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Challenges and achievements: the importance of education for deaf children

Desafios e conquistas: a importância da educação para crianças surdas

Desafíos y logros: la importancia de la educación para niños sordos

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Abstract:
This article analyzes the challenges and achievements related to the education of deaf children in the contemporary Brazilian educational landscape. It begins with the observation that the school inclusion of deaf students still faces obstacles such as insufficient teacher training, a shortage of accessible teaching materials in Brazilian Sign Language (Libras), and persistent prejudice about deafness, while also acknowledging significant advances, including the legal recognition of Libras, the consolidation of bilingual education, and the appreciation of deaf identity and culture. The study is bibliographic in nature and uses a qualitative approach, drawing on established theoretical scholarship in deaf education and on Brazilian legislation relevant to the subject. The results show that the challenges and achievements are deeply interconnected, so that progress in one area depends on simultaneously addressing the other. It concludes that building inclusive education for deaf children requires continuous investment in teacher training, the production of accessible materials, and recognition of Libras as the natural language of deaf people, all of which are essential to affirming deaf identity in schools.

Keywords:
Deaf education; Libras; School inclusion; Bilingual education; Deaf identity.

Resumo:
Este artigo analisa os desafios e as conquistas relacionados à educação de crianças surdas no cenário educacional brasileiro contemporâneo. Parte-se da constatação de que a inclusão escolar de estudantes surdos ainda enfrenta obstáculos como a formação insuficiente de professores, a escassez de materiais didáticos acessíveis em Língua Brasileira de Sinais e a persistência de preconceitos sobre a surdez, ao mesmo tempo em que se reconhecem avanços expressivos, como o reconhecimento legal da Libras, a consolidação da educação bilíngue e a valorização da identidade e da cultura surda. A pesquisa tem caráter bibliográfico e abordagem qualitativa, apoiando-se em produção teórica consolidada na área da educação de surdos e na legislação brasileira pertinente ao tema. Os resultados evidenciam que os desafios e as conquistas estão profundamente interligados, de modo que o avanço em um campo depende do enfrentamento simultâneo do outro. Conclui-se que a construção de uma educação inclusiva para crianças surdas depende de investimentos contínuos na formação docente, na produção de materiais acessíveis e no reconhecimento da Libras como língua natural da pessoa surda, elementos fundamentais para a afirmação da identidade surda no espaço escolar.

Palavras-chave:
Educação de surdos; Libras; Inclusão escolar; Educação bilíngue; Identidade surda.

Resumen:
Este artículo analiza los desafíos y los logros relacionados con la educación de niños sordos en el panorama educativo brasileño contemporáneo. Se parte de la constatación de que la inclusión escolar de estudiantes sordos todavía enfrenta obstáculos como la formación insuficiente del profesorado, la escasez de materiales didácticos accesibles en Lengua Brasileña de Señas (Libras) y la persistencia de prejuicios sobre la sordera, al mismo tiempo que se reconocen avances significativos, como el reconocimiento legal de la Libras, la consolidación de la

educación bilingüe y la valorización de la identidad y la cultura sordas. La investigación es de carácter bibliográfico y enfoque cualitativo, y se apoya en una producción teórica consolidada en el área de la educación de sordos y en la legislación brasileña pertinente al tema. Los resultados evidencian que los desafíos y los logros están profundamente interrelacionados, de manera que el avance en un ámbito depende de afrontar simultáneamente el otro. Se concluye que la construcción de una educación inclusiva para niños sordos depende de inversiones continuas en la formación docente, en la producción de materiales accesibles y en el reconocimiento de la Libras como lengua natural de la persona sorda, elementos fundamentales para afirmar la identidad sorda en el espacio escolar.

Palabras clave:
Educación de sordos; Libras; Inclusión escolar; Educación bilingüe; Identidad sorda.

Introduction

The education of deaf children is a highly relevant issue in the contemporary educational context, especially in light of the legal and pedagogical advances achieved in Brazil over recent decades. Historically, the educational path of deaf people was marked by oralist approaches that disregarded Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) as the natural language of this group and imposed teaching methods centered on speech training and lip-reading (SKLIAR, 1998).

