

BEYOND LANGUAGE POLICIES: DEAF PROTAGONISM, BRAZILIAN SIGN LANGUAGE, AND DEAF EDUCATION

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Abstract: *This paper presents the linguistic plan for Brazilian Sign Language, also known as Libras (Língua Brasileira de Sinais), which has an impact on deaf education in Brazil. A set of actions for the recognition of Libras has been established given the development of research in the field of deaf education, sign language linguistics and sign language translation and interpretation through the involvement of the National Deaf Education and Integration Federation, FENEIS (Federação Nacional de Educação e Integração de Surdos). Documents created by the deaf and scientific publications have contributed to establishing a law that recognises Libras, as well as political actions that legitimise deaf education. However, some educational policies prevent the deaf from access to education. This paper presents the actions that contributed to the recognition of sign language and deaf education and discusses the educational policies that make deaf access to education difficult given their linguistic and cultural specificities. It also presents the subsidies associated with the bilingual linguistic policy in deaf education – Libras and Portuguese –, thus, indicating the need for the implementation and application of Libras and Portuguese teaching in Brazil. In addition, an analysis of the developments of this public policy is presented, considering some crucial concepts that potentially influence decisions and referrals based on linguistic policies and on the rights of deaf people, which are based on the concepts of ‘diversity’ and ‘inclusion’ (Kusters, et al., 2015).*

Keywords: *Brazilian Sign Language, language policies, language planning, Letras Libras, deaf education in Brazil*

1. INTRODUCTION

Brazilian language policies for Brazilian Sign Language, also known as Libras, have been established over the years by socio-political movements driven by the National Federation for the Education and Integration of Deaf People (FENEIS, *Federação Nacional de Educação e Integração dos Surdos*). Starting from 1987, these policies were developed on the basis of research conducted on Libras (mainly from the 1990s onwards) (Brito, 2013). These socio-political movements culminated in the enactment of the 2002 Law 10,436, referred to by the deaf community as the Libras Law, which recognises Libras as the national language of Brazilian deaf communities. The law was regulated in 2005 through Decree 5.626 and it includes a series of actions to implement the Libras Law.

Among these actions, we highlight the achievements made in association with the educa-

tion of deaf people in Brazil and the development of training courses in higher education for Libras teachers, translators, and interpreters of sign language, such as Letras Libras¹. The education of deaf people in Brazil is supported by laws that recognise Libras as a national language and establish the right of deaf people to access bilingual education in which Libras is the first language and Portuguese is the second language. Despite this legitimacy, it is difficult to align the Libras linguistic policies introduced in 2002 and educational policies that are guided by proposals for educational inclusion (Quadros, 2012).

Additionally, higher education courses have been developed for bilingual teachers (Libras and Portuguese), Libras teachers, and sign language

¹ Letras Libras literally translates as *Libras Letters*. It is a course of Libras studies that focuses on language and literature in Libras.

interpreters and translators. These courses were developed in 2005 at the Federal University of Santa Catarina through special projects financed by the federal government and carried out online using distance learning models. They included nine federal and state partner institutions.

In 2009, the Federal University of Goiás and the Federal University of Santa Catarina created the first on-campus Letras Libras Course within the context of Reuni, a program for the expansion of Brazilian universities (Quadros, 2014). In 2012, the Viver sem Limites Program supported the establishment of Letras Libras Courses in all Brazilian states. Currently, at least one federal university in each state offers this course on a regular basis, and this has been made possible because of the language policy plan that can count on financial support for the development of such programs. The implementation of this language policy has already shown significant effects on the appreciation and recognition of Libras throughout Brazil.

The first deaf students to obtain their Master's and Doctoral degrees at the Federal University of Santa Catarina actively participated in the development of the syllabus of the first two Letras Libras courses². Their participation in the development of these courses and in proposing ways of teaching and learning for deaf students was essential to ensure that the courses were developed based on the perspective of deaf people. All teaching materials were produced in Libras, and all teaching and assessments were carried out in Libras. For the first time at a Brazilian public university, the Portuguese language did not constitute an exclusion factor for deaf students, because they were given the opportunity to learn and be assessed in Libras. Thus, in the context of the course, Portuguese was no longer a problem in the lives of deaf people and became just another

language used by students (evaluations made by deaf students from Letras Libras course and reported in Barbosa and Rigo, 2014). Deaf students started to use the Portuguese language as a helping tool, while Libras was used to interact and record knowledge in scientific areas that were part of the courses. The political and pedagogical project of the Letras Libras courses started with Libras. The first two offers involved 1300 students, of which 90% in the first offer were deaf people who were trained as Libras teachers. The second offer was a teacher training course for 450 students (80% of whom were deaf), as well as a course aimed at training Libras/Portuguese translators and interpreters (450 students). In the latter, most students were Libras interpreters who had already worked in this field, but had no specific training in the area. Based on the success of these two courses, regular four-year courses in Letras Libras have been established throughout Brazil for training Libras teachers and/or translators and interpreters.

Deaf education in Brazil has changed significantly since the recognition of Libras, especially given that it was historically challenged based on the fact that deafness was both an impairment and a loss that needed to be fixed, as well as by the issue of languages (Quadros, 1997; Skliar, 2013 [1996]; Quadros and Hoffmeister, 2021). In the Brazilian context, deaf education was marked by the permission to use sign language or the prohibition of its use. This led the deaf community to launch a resistance movement by establishing deaf associations that still exist today. Quadros (1997) documented that deaf education continues to include schools for the deaf that have undergone several educational perspectives: oralism, total communication, and bilingualism. However, many of these schools had to be closed down, particularly after inclusive education was implemented through public policies that indirectly caused their decline (Quadros, Strobel and Masutti, 2014). In addition to schools for the deaf, classes for the deaf were always offered in mainstream schools (Quadros, 2003; 2006; Skliar and Quadros, 2004).

