The bilingual classes enabled improvements in communication and the identification of some of the students’ difficulties, as can be seen below, in one of the classes with the student Fátima:

We began the class by asking if she remembered what we had covered in the previous class. At first, she did not understand the question and started talking about other things. We repeated it a few times, signing in different ways, until she answered, saying that in the last class we had introduced our families. She signed in great detail, explaining who was in our family (father, mother, siblings), how many there were, whether they were male or female, and whether they were older or younger.

(Field journal, October 21, 2025, Fátima)

The students' use of sign language and the Portuguese teacher's knowledge of this language make the teacher's job easier. This allows the teacher to determine whether the objectives are being met and whether the students are understanding the material, as shown in this excerpt from the field journal:

After fingerspelling a few times, she wrote the names (of her family members) on the board. Interestingly, while she was writing, she was fingerspelling, as if she were... which we can relate to "thinking out loud". This showed us that, in fact, she was not just copying, but also reflecting on what she was doing. (Field journal, October 7, 2025, Fátima)

Peixoto (2006) explains that it is common for deaf students to use fingerspelling before reading or writing a word. In this regard, Gesser (2009) highlights that using the manual alphabet differs from linguistic production in sign language, as it is closer to Portuguese. Thus, since the students were learning this language, the use of this mechanism was expected as a form of assimilation, which indeed occurred.

We adopted the recommendations of Fernandes, Pereira, and Ribeiro (2024), according to which, when working with bilingualism, it is also advisable, and, in some cases, essential, to create teaching materials, due to their scarcity or the need to adapt them to the students' specific reality. This work of creation and adaptation was carried out during the organization of the Portuguese course. Some of the strategies applied in this context are presented below.

4.3 Strategies applied

The strategies were developed based on the needs identified through the analysis of student data and after assessing their language proficiency. Two examples are provided below: Contextualized topics (4.3.1) and Use of genres (4.3.2).

4.3.1 Contextualized topics

The lesson topics were developed based on the students' experiences and needs, since, according to Baldo and Iacono (2009); Barbosa, Barbosa, and Neves (2013); Pereira *et al.* (2016); and Fernandes, Pereira, and Ribeiro (2024), it is essential that lessons be contextualized.

It was also noted that these must be consistent with the students' individual circumstances regarding their Libras and Portuguese acquisition levels, because, as Dias and Peixoto (2023, p. 526) point out, there are "many and serious issues in the education of the deaf, related to the production and interpretation of texts," which must be taken into account, given that deaf students advance through school grades without basic knowledge of Portuguese and, consequently, lack the tools for producing and comprehending texts.

Although Fátima was in the eighth grade, she had great difficulty writing her own name and the names of her relatives, a topic she frequently brought up. For this reason, it was decided to explore this theme. A set of Instagram stories titled "Deaf Family" was presented, in which digital influencer Michele Machado introduces her own family. The goals of this class were for the student to learn more about the topic and also to provide her with a real-life example of another deaf person, which could contribute to the recognition of her own community, making the lesson relevant to her own reality.

In addition, several lessons were developed around the theme of family, during which she was able to improve her writing skills and expand her Portuguese vocabulary. To this end, the approach taken was to illustrate the activities using examples drawn from the experiences of the professor-researchers themselves:

Initially, we asked if she remembered our names and our signs; then we briefly reintroduced the members of our family, using fingerspelling and writing each person's name on the board. Next, we asked her to do the same with her own family. She introduced each person by name. First, she made the sign for "brother" and then fingerspelled the name. We asked her to go to the board, signed "family," and asked her to write it down. Then we asked her to write her brother's name as well, which she did with our help and that of the interpreter (Field journal, October 7, 2025, Fátima).

As observed, teaching a lesson using a concrete example is meaningful for deaf students (Lacerda, 1998). Based on the reference provided, she was able to achieve the learning objective by

creating a list of her own family members' names and, therefore, internalizing this content. By the end of this sequence of lessons, the student was also able to write her full name without assistance, which represented an important milestone.

