

# BRAZILIAN SIGN LANGUAGE: BRIEF HISTORY OF EDUCATIONAL ASPECTS OF THE DEAF

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## SUMMARY

This article aims to present a compendium of the evolutionary history of Brazilian Sign Language - Libras and its impact on the entire deaf community in terms of education for all. Schooling must be guaranteed to all and therefore, the action of supporting any disparity promoted by a specificity is fundamental. This dynamism reflects the co-responsibility of public and private agencies and agents, in the legislative and educational context for specific training in relation to the Language and preparation of the environment for promoting teaching/learning. As a method, exploratory bibliographic research in scientific articles and books was used, with filters for the central theme of this work. The results are shown to be disastrous due to the current state of involvement and interaction of public policies and effective actions for the integration and inclusion of deaf people in the social/educational context, showing a challenge for more accurate research on the subject to promote solutions and resolutions to the problems of social disparity of people.

**Keywords:** Libras; Social Inclusion; Educational Inclusion; Education.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Following the educational aspects of deafness, with comparisons in socio-anthropological and historical aspects, it is clear that adequate communication for the non-hearing public is necessary for equality and inclusion in the school context. From this need, Brazilian sign language - Libras - emerged.

Not only this, but Libras also has connections with several themes that can be worked on, such as: educational psychology, public educational policies, education and human rights, among others.

To guide this work, we used the question of how educational aspects linked to deafness emerged in a way that made it necessary to create a language that could enable the inclusion of deaf students in classrooms, as well as their learning could actually occur without them being in a world apart, isolated from their peers, since an auditory barrier became present in the life of this student from an early age or even later due to an accident suffered by them.

## 2 THE FIRST INSTITUTE FOR THE DEAF

It was with the arrival of Professor Édouard Huet, a Frenchman who was deaf, that Libras – Brazilian Sign Language – began to be created, since Professor Huet brought with him the French manual alphabet. Soon the signs known as LSF (French Sign Language) gave rise to the first signs of Libras. In 1857, the National Institute of Education for the Deaf (INES) was created, located in the State of Rio de Janeiro, where students from other cities used it as a dormitory, since it was a boarding school at the time. (MONTERO, 2006)

The author also highlights the importance of this institute in training the first deaf leaders, the dissemination and development of Libras as the mother tongue of the deaf in a way that allows their communication and promotes their inclusion in society.

The role of the deaf people who lived at INES – and who developed through communication in French Sign Language and old Brazilian Sign Language – was important, because it was from there that the Deaf leaders who have been spreading Sign Language throughout the country for many years came from. [...] In 1873, the iconography of the signs was created, launched by the director of the Institute for the Deaf-Mutes, and authored by the deaf student Flausino José de Gama. [...] In 1881, history tells of the fact that Sign Language was banned at INES and throughout Brazil. As a consequence of this ban, in 1895, there was a decline in the number of Deaf teachers (22%) in schools for the Deaf and an increase in the number of hearing teachers. (MONTERO, 2006, p. 296).

## 3 CHALLENGES OF THE DEAF COMMUNICATION SYSTEM

Libras then began to play an important role for people who have hearing loss or are deaf, whether from birth or those who lost their hearing throughout their lives, and is also considered the first language of the deaf, allowing their integration into society and the possibility of interacting with listeners.

In the past, deaf people were seen as a source of shame for their families, they were kept welcomed and even when seen they were accompanied. The idea that deaf people should learn to communicate orally without using gestures was disconnected from the customs of the time. Montero (2006) presents the reality experienced by many deaf people when it came to the dilemma of communication:

Communication between parents and their deaf children was very complex, as they did not know Sign Language and did not accept it; they thought it was "*ugly*" to do "*gesture*" or "*mime*" (not Sign Language) as a form of communication with their child and, consequently, did not accept sign language as the first language of the deaf. Deaf children, in turn, felt "isolated" and without any communication. Thus, they often created "complexes" and/or became "nervous". (MONTERO, 2006, p. 294).

As several teaching approaches were applied to teach the Deaf to read and write, there was a process of denaturalization in relation to Libras, and as a result, the Deaf community was divided between those who were in favor of Sign Language and oralism, and those who were in favor of total communication. Not only that, according to the author, the Deaf themselves did not understand the importance of Sign Language, which made it difficult to build their cultural identity, as shown in the following excerpt:

For many years, deaf people themselves did not understand the importance of communication through Sign Language for the process of constructing their Cultural Identity, as well as for the development of their cognition and language. (MONTERO, 2006, p. 294)

#### **4 EDUCATIONAL ASPECTS OF LIBRAS**

A global movement led by the deaf community in several countries began in the 1980s with the intention of demanding the implementation of public policies that would enable bilingual education for deaf people in schools, recognizing sign language as their first language, "the right of children who use a language other than the majority language to be educated in their own language" (SKLIAR, 1999 apud LODI; ROSA; ALMEIDA, 2012, p. 2), however, it took a while for this movement to reach Brazil.