Educational policies still believe that Brazilian sign language is instrumental in deaf education.

² Ana Regina Campello, Karin Strobel, Rodrigo Rosso Marques, Flaviane Reis, Fabiano Souto, Carolina Hessel, Deonísio Schmitt, Rimar Segala, Nelson Pimenta, and Fernanda Machado were involved in the planning and implementation of these courses. Currently, all of them hold PhD degrees and have full time positions in different institutes and universities in Brazil.

However, since the Libras Law was published in 2002, sign language has been recognised as a first language and Portuguese as a second language. In the same manner, the social, cultural, and scientific experiences of the deaf have also been recognised (Quadros, Strobel and Masutti, 2014). We are faced with a symbolic political negotiation process: how can we maintain both Brazilian sign language and Portuguese in the learning spaces that include the deaf community. The political spaces represented by each language are not the same and biases are ambivalent, forming what Bhabha (2003) calls the ‘third space’ by means of interstitial relationships. We no longer face opposing arguments, but third spaces, places of fissure, objections, and symbolic representations that weave dramatic forms can affect the lives of Brazilian deaf people. Therefore, it is necessary to begin negotiations in the discussions of linguistic policies. These “negotiations” are only possible when Libras becomes a key player in decision making. According to Bhabha (2003), negotiation occurs instead of negation. The deaf no longer need to deny Portuguese, and the hearing no longer need to deny the Brazilian sign language. Negotiation goes beyond opening hybrid spaces, places, and objectives. This does not mean that deaf education will include both languages: both languages will be in negotiation spaces that are not translated as one place or the other place, but in a territory that belongs to both. Thus, relationships have a much more complex order and political negotiation is usually required.

This paper was prepared based on document analysis and research that resulted in different publications on linguistic and educational policies that affect Libras and deaf communities. The authors of this paper were actively involved in the preparation of official documents and in the implementation of various actions resulting from the law, including the creation of the Letras Libras Course (Quadros, 2014; Quadros and Stumpf, 2014, 2015). We present our analyses of legal milestones that involve the linguistic and educational rights of the deaf as established by the deaf movement (i.e., the right to the recognition of their culture and the usage of Libras as their

language for communication). Our objective was to discuss the lack of administrative structure and educational practices in schools for the deaf that results in the inability to address this historical demand, which is growing every year as a result of the fast-paced schooling process undergone by the Brazilian deaf communities. Document analysis was conducted by identifying existing laws and examining the proposed actions in order to ascertain the effects of their implementation. The publications analysed formed the historical background of the legal milestones pertaining to Libras and deaf education.

The following guiding questions were asked:

(1) What were the direct gains for the deaf community with respect to their autonomy, identity, and strengthening of both Libras and the deaf community?

(2) What are the challenges faced by the Brazilian deaf communities with respect to policies that do not include their aspirations?

To focus on the gains, we analysed sign language teacher and translator-interpreter training programs, given that this action was effectively implemented after the Libras Law. Regarding the challenges, we focused on the national inclusion policy, which contains various conflicts with the linguistic policies put forth in the documents.

Section 1 includes the repercussions of the legal milestones on deaf education in order to answer the two questions listed above. We start by presenting the legal recognition of Libras through specific laws that have an impact on deaf education. In Section 2, we discuss the importance of the Letras Libras Courses (Brazilian Sign Language Programs) created in 2006. In Section 3, we show the impact of these courses considering the recognition of the status of Libras as a consequence of different gains. In Section 4, we discuss the tension that remains in the language planning policies with respect to deaf education, especially in the context of legal recognition. Finally, we propose an agenda for the future of language and education planning with respect to Libras and deaf education.

2. IMPACT OF THE LIBRAS LAW 10.436/2002, DECREE 5.626/2005, AND OTHER OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS ON THE EDUCATION OF DEAF PEOPLE

For many years, the language used by Brazilian deaf communities was not legally recognised. In April 2002, the Federal Law 10.436 (Brazil, 2002), also known as the Libras Law, was enacted as a result of deaf social campaigns organised by the National Federation for the Education and Integration of Deaf People (FENEIS). A plan to implement this law was sanctioned by the 5.626 Federal Decree (Brazil, 2005) in December 2005. These two official documents represent an important milestone for the recognition of Libras and for a series of actions to consolidate its recognition since then.

This historical milestone for the deaf community had an impact on different aspects of the life of Brazilian deaf people, more specifically at the educational level and in different parts of society. The Libras Law recognises the language of the Brazilian deaf community. The law is grounded on the principle that language is part of a community that represents a Brazilian social group. This “collective” principle is fundamental, especially when we discuss the issues of ‘inclusion’ and ‘diversity’, since the implications of this law are associated with a certain power that has impacted several decisions involving deaf people in Brazil.

These official legislations were achieved through a collective process led by FENEIS with the representation of various Deaf Associations and scholars who were beginning to study Libras (Brito, 2013 [1995]). The campaign was also supported by other documents organised by the deaf people themselves.