As linguistic studies recognizing Libras as a visual-spatial language with its own grammar and full capacity to express abstract concepts became more widespread, a new educational paradigm focused on valuing deaf identity and culture was consolidated (QUADROS, 1997). This movement culminated in important legal achievements, such as the enactment of Law No. 10,436/2002 and Decree No. 5,626/2005, which recognize Libras as the official language of the Brazilian deaf community and require its inclusion in school curricula (BRASIL, 2002; BRASIL, 2005).

Despite these advances, the inclusion of deaf children in the regular education system still faces significant challenges related to teacher training, the availability of accessible teaching resources, reliance on the educational interpreter acting alone, insufficient support for families at the time of diagnosis, and persistent prejudice that devalues deaf culture. Against this background, this article aims to discuss the main challenges faced in educating deaf children as well as the achievements made in the pursuit of more inclusive education. Its specific objectives are: (i) to provide a historical account of educational approaches adopted for deaf students, from oralism to bilingualism; (ii) to identify the main pedagogical, institutional, and family barriers to the school inclusion of deaf students; (iii) to situate the legal framework supporting bilingual education in Brazil, its subsequent developments, and the role of the deaf movement in this achievement; and (iv) to discuss the relationship between language acquisition, appreciation of deaf culture, and the construction of deaf identity.

Methodologically, this is a qualitative bibliographic study developed through the analysis of established theoretical references in deaf education together with Brazilian legislation relevant to the subject; its procedures are detailed in the following section. The results discussed throughout the article indicate that challenges and achievements are not isolated phenomena but interdependent processes: overcoming each pedagogical obstacle is associated with a corresponding legal or cultural advance, and vice versa. In summary, the consolidation of truly inclusive education for deaf people depends on continuing these advances and actively addressing the challenges that remain.

Methodology

This study is characterized as bibliographic research of a qualitative and exploratory-descriptive nature. Bibliographic research was chosen because it allows the systematization of knowledge already produced on the education of deaf children, making it possible to identify convergences and divergences among different authors and legal frameworks on the subject.

Data collection consisted of surveying and analyzing major theoretical works in deaf education and Deaf Studies, particularly the works of Quadros (1997), Skliar (1998), Lacerda (2006), Goldfeld (2002), Ferreira-Brito (1995), Sá (2002), and Strobel (2008), selected for their relevance and established recognition in the field, as well as Brazilian federal legislation directly related to Libras and deaf education, notably Law No. 10,436/2002, Decree No. 5,626/2005, the Brazilian Inclusion Act (Law No. 13,146/2015), and the National Common Curricular Base (BRASIL, 2017).

The inclusion criteria covered works directly addressing bilingual education for deaf students, the acquisition of Libras as a first language, and the formation of deaf identity and culture, published as books, book chapters, recognized scientific journals in the field, and official legal texts. Sources unrelated to the school education of deaf children and outreach materials lacking theoretical or documentary support were excluded. The selected material was read in full, and the main concepts, arguments, and legal data from each source were recorded and subsequently grouped by thematic affinity.

Data were analyzed through thematic categorization, organizing the surveyed material into three broad analytical axes: (a) the historical trajectory of educational approaches intended for deaf students, (b) the challenges faced in educating deaf children, and (c) the achievements made in this field, including their interrelationship with language acquisition and the

construction of deaf identity. No empirical data were collected from research participants, nor were third-party images used; therefore, submission to an ethics committee was not applicable.

Theoretical framework

Historical trajectory of educational approaches for deaf students

To understand the current challenges and achievements in educating deaf children, it is necessary to place the different pedagogical approaches adopted over time in historical context. For much of the twentieth century, oralism predominated in Brazil and many other countries. This approach sought to develop speech and lip-reading exclusively in deaf students and often explicitly prohibited the use of sign languages in the classroom (GOLDFELD, 2002).

Oralism was based on a clinical-therapeutic view of deafness, understood as a disability to be corrected through speech rehabilitation, while sign languages were disregarded as legitimate linguistic systems (SKLIAR, 1998). The results of this approach, however, proved limited: a significant proportion of deaf students subjected exclusively to oralist methods did not fully develop spoken language and were simultaneously deprived of access to an accessible visual language, compromising their cognitive and academic development (GOLDFELD, 2002).