4.3.2 Use of genres

Speech genres are relatively stable types of utterances (Bakhtin, 2016) and offer an interesting approach to teaching Portuguese because each genre has a relatively fixed structure, like a template, which is of great value to deaf students. As Pereira (2009) states, these students have gaps in their knowledge of the world because their access to their L1, which is Libras, is often delayed. For this reason, teaching through different speech genres and conducting many lessons on the same topic are tools used to help students better understand and assimilate information about the world around them.

For José, a fifth-grade student, the chosen genre was the fairy tale. Through it, aspects of Libras and Portuguese were explored, such as retelling, reading comprehension, and characteristics of the genre. The result can be seen in the following field journal entry:

During class, we planned to revisit the story of "Puss in Boots" (In Portuguese: O Gato de Botas), first asking him to tell the story, which he did satisfactorily. Then we went back to the video and showed only the images of the characters, and fingerspelled. Next, we asked him to go to the board and write the characters' names in Portuguese. He wrote them, but needed help, especially with longer expressions such as "first son", "second son", and "third son". In these examples, there is also an inversion, since in Libras we sign "son first" and in Portuguese we write "first son". (Field journal, September 1, 2025, José)

As noted, the text "Puss in Boots" (Perrault, 1697)⁸ was presented. First, the story was adapted into Libras with the aid of a video, and based on that, some differences between Portuguese and sign language were discussed with the student:

At first, when writing, he used the title "Gato da bota". Later, when we showed him the character's name and asked him to rewrite it, he wrote "Gato de bota". We took the opportunity to ask him to correct the title and also to explain the concept of the

⁸ CONTOS NAS MÃOS. *O Gato de Botas*. Available in: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GALaliXZ6KI>. Accessed on 21 ago. 2025.

plural: since the cat was wearing more than one boot, two, it was necessary to add an “s” at the end. (Field journal, September 1, 2025, José)

In this case, it was explained that there is a difference between signing and writing in Portuguese. Furthermore, some Portuguese rules, such as plurals, were worked on. Thus, as the classes progressed, the students’ difficulties were identified so that they could be addressed.

In addition to the issues discussed above, it became apparent that José, being a shy student, signed very little at the beginning of the study. Consequently, the focus shifted to creating activities that provided opportunities for signing. Over time, it was observed that not only was he signing more frequently, but he also began to perform the movements with greater agility. It is believed that the student was influenced by the linguistic input of the interlocutor, that is, the professional who was communicating using Libras; this input leading to José’s output (Gomes, 2018; Gomes & Quadros, 2019).

As needs arose, efforts were made to adapt and plan future lessons, taking into account the reality of the school. From this perspective, it is essential to emphasize that the educational environment plays an extremely important role in the process of teaching Portuguese as an L2 to deaf students.

4.4 The school’s role in teaching Portuguese as an L2 to deaf students

In addition to topics related to language teaching, another factor that directly influences the teaching and the students’ learning is the role of the school in this context. Through observations and analyses, it was found, as previously highlighted in other studies, that the fact that a school welcomes both deaf and hearing students does not necessarily mean that it offers a bilingual education (Nascimento & Costa, 2014). It was noted that the effort on the part of the school, where the research was conducted, in embracing new perspectives of knowledge proved essential to the implementation of the Portuguese as an L2 course.

José and Fátima’s school is an inclusive school, but it does not yet receive all the funding needed to provide Portuguese language teaching for deaf students, so there were no classrooms available for this purpose. It is clear that Portuguese language instruction for the deaf is still not part of

the curriculum, and as Fernandes, Pereira, and Ribeiro (2024, p. 146) explain, “it’s viewed merely as a ‘complementation’” for students; consequently, the school environment lacks the appropriate structure for carrying out these activities. For the lessons, the school made space available in various settings, such as the library and the resource room, where Specialized Educational Services⁹ were held.