An important example was the document, **The Education that we, Deaf people, want** (*A Educação que nós Surdos queremos, 1999*). This document is considered a milestone among Brazilian deaf campaigns and was developed collectively in 1999 at the pre-conference of the V Latin American Conference on Bilingual Education for the Deaf (*V Congresso Latino Americano de Educação Bilingue para Surdos*). Before this con-

ference, deaf people met and discussed the issues to be considered in the education of deaf people. The title of the document indicates the way it was built through the use of the first-person plural “we” - the deaf people. This document represents the wishes of the deaf people who participated in its creation: deaf intellectuals and leaders, as well as the deaf people from different communities. FENEIS endorsed the document and forwarded it to the Ministry of Education as a formal demand from the deaf people all over the country.

When we discuss the current context of deaf education in Brazil in this paper, our point of departure is the above-mentioned document which was prepared almost two decades ago. This document inspired us to further examine the implementation of bilingual education from the point of view proposed by deaf representatives. At its core, this perspective guarantees the right of deaf people to be educated in their own language and to be assisted by interpreters in public spaces and in the media. When we began writing this paper in 2021, i.e., 20 years after the document **The Education that we, Deaf people, want** was published, 18 years after the Libras Law was passed, and 13 years since the Decree 5.626/2005 was implemented, we see that the rights of deaf people that have been safeguarded until the present were based on the wishes of the deaf community. One such wish was the creation of the Letras Libras courses, which is linked to the education of the deaf people and represents one of the enactments of Decree 5.626/2005.

This document was a claim for better deaf education in Brazil, because the laws recognised Libras and bilingual education with Libras as the first language and Portuguese as a second language. However, the main goal was to change the education systems in mainstream schools, where sign language interpreters were going to be hired to provide bilingual education. However, this solution did not guarantee access to education (Quadros, 2006), because deaf education requires direct interaction in sign language in order to be able to utilize the knowledge gained at school in different areas of life: this refers not only linguistic abilities, but also to academic, emotional, social, and

cultural knowledge (Quadros, 1997, 2006; Lane, Hoffmeister and Bahan, 1996). Therefore, we see a tension between the language policies and the educational policies established in Brazil. This tension struggles between the principle of inclusive education, which defends the “individual” access to education available to everyone, and the education that deaf people want, which is guided by the perspective of a socio-cultural linguistic group with linguistic policies that recognise Libras. There is also conflict between the point of view focused on the deaf individual as being part of the Brazilian community through mainstreaming schools, and the perspective of deaf people who want to be Brazilian citizens who can access bilingual education systems. As Ladd (2003) points out, this is a minority group formed by several other minority groups (black deaf, white deaf, indigenous deaf, deaf people of different genders and social classes, disabled deaf people, and so on), but they are all part of deaf communities that use a sign language. In the context of these conflicts/tensions, inclusive education was established as a national policy under the Ministry of Education whose goal is to promote inclusion in a highly diverse society. Thus, “inclusion” and “diversity” create a constant debate regarding the relevant meaning of the term ‘inclusion’: this debate also occurs in the tensions established between public policies and the wishes of the deaf community.

In 2013, the Ministry of Education, via the Department of Education, requested FENEIS to recommend a group of scholars and deaf leaders who could form a committee to prepare a document proposing the viability of bilingual education for deaf people in public schools based on one of the recommendations provided in Decree 5.626/2005: bilingual education for the deaf. Along with fellow researchers, FENEIS was represented in this committee by its deaf leaders and deaf intellectuals who had completed their Master’s and Doctoral degrees. For the first time, deaf people became the authors of a document created by the Ministry of Education in Brazil³ (MEC/

SEESP, 2008). This document was completed in 2014 with proposals that placed a focus on “diversity” in bilingual education within the Department of Education, while considering the language used by the deaf people as one of the guiding threads of the proposal: the document was called **Report on the Bilingual Education Policy - Libras and Portuguese Language** (*Relatório sobre a Política Linguística de Educação Bilingue - Língua Brasileira de Sinais e Língua Portuguesa*, 2014)⁴. The purpose of this document was to provide subsidies for the National Policy for Bilingual Deaf Education, including guidance on the implementation of bilingual education and alternatives in different spaces (school for the deaf, bilingual classes and mainstream schools). Furthermore, the document included guidelines for initial and continuing teacher training programs for teaching Libras as the first language and Portuguese as the second. The proposal was filed by the Ministry of Education, and it highlighted the divergence between the government and FENEIS with respect to the government’s educational policies.

The above-mentioned report provides the guidelines for bilingual education based on the Libras Law and Decree 5.626/2005. This official document echoes many wishes of deaf people that were already mentioned in the **Education that we, Deaf people, want** document. The proposal situates the education of deaf people as linguistic diversity based on linguistic human rights, which

sor at Instituto Nacional de Educação de Surdos, the National Institute of Deaf Education), Marianne Rossi Stumpf (PhD in Informatics in Education, Professor at the Federal University of Santa Catarina), Gladis Perlin (PhD in Education, Retired Professor at the Federal University of Santa Catarina), Patricia Luiza Ferreira Rezende (PhD in Education, Professor at the National Institute of Deaf Education), Shirley Vihalva (Master in Linguistics, Professor at the Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul), and Carolina Ferreira Pêgo (Master in Linguistics, Professor at the Federal University of Santa Catarina). This document also included deaf collaborators from the National Institute of Education - Professors Paulo André Martins and Valdo Ribeiro da Nóbrega. Valdo Ribeiro da Nóbrega holds a Master’s degree in Linguistics and is a Professor at the Federal University of Paraíba.