Discussions about teaching and recognizing bilingual education for the deaf began in 1990, since according to authors Lodi, Rosa and Almeida (2012), it was the year in which linguistic studies on Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) began. With the emergence of these movements, Law No. 10,436/02 was enacted, which recognizes libras as a legal means of communication and expression for the deaf community.

Almost three years later, according to these authors, decree No. 5,626/05 was issued, which regulates this Law and provides for bilingual educational processes involving deaf students.

Ensuring bilingual education for the deaf requires respect for certain principles, without which there is a risk of a process that remains only at the discursive level. The first of these is ensuring opportunities for deaf students to develop language/appropriate Libras as their first language, through interaction with interlocutors who use this language, members of the Brazilian deaf community(ies), who must assume socially relevant positions in educational spaces – deaf teachers. (LODI; ROSA; ALMEIDA, 2012, p.2)

In this way, the government must guarantee access to bilingual education that enables the inclusion of deaf students both in schools and in the society in which they live. However, the Federal Government has recognized that there have been few changes that have in fact aimed at

inclusive education, until the year 2007 according to the authors Lodi, Rosa and Almeida (2012) present to us.

In this context, in 2007, a Working Group was established with the objective of “reviewing and systematizing the National Policy on Special Education” (Brazil, 2007b: 1). The approved document – National Policy on Special Education from the Perspective of Inclusive Education – aims to value inclusive processes “from the perspective of human rights and the concept of citizenship based on the recognition of differences and the [social] participation of subjects” (Brazil, 2008: 1). For this process, it emphasizes the need for a structural and cultural reorganization of education systems, in order to ensure that the educational specificities of all students are met. (LODI; ROSA; ALMEIDA, 2012, p. 3)

As can be seen in the previous quote, it became necessary to analyze and structure the “National Special Education Policy” since it had been leaving much to be desired and bringing few and scarce changes to the education of both the deaf and other people with disabilities.

Despite some studies and observations, the true education of the deaf, whether in Brazilian Sign Language or in the classroom, still presents several flaws that require new reviews and evaluations for the constant improvement of this teaching in the classroom. Despite this, in 2012 there were two proposals for the education of the deaf, which are:

The first, present in the documents of the Ministry of Education, defends the enrollment of all students, including the deaf, in the educational system and foresees, as support for the schooling processes of these students, the presence of translators and interpreters of Libras - Portuguese language at all educational levels and the offering of specialized educational assistance, in a shift opposite to the regular teaching period, with the function of complementing or supplementing the school education received (BRASIL, 2008 apud LODI; ROSA; ALMEIDA, 2012, p 3-4).

The authors add:

The second, following the provisions of Decree 5.626/05 and supported by the leaders of Brazilian deaf communities and researchers in the field of deaf education, is the implementation of specific school spaces for these students, with Libras as the language of instruction, a school curriculum that also takes into account the sociocultural and linguistic specificities of deaf people and work focused on teaching and learning the written language of Portuguese as a second language. (LODI; ROSA; ALMEIDA, 2012, p. 4)

Of course, the education of the deaf is still being constantly studied and evolving so that it can increasingly include students in education and not just fit them into a room with “hearing” students, so that they can keep up with their age peers. However, it is necessary for educators themselves to seek to study the topic so that they can understand the history and help their students in the school journey that lies ahead.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

After studying Brazilian Sign Language, how it emerged and its path through education, it can be seen that little progress has actually been made to achieve a real education for a deaf student compared to a “hearing” student. However, compared to the beginning of the studies and the emergence of Sign Language, there have been great advances in education and recognition of the deaf as a person with rights, just like the “hearing” person, since the latter now has, in addition to the right to education, a legal and institutional right instead of just being hidden by their family out of shame.

In this way, carrying out this research and writing this work was enlightening for its authors, as it brought knowledge both about Sign Language and about the deaf person who became a citizen. It should be remembered that education as such is always being reviewed and improved and therefore is always in constant change, which made this study even more enlightening on a topic that is so important today for educators.

It is hoped that the reader of this work will not only have their doubts about the subject cleared up, but will also have acquired knowledge for their career, or simply for their day-to-day life. Remember that everyone is a person with rights and duties, regardless of whether they have any differences. Instead, we should all join together.

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