The environments previously mentioned already had their own routines, which also influenced how classes were conducted:

We had to change the location of our class because, upon arrival, we found out that the library was being used for a bazaar. The librarian suggested that we talk to the vice principal. We met with the school coordinator, who told us to stay in the resource room. (Field journal, October 7, 2025)

Although the school is open to the research being conducted, obstacles remain in the way of actually claiming this space. This is a recurring limiting factor that can only be overcome through dialogue and the receptiveness of everyone involved.

Concluding Remarks

This study sought to present possibilities for teaching Portuguese as a second language to deaf students who are in the process of acquiring Libras and learning Portuguese. Moreover, it highlighted bilingual adaptations that can be implemented in inclusive schools, contributing to the strengthening of more accessible and effective pedagogical practices in this field.

In conducting the research, it was observed that the institution did not initially demonstrate a clear understanding of the relevance of Libras as a language of instruction, nor of the specific nature

⁹ Specialized Educational Services (AEE) constitute the pedagogical mediation aimed at enabling curriculum access by addressing the specific educational needs of students with disabilities, autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and high ability or giftedness, who comprise the target population of special education. It is conducted primarily in the school's own multifunctional resource rooms (SRM), in another regular school, or in public or private specialized educational services centers (CAEE) (Inep, 2025, p. 1).

of teaching Portuguese as a second language (L2) to deaf students. However, the openness and flexibility shown by the school's staff were crucial, as they displayed willingness to understand the importance of Libras in these students' learning process. This stance was confirmed by the collaboration of the management team in the face of the challenges encountered throughout the project's development, which was an indispensable element for the consolidation of the educational proposals implemented. Additionally, there was coordinated planning and institutional clearance involving all parties in the process—interpreters, the Libras instructor, the management team, teachers, professors, families, and municipal authorities—to ensure that the activities could be effectively carried out.

Subsequently, a mapping of the students' knowledge of Libras and Portuguese was conducted. The results indicated that both students showed gaps in the acquisition process of both languages, given their respective grade levels (José in the fourth grade and Fátima in the eighth grade). With regard to teaching methodology, the project demonstrated that bilingual approaches proved effective for the development of the deaf children involved, treating Libras as their first language (L1) and Portuguese as their second language (L2). The study also highlighted the importance of using concrete and visual resources as strategies to facilitate learning. However, it was necessary to select familiar and contextualized topics in order to foster student engagement and meaningful knowledge construction. Therefore, this case study demonstrates that the implementation of bilingual education in an inclusive school does not occur spontaneously or automatically, but requires a holistic view of the linguistic, social, and educational context of deaf students, as well as collaborative, planned, and committed action among all the professionals involved. It was found that the inclusive school, although committed to the principle of inclusion, does not function as a bilingual school in accordance with the theoretical and methodological frameworks advocated by the specialized literature, which calls for a systematic structure for deaf students' learning and longer hours dedicated to teaching Portuguese as a second language (L2) (Nascimento & Costa, 2014; Quadros, 2008; Oliveira & Gomes, 2024). Nevertheless, despite the dedication of the school's professionals and the researchers involved, it was found that, although progress was observed in the students' learning process, the allocation of only two hours per week to Portuguese instruction proved insufficient to promote broader and more consistent language development.

Finally, it was observed that adopting bilingual teaching methods approximations makes the teaching and learning process more accessible, since classes are taught in sign language, respecting the linguistic and cultural specificities of the deaf community. In the Brazilian context, Libras is the first language (L1) of deaf students, which reinforces its central role in the educational process. In the Portuguese language course, the use of Libras proved to be essential and indispensable, as it helped make the classes more dynamic, facilitated students' access to the Portuguese language, and expanded opportunities for interaction in the classroom.

It should be emphasized that this research is a case study, which highlights the need for further research on the implementation of bilingual education in inclusive contexts. Even so, it is believed that this study can contribute to the field, especially in realities where there are no structured bilingual schools, by providing theoretical and methodological guidance for organizing pedagogical practices that are more accessible and linguistically appropriate for deaf students.

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