⁴ Working Group designated by Decree No. 1.060/2013 and No. 91/2013 by MEC/SECADI. Document available at www.bibliotecadigital.unicamp.br/document/?down=56513

³ This document was created by deaf researchers including Ana Regina and Souza Campello (PhD in Education, Profes-

in turn establishes the right of linguistic minorities to access education in their own language, as well as the right to education in their own language and in a second language (i.e., the main language spoken in that country). The bilingual education proposal goes even further to establish that deaf education must be accessible for deaf children along with their deaf peers, even when they live with hearing peers. Sign language, therefore, is seen as a vital part of a social group and gatherings where such language skills are developed. The document clarifies that bilingual education will promote the linguistic identity of the deaf “community” (p. 6), and not of the deaf individual. Thus, it moves deaf people’s education away from the perspective that has governed inclusive education as a collective, making deaf people invisible, by considering them as a whole, or “everyone”. The deaf people are not “everyone”: they belong to a social group that is created within the deaf community, a diverse group that gives a false idea of social equality. We present below an excerpt of the document about the education of deaf people from the deaf people’s own point of view:

*Bilingual education for deaf people is not compatible with the service offered by Special Education Programs, since it is restricted to issues imposed by the limitations resulting from disabilities in an extremely broad way, as if the deaf person, due to his/her deafness, was its object. Considered as part of a **linguistic-cultural community**, the deaf student requires another space from MEC [Ministry of Education] to establish **a regular bilingual education that meets the different possibilities of being deaf**. As a result, deaf people with disabilities, in addition to deafness, must be helped by specialised services organised according to the principles of Bilingual Education offered in Libras and Written Portuguese as a second language. (Report on the Bilingual Education Policy - Libras and Portuguese Language, 2014: 6-7, emphasis by the authors)*

The document is founded on the principle of bilingual education and in terms of social group, it considers deaf communities as “linguistic-cultural

communities” (following recommendations by WFD, 2018; Aleen, 2016, 2018). Therefore, all guidelines presented were designed considering deaf children and youngsters amidst their deaf peers, with deaf references, in a favourable linguistic-social environment.

At the same time, in 2014, the National Education Plan was published, which included a specific goal for deaf education:

4.7. to guarantee the offer of bilingual education, in Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) as a first language, and the written modality of Portuguese as a second language for students who are deaf and who have hearing impairment, from zero to seventeen years old, in schools, bilingual classes, as well as in inclusive schools, under the terms of art. 22 of Decree No. 5.626, of December 22, 2005, and of articles 24 and 30 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, along with the adoption of the braille reading system for the blind and deaf-blind. (Brazil, 2014, Lei 13.005, PNE Target 4.7)

Before publishing the final version of the National Education Plan (MEC/SEESP, 2008), FENEIS had several conflicts with the Department of Education - a consequence of the existing conflict between the needs of the deaf people and the expectations of inclusive education, in spite of the question of diversity being posed by this department. During the development of Goal 4, the deaf people represented by FENEIS inserted Goal 4.7 in order to include bilingual schools and classes in the document, as well as to consider Libras as the first language and the language of instruction, and Portuguese as a second language for deaf children between the ages of zero and 17 years.

The main intention of FENEIS has always been to guarantee an education in which deaf children could access schooling with their deaf peers, linking their linguistic rights to their rights of self-development within a social group to which the deaf community belongs. However, as direct collaborators of FENEIS, we attested that three attempts were made to remove the issue of bilingual

schools and classes from the National Education Plan, and to impose the education of deaf people within the inclusive education system (i.e., in regular schools where Portuguese was the language of instruction and the main means of communication). This was suggested in order to reaffirm the understanding of deaf people as individuals with the right to education, but did not consider the collective goals that were vital to them. Deaf people felt betrayed by the three attempts to remove the text proposed by FENEIS because it meant the removal of the deaf collective by means of bilingual schools, or, at least, bilingual classes. Therefore, FENEIS published a note of disapproval regarding the events related to the preparation of the National Education Plan, especially Goal 4.

We affirm that no other segment that deals with disabilities, and/or managers or public authorities can impose on us a form of education that was not decided by us. We repeat the motto of the International Convention for People with Disabilities: “nothing about us without us”. What lies behind this fight for words? Our right to seek the type of education that meets our visual needs most adequately: specific bilingual schools and classes for the deaf. (...) Now, through this text without consensus, the Ministry of Education wants to declare that bilingual schools and classes are equal to ordinary schools with the presence of a Libras interpreter. We affirm that public authorities want to diminish our achievement and go against what is established in Decree 5.626/2005: that the bilingual schools are one thing and the ordinary schools from the regular school system are another (cf. Article 2-II). We, deaf people, need our bilingual schools and classes. We call on educators and society to help us defend our right to acquire our language in a linguistically favourable environment, something an ordinary school can never provide. (FENEIS, 2013).

FENEIS, then, managed to ensure that the original text suggested was retained, which is an achievement based on the claims of deaf people, who are considered as a social group belonging to the deaf community. These attempts to modify the

original text show the conflicts between deaf people and the principles that govern inclusive education in Brazil. The retention of the original text, which kept bilingual schools and bilingual classes for deaf children, restates the guidelines presented in the other official documents that were created with the presence of deaf people, namely **The Education that we Deaf people want** document (1999), Decree 5.626 (2005), and the **Report on the Bilingual Education Linguistic Policy - Libras and Portuguese Language** (2014).