In response to the limitations of oralism, the total communication approach emerged in the 1970s and began to allow the simultaneous use of signs, gestures, lip-reading, and graphic resources to expand communication channels with deaf students (GOLDFELD, 2002). Although it represented progress compared with oralism, total communication was later criticized for failing to recognize sign languages in their own grammatical structure and for using them in a fragmented manner subordinate to the structure of spoken language (FERREIRA-BRITO, 1995).

Beginning with linguistic studies that demonstrated the status of sign languages - Libras in Brazil - as natural languages, the bilingual proposal became consolidated, especially from the 1990s onward. It recognizes Libras as the first language of deaf people and written Portuguese as their second language (QUADROS, 1997; FERREIRA-BRITO, 1995). This paradigm shift, from a clinical-therapeutic perspective to a socio-anthropological perspective on deafness, is regarded by Skliar (1998) as the central theoretical foundation of the educational and legal achievements discussed in the following sections.

Challenges in the education of deaf children

One of the main challenges in educating deaf children is the insufficient preparation of educators to work with this population. Many teachers neither know Libras nor have specific training in the linguistic and pedagogical particularities involved in teaching deaf students, which impairs classroom communication and, consequently, the teaching and learning process (LACERDA, 2006).

According to Lacerda (2006), the absence of teacher education that treats Libras as the language of instruction tends to reproduce outdated oralist practices even in settings that describe themselves as inclusive. This highlights the need for public policies focused on initial and continuing teacher education, emphasizing proficiency in Libras and knowledge of deaf culture.

Another relevant challenge is the shortage of teaching materials produced in Libras or adapted for deaf students' comprehension. Most available school materials are designed for hearing students and assume mastery of spoken and written Portuguese as a prerequisite for learning, which makes it difficult for deaf students to gain full access to curricular content (GOLDFELD, 2002).

Goldfeld (2002) emphasizes that deaf children construct their knowledge of the world through a visual language; therefore, exclusively auditory or textual materials without translation or adaptation into Libras tend to limit their comprehension and their cognitive and linguistic development.

In addition to pedagogical barriers, a historical prejudice persists in schools that associates deafness with a disability to be corrected, to the detriment of a socio-anthropological perspective that recognizes deaf people as a distinct linguistic and cultural group (STROBEL, 2008). This ableist view can lead to low self-esteem, social isolation, and the marginalization of deaf children in the school environment.

Assistive technology and digital teaching materials in Libras

The shortage of teaching materials in Libras discussed above has been partially mitigated by advances in assistive technologies designed for the deaf community. According to Gil and Busatta (2023), software and applications that automatically translate Portuguese into Libras - such as VLibras, Hand Talk, ProDeaf, and Rybená - have been incorporated into schools as complementary resources for Specialized Educational Assistance, enabling texts,

videos, and digital-platform content to be translated into sign language through three-dimensional avatars.

Among these resources, VLibras, developed by the federal government in partnership with Brazilian universities, stands out for its adoption on public websites and its ability to generate Libras captions for video lessons at low editing cost, expanding deaf students' access to content originally produced for hearing audiences. These tools do not replace the mediation of a bilingual teacher or educational interpreter, but serve as complementary support, especially in inland municipalities where professionals qualified in Libras remain scarce.

Even so, the literature warns that incorporating these technologies into the classroom requires specific teacher training; otherwise, the resources may be used sporadically and disconnected from the bilingual pedagogical project, without the depth needed for deaf students to appropriate Libras as their first language.

The role of the Libras educational interpreter

An additional challenge closely related to teacher training concerns the role of the Libras interpreter in schools. The presence of this professional is often mistaken for a full guarantee of accessibility when, in reality, the interpreter's function is to mediate communication between the deaf student and a curriculum, teaching staff, and pedagogical project that were often not designed with the linguistic and cultural specificities of deafness in mind (LACERDA, 2006).

Lacerda (2006) warns that simply having an interpreter in the classroom, without simultaneously training the classroom teacher in Libras and adapting materials and methodologies, tends to reproduce merely formal inclusion, in which the deaf student remains exclusively dependent on translation and does not establish a direct pedagogical bond with the teacher. This reinforces the need to understand the educational interpreter as part of a broader support network rather than as an isolated solution for including deaf students.