In this sense, therefore, Brazilian legislation guarantees the linguistic rights of deaf people. This legislation makes it possible to think about the education of deaf people and their perspectives, among many other possible aspects that represent their visual experiences, the dissemination of their language and their experiences through personal accounts - which represent real breakthroughs in expressing how much the world has made sense from the moment they were able to express themselves in Libras and to “listen” through signs.

However, it is necessary to remain vigilant. The conflicts remain and demand caution from deaf communities. Deaf representatives continue to carefully monitor and coordinate educational activities for deaf people.

FENEIS is a member of the World Federation of the Deaf, whose agenda is focussed on the rights of deaf people in the world. This international agenda also supports and strengthens FENEIS’ actions. On the occasion of the Second International Conference of the World Federation of the Deaf conducted in 2013 in Sydney, Australia, it was established that as a priority for the work of the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) that universal human rights must be ensured as a reality for deaf people worldwide. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) presented a paradigm shift from a model that understood disability as a disease to a model in which disability is part of Human Rights. Deaf people have civil, political, social, linguistic, economic, and cultural rights based on equality for all. This mainly requires the recognition of the linguistic and cultural identity

of deaf people. The principle underlying the proposals that include the desires of different groups, such as “nothing about us, without us”, were implemented based on this convention. The presence of the collective was clear when these policies were established.

WFD continues to defend the rights of deaf people through four key policies:

- (1) Recognition of sign language - Sign language is the first and natural language of deaf people. Full recognition of sign languages is paramount to the promotion of equality for deaf people.
- (2) Education - Deaf children must have access to education to be able to contribute to society as equal adults. They have the right to acquire their first and natural language - sign language - and to learn in an environment that respects and values sign language. They are entitled to education with the same high standards as hearing children.
- (3) Accessibility - Deaf people have the right to participate in all areas of daily life on an equal basis with others using sign language.
- (4) Sign language interpretation - A key factor for accessibility is the right to sign language interpretation. Societies should create systems that provide general access to sign language interpreters.

The WFD agenda is considered by FENEIS as a reference for assuring the rights of Brazilian deaf people associated with the development of research on Libras, the education of deaf people, and translation and interpretation in this field. FENEIS has been aligned with academic achievements in the past two decades, empowering its scientific discourse through detailed scientific research. FENEIS continues to work with deaf and bilingual researchers, thus ensuring the consistent and representative recognition of the issues involved in the lives and education of Brazilian deaf people.

One fundamental aspect of multilingual education is early access and frequent exposure to a natural and complete form of sign language. This starts the process of acquisition of a first language

and creates the possibility for multilingualism (Grosjean, 2008; Johnson et al., 1989). Several studies have shown that deaf children who have developed good language skills early on are academically advantaged. Irrespective of all other factors, a deaf child who signs well has better academic performance than the deaf child who does not have access to sign language. Most of these studies attribute this finding to the fact that the deaf child who uses sign language from an early age is not at a linguistic disadvantage (Freel et al., 2011).

This discovery has been replicated with numerous sign language and spoken language combinations, including American Sign Language (ASL) and English (Padden and Ramsey, 2000; Strong and Prinz, 2000; Mayberry et al., 2006; 2011, Clark et al., 2014), British Sign Language (BSL) and English (Cormier et al., 2012), Quebec Sign Language (LSQ) and French (Dubuisson et al., 2008), German Sign Language (DGS) and German (Mann, 2007), Chilean Sign Language (LSC) and Spanish (Alvarado et al., 2008), Australian Sign Language and English (Trezek et al., 2010), Israeli Sign Language and Hebrew (Miller, 2013), Aramaic Sign Language, written Aramaic and English (Ludago, 2014), and Hong Kong Sign Language and Chinese Cantonese (Tang et al., 2014).

The bilingual education policy referred to in Goal 4.7 requires basic education for deaf people to cover the period between ages zero and 17 years. This implies an early acquisition of sign language, which begins when the baby’s deafness is confirmed. The acquisition of Libras, as well as that of Portuguese are outlined in the official documents and need to be implemented. Sign language acquisition and bilingual development through bilingual education are guaranteed by law. However, the manner in which it implemented is incorrect, for example, focussing on providing sign language interpreters to mainstream schools, instead of bilingual classes.

Currently, a deaf campaign in Brazil is in the process of producing a new document aimed at expanding the references of the deaf community and guaranteeing the rights of deaf people (Bra-

zil, Lei 14.191, de 2021). Brazilian deaf leaders have created a social network group to discuss the proposal of this new document, with the aim of reaffirming current legislation and requesting a number of actions to be implemented so that deaf people can exercise their Brazilian citizenship on an equal footing with hearing people. The main aspects addressed in the document involve the right to access sign language in different public spaces, for example, using translators and interpreters, as well as the presence of deaf people themselves. Once again, the rights of deaf people are reaffirmed based on linguistic diversity and a different understanding of the term ‘inclusion’. The issue of ‘diversity’ and ‘inclusion’ is being considered once again while examining these official documents as public policies.

In the next section, we discuss the implementation of Decree 5.626 specifically through the training of Libras teachers, as well as through Libras translators and interpreters. These courses train professionals who will work at all levels of education of deaf people and, therefore, represent an important achievement in the implementation of language and education policies in the country. It is paradoxical that bilingual education starts at the university level rather than at the level of basic education. The implementation of a top-down language planning approach occurred because the education system in Brazil has its own educational planning. This is due to the conflict between linguistic and education policies and will be discussed in the section on diversity and inclusion.

3. DEVELOPMENT OF LETRAS LIBRAS COURSES IN BRAZIL

There are two common types of undergraduate degrees in Brazil, typically completed over four to five years of education: the *licenciatura* is an undergraduate degree that entitles the graduate to teach in schools, and the *bacharelado* is a more general degree that enables the graduate to work in other professions. The first Letras Libras *licenciatura* course in Brazil began in 2006 and was offered by the Federal University of Santa Catarina, in partnership with eight other educational institutions (both at federal and state levels). In 2008, a

bacharelado degree in Letras Libras was included, and a total of eighteen educational institutions offered both courses. More than 90% of the students in the first Letras Libras course were deaf, since the course was directed principally at Libras instructors, who were deaf people trained by the Ministry of Education, in partnership with FENEIS and the National Institute of Deaf Education (Instituto Nacional de Educação de Surdos). These courses, therefore, formed a new academic community in sign language that did not exist before. More than a thousand students were trained in these two courses throughout Brazil. For the first time, deaf people entered the federal and state universities in the country and took up positions prioritised for deaf people, as supported by Decree 5.626/2005. The priority given to deaf people was a policy of affirmative action that guaranteed a Libras teaching space for deaf people. The main objective of these courses was to train Libras instructors who already worked with Libras education, but did not have additional educational qualifications. Libras instructors were deaf people trained through short courses by FENEIS. Thus, the Letras Libras courses turned out to be a gateway for Brazilian deaf people to enter federal universities. Brazilian federal universities are highly prestigious in Brazil and are also extremely competitive institutions.

This helped boost deaf culture in terms of several forms of expression: literature, films, poetry, theatre, visual arts, and computer arts. It encouraged the publication of numerous articles in scientific books, undergraduate dissertations, Master’s theses, and Doctoral dissertations by deaf authors.

It is important to understand that, up until a few years ago, all discourses about deaf people were controlled, conceived of, and written by people who were not deaf. Only recently have deaf people participated and demanded attention, thus, changing the focus of our academic studies in a way that it contemplates deaf people who are not part of the deaf “elite” (i.e., those who are considered “elite” based on their skills in written Portuguese, the fact that they are bilingual, or that they are a member of a university). The contacts established between these academic institutions,

associations, sports groups, and deaf people are essential for their narrative to show resistance and provide them with a diaspora movement (see Quadros, Strobel and Masutti, 2014; Perlin and Miranda, 2003). For many years, the “Deaf People” have lived and understood their essence of being, but there were few records of academically recognised deaf protagonists in order for the wider society to access their claims.

The term “Deaf Culture” was put forth very recently. This term evolved during the course of deaf social campaigns, which have become more common in the fight for respect for sign languages, and it has incorporated new concepts and agents from different places. Ladd (2003) claimed that the crucial difference between majority and minority cultures is that the former have no obligations to explain the beliefs that guide their actions or, even to justify their existence. On the contrary, the latter are not only required to justify themselves, but also are not offered the material resources (or sufficient resources) needed to do so. Since the majority culture is dominant, “they” are the ones who investigate and analyse “the others”, and “they” are the ones who file the reports that collectively constitute what the West defines as “knowledge” (Ladd, 2003, p. 22). With the development of academic training programmes for Brazilian deaf people, this logic was disrupted, since deaf people who are qualified at higher levels (graduates with a Bachelor’s, Master’s, and/or Doctoral degrees) become the protagonists in the discussions about linguistic and educational policies in Brazil.

Deaf academicians gained access to Brazilian universities and made a difference within their classrooms, by demonstrating through their work, activities, and academic output that it is possible to conceive of a different teaching approach. Having done that, the doors of Brazilian universities were opened for Brazilian deaf people. The national selection processes, through the **National High School Exam**, (*Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio - Enem*), required for entering universities, now has examinations in Libras, which guarantee the right of deaf people to participate in the selection processes on an equal basis. Deaf people then

began integrating into different courses in Brazilian universities.

However, these ‘conquered’ spaces are still restricted to universities and do not yet extend to basic educational institutions, because, at this level, the policy of inclusion remains in dispute with the established Libras language policies. So far, basic educational institutions have not implemented bilingual systems grounded in the ways of thinking of the deaf community regarding education based on the collective form.

4. IMPACT OF THE LETRAS LIBRAS COURSES IN BRAZIL

The deaf people in Brazil who have received the Letras Libras training continue to work and train educators in all universities across Brazil. This is important since Decree 5.626/2005 requires the inclusion of Libras in *licenciatura* courses in different fields of knowledge, as well as in speech therapy courses. The presence of deaf people in institutions of higher education has led to the training of teachers at both the Master’s and Doctoral levels. Since 2009, at the Federal University of Santa Catarina alone, the Graduate Program in Linguistics has attested 46 Master’s theses and 25 Doctoral dissertations on topics concerning Libras. In the Translation Studies Program, 57 Master’s theses and 18 Doctoral dissertations about translation and interpretation of Libras have been defended, and many more are in progress. Among these dissertations, 84 were carried out by deaf researchers. Based on the data from this university alone, we can see the evolution in the training of researchers from Libras and Translation Studies focused on sign language. Several other Brazilian universities are also currently training researchers in these fields.

The impact of these courses has raised several important issues for the deaf community:

- (1) Promotion and recognition of Libras - The fact that Libras is part of the academic training curriculum in the field of Language and Literature has fostered a new outlook on sign language, similar to what happens with other languages that are part of Language and Literature courses

es. This is because Libras is now slowly integrating into the set of languages that are part of the country's language training courses. The promotion and recognition of Libras through the Letras Libras courses has provided a new status to the language within the group of languages spoken/used in Brazil.