Teacher fluency in Libras and the role of the deaf teacher

Valuing the growth and learning of deaf children depends greatly on the quality of the pedagogical mediation offered to them, and this quality is directly related to the teacher's fluency in Libras. A bilingual teacher who truly masters Libras - rather than possessing only basic signing skills - can teach directly in the deaf student's natural language without relying exclusively on an interpreter, strengthening the pedagogical bond and expanding learning opportunities (LACERDA, 2006).

In this context, the presence of a deaf teacher plays a central role. As a native or fluent Libras user who shares the visual experience of the world characteristic of the deaf community, the deaf teacher becomes an identity and language reference for deaf children, something that is difficult for even a bilingual hearing teacher to achieve fully (STROBEL, 2008; CAMPELLO, 2008). Campello (2008) notes that deaf professionals tend to develop visual-pedagogy strategies more naturally, such as the intentional use of space, sustained eye contact, and visual resources that support deaf students' learning in ways not contemplated by hearing-oriented pedagogy.

This distinction is central: an appropriate teaching methodology for deaf children cannot be a simple adaptation of a methodology designed for hearing students; it must be conceived from deaf culture and its own visual logic (CAMPELLO, 2008; STROBEL, 2008). This includes, for example, how the teacher organizes the classroom, the visual supports used to explain concepts, and the way the transition from Libras to written Portuguese is conducted - always beginning with Libras as the language of instruction and with the student's visual experience, rather than taking the auditory-oral model as a universal teaching standard.

It is precisely this deep knowledge of deaf culture, combined with fluency in Libras, that enables the bilingual teacher to guide successfully the learning of written Portuguese as a second language. Beginning with what the child already masters - Libras - the teacher can build specific methodological bridges for teaching reading and writing instead of directly imposing literacy strategies created for hearing children who are native Portuguese speakers (QUADROS, 1997; CAMPELLO, 2008). Expanding the training and appreciation of bilingual teachers and deaf teachers is therefore not merely a matter of representation, but a concrete pedagogical condition for improving the quality of education for deaf children in every region of Brazil.

Family, early diagnosis, and language deprivation

Another decisive aspect of a deaf child's school trajectory occurs even before school entry: the diagnosis of deafness and the family's response to it. Because the great majority of deaf children are born into hearing families with no prior contact with Libras, late diagnosis or delayed access to sign language may result in significant language deprivation during the first years of life, a crucial period for language acquisition (QUADROS, 1997).

Goldfeld (2002) notes that families receiving appropriate guidance soon after diagnosis - including encouragement for hearing parents to learn Libras and for the child to have contact

with deaf adults - tend to support linguistic and cognitive development closer to that observed in deaf children of deaf parents, who acquire Libras naturally from birth. This evidence reinforces the importance of public newborn hearing-screening policies linked to family guidance and early Libras instruction, rather than merely to clinical and therapeutic referral.

Achievements in the education of deaf children

Despite the challenges presented, several achievements have been made in the struggle for inclusive education for deaf children. The enactment of Law No. 10,436 of April 24, 2002, represented a historic milestone by recognizing Libras as a legal means of communication and expression for the Brazilian deaf community (BRASIL, 2002).

Subsequently, Decree No. 5,626 of December 22, 2005, regulated that law, establishing guidelines for including Libras in teacher-education curricula, guaranteeing Libras interpreters in schools, and organizing bilingual education for deaf students, in which Libras is the first language and written Portuguese the second language (BRASIL, 2005).

Statistical overview of deaf education in Brazil

Recent data make it possible to assess the reach of these legal achievements in everyday Brazilian schools. According to the 2023 Basic Education Census conducted by the Anísio Teixeira National Institute for Educational Studies and Research (INEP), Brazil has approximately 62,192 deaf, hard-of-hearing, or deafblind students enrolled in basic education. Of this total, 55,932 study in regular classes and only 6,260 attend classes or bilingual schools specifically for deaf students. This shows that the great majority of Brazilian deaf students are still placed in predominantly hearing environments that are not always equipped with teachers fluent in Libras or educational interpreters (INEP, 2024).