- (2) The qualification of professionals who were already working in areas related to the teaching, translation, and interpretation of Libras (i.e., *Licenciatura* and *Bacharelado*).
- (3) Consolidation of political, educational, and social networks established among former students of Letras Libras (Quadros, Strobel and Masutti, 2014): There are several ways in which deaf people utilise the networks established throughout the country. Deaf people have organised several conferences, meetings, courses, and committees to put together official documents. Sometimes there is strong resistance from many hearing people, and other times there is an attitude of cooperation: this depends on the type of relationship built between deaf and hearing people in different places and at different times. Differences can also be observed among Brazilian universities. The strategic use of social media can also help build networks that empower deaf people. Social media, for example, was used to mobilise deaf people in 2011 in Brasilia when more than 4000 deaf people demanded the rejection of a decree that would lead to the enforcement of a single model of inclusive education and the closure of all schools for the deaf in the country. This mobilisation resulted in the removal of the decree and, consequently, was a great achievement for the Brazilian deaf people. These networks continue to be used by deaf leaders to create a new document that can be formally forwarded to the authorities.
- (4) Dissemination of Libras by different media, including television and the internet - With the training of Libras teachers, as well as Libras interpreters and translators, the presence of these professionals in the media has become more evident. The fact

that we have qualified professionals makes it possible to hire experts to work in different programs. Among these, we would like to highlight political debates, slots for presenting mandatory information that needs to be shown on television (e.g., information regarding screen classification for age), and other specific programs. There are also interviews on popular programs that include deaf people and the presence of interpreters. Media, therefore, has become an ally in the dissemination of Libras. There are also certain requirements established by Decree 5.626/2005 that oblige the broadcasting of certain programs in Libras. The fact that we have properly trained professionals makes it possible for us to carry out these legal requirements in the media, which in turn helps disseminate the language.

- (5) Training of deaf people with Master's and PhD degrees: This is one of the consequences of the training of deaf teachers in the context of Letras Libras courses. Many former students became professors at Brazilian universities and continued their studies in this academic research area. The training of deaf people at higher levels of formal education has enabled deaf authorship and the empowerment of deaf people. These highly qualified deaf people actively participate in decision-making processes and issues where deaf people are involved as citizens.
- (6) Development of research that includes deaf scholars: The results of their theses, articles presented in conferences, and academic journals are being published. However, we continue to see the need to be more assertive in this respect and believe that a specific program is necessary to promote these results. This task is two-fold and requires further support. Currently, very few scholars (mainly hearing people and second language signers) have provided their support. Since Libras is still poorly described, there is a lot more to be done (e.g., Brito, 2013 [1995]; Quadros and Karnopp, 2004; Nascimento, 2009; Xavier, 2014; Campos, 2017; Quadros, 2019).

In fact, there is very little information about other Brazilian sign languages (e.g., Vihalva, 2009; Damasceno, 2017; Pereira, 2013; Silva, 2021). It is critical that more people are trained and such research is made more accessible to teachers and the general public. Although knowledge is the best, and perhaps the only, way to overcome prejudice, there continues to be a lot of prejudice and misconceptions about sign languages. In the last few years, the work of Brazilian researchers has become part of other graduate programs, providing visibility to deaf students, and enabling them to publish their key research results. We have books, articles, and some edited collections of articles in Linguistics and Libras, Translation and Libras/Portuguese Language Interpretation and Education for the Deaf and other national periodicals, such as *Leitura Journal*, *Cadernos de Tradução* and also *Libras Portal* - which includes the Libras documentation (<https://portal-libras.org>).

Along with the larger deaf community, these professionals have demanded a specific type of education - one that allows them to conclude their basic schooling and then to be trained as teachers. This way they are qualified to work in the field of education for the benefit of children. This is part of the specific legislation that guides deaf people in a bilingual education system that is different from other sectors of the deaf community. In this legislation, teachers are guaranteed “in service” training that taken place in parallel to their classroom training, along with their basic training.

This is confirmed in Libras Law n° 10.436/2002, and reiterated in the Report of the Working Group designated by Ordinances n° 1.060/2013 and n° 91/2013, which presents subsidies for the Bilingual Education Policy - Brazilian Sign Language and Portuguese Language.

The education of teachers of Libras, Portuguese as L2, translators and interpreters is essential to train professionals to work in basic education. These courses must be guaranteed at the higher education level (licenciatura and bacharelado) and as continuing training

for teachers who are already working in basic and higher education. The undergraduate courses involve Bilingual Pedagogy (which trains the bilingual teacher to work in young children’s education and first years of elementary school), the Letras Libras Licenciatura courses (which train Libras teachers to teach Libras in elementary and high school) and Bacharelado courses (which train translators and interpreters of Libras and Portuguese). The course on Portuguese Language as L2 must be offered to train teachers who will work both in basic and higher education.

(Relatório sobre a Política Linguística de Educação Bílingue – Língua Brasileira de Sinais e Língua Portuguesa, 2014).

It was expected that the official documents would have an effect on the practices of teaching systems with respect to the qualification of their staff in order for them to be able to work in bilingual schools and universities. Unfortunately, as mentioned earlier in Section 1, the report was filed by the Ministry of Education for the period from 2014 to 2021. Several teachers organisations and deaf people’s campaigns have taken an important step in this direction to pressure the education systems to create proposals and training programs not only in institutions of higher education, but also in elementary and high schools.