In higher education, the same survey indicates 4,842 enrollments by deaf students, of which 1,397 have already resulted in degree completion, in addition to a still limited number of deaf postgraduate degree holders - 269 master's degree holders, 97 doctoral degree holders, and 13 postdoctoral researchers in the country (INEP, 2024). Compared with the IBGE estimate of more than ten million deaf people in Brazil, these figures reveal a substantial gap between the right to bilingual education guaranteed by law and its full implementation throughout the educational trajectory, reinforcing the relevance of the discussion of challenges and achievements proposed in this article.

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The deaf movement and the struggle for bilingual education

The legal achievements mentioned above did not arise spontaneously but resulted from decades of political mobilization led by the deaf community itself. Strobel (2008) reports that the main national organization representing the deaf community, today known as the National Federation for Deaf Education and Integration (Feneis), was founded in 1977 as the National Federation for the Education and Integration of the Hearing Impaired (Feneida). At the time it was composed exclusively of hearing professionals who, despite their good intentions, did not share the lived experience of deafness.

Dissatisfied with this lack of representation, deaf people from several Brazilian states organized a Committee for the Struggle for Deaf Rights in 1983, launching an activist movement that demanded the effective participation of deaf people in leading the very organization that claimed to represent them. This struggle culminated in 1987 with the election of a deaf leader as president of the federation and the restructuring of the institution, now renamed the National Federation for Deaf Education and Integration, with bylaws ensuring that it would be led by deaf people (STROBEL, 2008).

This historical episode is emblematic because it summarizes the principle that would thereafter guide the entire Brazilian deaf movement: decisions about deaf people's education, language, and culture must be made with deaf people in leading roles, rather than merely on their behalf by third parties. A few years later, this same activist principle supported the demand for official recognition of Libras, culminating in Law No. 10,436/2002 and Decree No. 5,626/2005 (BRASIL, 2002; BRASIL, 2005).

It is important to emphasize that this struggle did not end with the legal achievements already consolidated. The advocacy of the deaf community through Feneis and state and local deaf associations remains active today, demanding the effective implementation of bilingual education in schools, an expanded presence of qualified teachers and interpreters, and recognition of Libras as a language of instruction throughout the country. It is therefore an ongoing struggle in which deaf leadership remains at the forefront of defending and advancing bilingual education, not merely a closed chapter of history (STROBEL, 2008).

Awareness of the importance of bilingual education for deaf people has grown significantly in recent decades. The bilingual approach, which values both Libras and Portuguese, enables deaf children to develop their language skills more effectively, supporting their learning and social integration (QUADROS, 1997).

Subsequent legal developments: the Brazilian Inclusion Act and the BNCC

The initial framework represented by Law No. 10,436/2002 and Decree No. 5,626/2005 was later supplemented by other legal instruments that expanded guarantees of deaf people's access to education. The Brazilian Inclusion Act for Persons with Disabilities (Law No. 13,146/2015), known as the Statute of Persons with Disabilities, reinforced the right to inclusive education at every level, providing for assistive-technology resources, support professionals, and specialized educational assistance, which for deaf people includes support in Libras (BRASIL, 2015).

More recently, the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC) began guiding the curricular organization of basic education throughout the country, establishing competencies and skills to be developed by students (BRASIL, 2017). Although the BNCC does not treat Libras as a mandatory curricular component at every stage, its implementation opened room for discussion within school systems about adapted curricula and the need to coordinate the national curriculum document with the specific guidelines for bilingual deaf education, which remain under consolidation in different regions of the country.

Language acquisition and deaf identity

A discussion of bilingual deaf education cannot dispense with an understanding of the language-acquisition process in deaf children. Quadros (1997) shows that, just as hearing children naturally acquire spoken language, deaf children undergo a natural and spontaneous process of acquiring Libras when exposed to it from the earliest years of life, especially during the period considered critical for language development.

This leads to a central methodological implication for the education of deaf children: the teaching strategy must prioritize the mother tongue as the foundation of the pedagogical process. According to Quadros (1997), Libras as the deaf child's first language is the foundation on which all linguistic and cognitive development is structured, and the educational process must recognize it as such because the language is constantly evolving and becoming increasingly consolidated as a complete linguistic system.

In this sense, the author argues that Libras must be understood as the natural language of deaf people, playing from a linguistic and cognitive standpoint the same role that the mother tongue plays for a hearing child. When deaf children are exposed early to Libras - whether through deaf parents who use the language or through appropriate educational intervention when their parents are hearing - they develop the linguistic foundations necessary for abstract

thought, categorization of the world, and full communication, just as they would through the acquisition of any mother tongue (QUADROS, 1997).

Quadros (1997) also warns of the risks arising from language deprivation: deaf children of hearing parents who do not have early contact with Libras frequently show significant delays in the development of language and thought. This reinforces the urgency of policies for the early identification of deafness and immediate access to sign language as a first language.

This relationship between language acquisition and cognitive development is directly associated with the formation of deaf identity. By acquiring Libras as a natural and mother language, deaf children simultaneously develop a sense of belonging to their own linguistic and cultural community, grounding a deaf identity defined not by the absence of hearing but by the affirmation of a visual experience of the world (QUADROS, 1997; STROBEL, 2008).

Several authors have reinforced this perspective from different angles: while Skliar (1998) discusses deaf identity through a socio-historical-cultural interpretation that breaks with the clinical-therapeutic model of deafness, Strobel (2008) emphasizes the existence of multiple deaf identities constructed from differing experiences of contact with sign language, the deaf community, and the majority hearing culture.

Foundations of bilingualism and biculturalism

The bilingual proposal for deaf education is supported by broader theoretical formulations about human bilingualism. Grosjean (2010) argues that a bilingual person should not be understood as the sum of two monolinguals in a single individual, but as a speaker with a distinct communicative competence who uses each language according to context, interlocutor, and communicative function. Applied to deaf education, this perspective reinforces that a deaf child's proficiency in Libras and written Portuguese should not be assessed solely against the performance of monolingual Portuguese speakers, but rather in terms of bilingual communicative competence as a whole.

Grosjean (2010) also proposes the concept of biculturalism, according to which bilingual individuals often move between two cultures, incorporating values, practices, and forms of socialization from both. For deaf children, this movement occurs between deaf culture - with its visual communication practices, history, and forms of community organization - and the majority hearing culture in which the regular school is situated. Recognizing this biculturalism means understanding that schools should not require deaf children to assimilate

exclusively into hearing culture, but should enable the two cultures to coexist without either being hierarchically subordinated to the other.

Language mediation in child development

The relationship between language and cognitive development discussed by Quadros (1997) connects directly with Vygotsky's (1984) social interactionist perspective. For Vygotsky, the development of higher psychological functions such as memory, voluntary attention, and abstract thought depends fundamentally on the symbolic mediation exercised by language in the child's social interactions with the environment. According to Vygotsky (1984), language enables children to internalize processes that are initially social and transform them into individual psychological processes.

When applied to deaf children, this perspective reinforces the centrality of Libras as an instrument of symbolic mediation: deaf children construct their higher cognitive functions through interaction in a fully accessible language. Accordingly, school and family environments that do not offer accessible linguistic interaction - whether because Libras is absent or only partially or belatedly offered - compromise not only immediate communication but the child's psychological development itself, as described by social interactionist theory (VYGOTSKY, 1984; QUADROS, 1997).

The convergence among the frameworks of Quadros (1997), Grosjean (2010), and Vygotsky (1984) makes it possible to understand bilingual deaf education not as one pedagogical choice among several, but as a structural condition for the full linguistic, cognitive, and identity development of deaf children, reinforcing the relevance of the challenges and achievements discussed in the preceding sections.

Results and discussion

Analysis of the surveyed literature allows the results to be organized into three central and strongly interconnected analytical categories: the historical trajectory of educational approaches and the challenges and achievements of educating deaf children in Brazil.

Regarding the historical trajectory, the succession of approaches from oralism to total communication and then to bilingualism represents not merely an evolution in pedagogical techniques, but a profound change in the very understanding of what it means to be deaf. The persistence of oralist practices until recent decades helps explain why some challenges identified in the literature - especially insufficient teacher training and prejudice in schools -

remain today even after bilingualism has been legally consolidated (SKLIAR, 1998; GOLDFELD, 2002).

Within the challenges category, five recurring axes stand out in the literature reviewed: insufficient teacher preparation to work with Libras, a shortage of accessible teaching materials, prejudice that devalues deaf culture, the limitations of relying on the educational interpreter alone, and the lack of adequate support for families when deafness is diagnosed. These axes do not operate in isolation: inadequate training tends to reinforce oralist pedagogical practices that, in turn, sustain - even if implicitly - the clinical-therapeutic view of deafness criticized by Skliar (1998), feeding prejudice and the devaluation of deaf identity in schools. Similarly, insufficient guidance for families at diagnosis (GOLDFELD, 2002) tends to delay the child's contact with Libras, worsening the difficulties later faced by teachers in the classroom.

Within the achievements category, the legal framework represented by Law No. 10,436/2002 and Decree No. 5,626/2005 (BRASIL, 2002; BRASIL, 2005) served as an enabling condition for the other advances discussed in the literature, especially the consolidation of bilingual education. The legal guarantee of interpreters and the requirement that teachers be trained in Libras, for example, created institutional conditions for the bilingual proposal advocated by Quadros (1997) to be implemented more widely in Brazilian schools. Subsequent legal developments, such as the Brazilian Inclusion Act (BRASIL, 2015) and the BNCC (BRASIL, 2017), expanded this framework, although the literature indicates that these guarantees are still implemented unevenly across school systems and regions, suggesting that the law's existence alone does not ensure bilingual education in everyday school practice.

The most significant intersection between the two analytical categories, however, occurs in language acquisition and deaf identity. The theoretical evidence indicates that recognizing Libras as a natural language - rather than as a compensatory resource - is the link connecting the overcoming of pedagogical challenges with legal and cultural achievements: when deaf children gain early access to Libras as their first language, both the cognitive-linguistic foundation necessary for learning and a sense of belonging to a positive deaf identity develop simultaneously (QUADROS, 1997; STROBEL, 2008).

This finding speaks directly to the perspective of valuing deaf culture: including deaf practices, references, and adults in daily school life is not merely symbolic reparation, but a constituent part of the very process of language acquisition and identity development discussed by Quadros (1997), Skliar (1998), and Strobel (2008). The results therefore suggest that policies directed exclusively at either the pedagogical or cultural field tend to produce partial and unstable advances, whereas integrated actions linking teacher education, the production of

materials in Libras, and the appreciation of deaf culture have greater potential to consolidate genuinely inclusive education.

From a theoretical standpoint, the frameworks of Grosjean (2010) and Vygotsky (1984) offer a complementary explanation for this interdependence between pedagogical and cultural fields: if children's psychological development depends on mediation through language (VYGOTSKY, 1984) and bilingual competence presupposes legitimate movement between two cultures (GROSJEAN, 2010), then both the absence of accessible Libras and the devaluation of deaf culture are, in practice, obstacles to the same developmental process rather than separate problems to be solved independently.

Final considerations

The education of deaf children is a field requiring constant attention and continuous action from educators, administrators, and public policymakers. Challenges such as insufficient teacher training, the shortage of accessible teaching resources in Libras, and prejudice related to deafness are significant, but the achievements made, especially in the legal and pedagogical spheres, demonstrate that more inclusive education that values difference can be built.

Investing in the preparation of educators qualified in Libras, in the creation and dissemination of accessible teaching materials, and in the appreciation of deaf culture and identity are essential steps to ensure that all deaf children in every region of Brazil have access to quality education. This necessarily entails increasing the presence in schools of bilingual teachers who are truly fluent in Libras and of deaf teachers, recognizing that a teaching methodology appropriate for deaf children is not an adaptation of a methodology designed for hearing students, but a distinct approach built upon deaf culture and visual experience. Only through such continuous investment will it be possible to build a fairer and more inclusive society in which every deaf child's potential is fully recognized and valued.

Revisiting the historical trajectory of educational approaches also reinforces that current advances should not be regarded as definitive achievements, but as a process under constant dispute. Just as oralism prevailed for decades before being overcome, merely formal inclusion practices - such as delegating communication exclusively to the interpreter without the classroom teacher's pedagogical involvement - can still coexist with the official discourse of bilingualism, requiring constant vigilance from researchers, educators, and families.

As a direction for future research, empirical studies should investigate, in specific school contexts, the concrete effects that the articulation among teacher education, the work of

educational interpreters, family support, accessible materials, and cultural appreciation has on the learning and identity formation of deaf children, thereby expanding the understanding developed in this article from an essentially theoretical basis.

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