The specific case of the training of translators and interpreters presents basic principles that apply to these professionals as outlined by the UN Convention:

- to recognise the equivalence of the status of sign language and spoken language,
- to respect and promote sign languages,
- to recognise and support the cultural and linguistic identity of deaf people, including sign languages and deaf culture,
- to recognise the importance of individual autonomy and independence for deaf people, including the freedom to make their own choices,

- to recognise that deaf people must have the opportunity to actively participate in policy and program decision-making processes, including those directly related to them,
- to respect the developing capacities of deaf children and to respect the right to preserve their identities,
- to consult organisations representing the deaf on issues that concern them.

The Letras Libras courses represent an important milestone in the training of deaf teachers in Brazil. They are currently also training deaf translators and interpreters, as well as bilingual hearing people. This represents a great advance in training within the realm of Libras. The impacts can also be observed in other institutions, since they are considered as a reference for the entire country.

Despite all the achievements in training bilingual teachers, Libras teachers, and sign language translators and interpreters in Brazil, there is still a lot to be done with respect to basic level deaf education. Educational policies, especially those that involve linguistic policies related to the deaf, tend to be misunderstood, and this is directly related to the way the terms “diversity” and “inclusion” are understood. These aspects are discussed in the following section.

5. DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION: IMPACTS ON DEAF EDUCATION IN BRAZIL

In spite of actions that have a definite positive impact on deaf education, particularly the recognition of Libras, educational policies continue to be in conflict with the established linguistic policies. The actions implemented after the Libras Law encompass the issue of bilingual education and the role of the languages included in this educational process (i.e., Libras as a first language and Portuguese as a second language). This linguistic policy is further understood by the implementation of educational policy actions that must take ‘diversity’ and ‘inclusion’ into account.

The terms ‘diversity’ and ‘inclusion’ are widely used in proposals that guide educational policies in Brazil (MEC/SEESP, 2018). The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities uses these terms to discuss education, more specifically, the education of deaf people. However, the official documents – meaning the current legislation that we have discussed so far - present these concepts in an individualised manner. Official documents have dealt with inclusion based on education for all, and on the understanding that “each individual” must have his/her access to education respected and guaranteed (i.e., UN, 1948, 1990; UNESCO, 1994). The terms ‘everyone’ and ‘each one’ have been a problem with respect to deaf education. The term ‘everyone’ ends up obscuring differences among deaf people that are important for their effective inclusion in society, while the term ‘each one’ signals an individualised understanding of each person and their needs in the inclusion process. Nonetheless, in the case of deaf people in Brazil, the term ‘everyone’ makes ‘every deaf person’ invisible in favour of ‘every person’ in society (as discussed by Hall, 2013). And, the term ‘each one’ focuses on the deaf individual as the one who needs access to communication, simplifying the issue of language to the access of sign language often through a sign language interpreter. These insights are immersed in an education plan based on ‘diversity’. The term ‘diversity’, as it has been understood within the field of inclusive education, comes to be seen as the guarantee that ‘everyone’ will be included in the educational system and will have their diversity respected as an individual.

Based on this line of thought, inclusive education policies develop education plans for all public schools with the aim of guaranteeing equal access to all diverse groups, as well as making sure that everyone’s right to education is respected. When a student arrives at school, she/he is seen as an individual who must have her/his needs met. In the case of deaf people in Brazil, when deaf students arrive at school, the question of language is posed and the recommendation has been to guarantee the presence of a sign language interpreter, so that

they have access to a so-called bilingual education plan (Stumpf and Rangel, 2012). In other words, deaf students will access the school content through the mediation of a sign language interpreter and thus will access it in Portuguese. However, this does not comply with the education plan for deaf people that is reported in the document **The Education that we, Deaf people, want**. In addition, even though most of the resources go to mainstream schools, this policy can have an impact on the resources available to deaf education. Under this strategy, schools for the deaf do not receive enough resources to remain open.

When we analysed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2007), the document objectively established that sign language needs to be guaranteed as a human right. However, it is clear that the specificity of language rights of deaf children is an important exception (Murray et al., 2018 and Murray, 2015). Deaf children need to have social interactions in sign language, which mainstream schools cannot offer when they offer classes with sign language interpreters. Even more importantly, as indicated by Murray et al. (2018), it explicitly acknowledges that deaf people, similar to all other people, must have their cultural and linguistic identities recognised, including sign languages and deaf culture, “accessing education with dignity and self-worth, and respect for human rights” (considering human diversity as mentioned below).

- a) The full development of human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth, and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity (Article 24: 1 (a)).
- b) Persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live (Article 24: 2 (b)).
- c) People with disabilities will be entitled, on an equal basis with other people, to have their **specific cultural and linguistic identity** recognized and supported, including **sign lan-**

guages and the deaf culture (Article 30: 4, emphasis added).

The document also establishes that deaf people must have access to different spaces guaranteed through the presence of sign language interpreters. As discussed by Murray et al. (2018) and Murray (2015), when the cultural and linguistic identity of the deaf is recognised, along with deaf culture, the deaf are recognised as a social group. Identity, culture, and language are part of their relationship with their peers, and can be used to identify factors that are common and shared. The deaf community, which involves the interaction of deaf people grouped in common spaces, is therefore essential to understanding “inclusive”, as primary and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities. It is vital to understand that the term ‘diversity’ indicates differences and the term ‘inclusion’ suggests a departure from the collective in order to guarantee citizenship in equal conditions as a human right. We discuss these terms in the context of Brazilian education based on the reflections of Kusters et al. (2015), summarized below.

Kusters et al. (2015) presents the advantages and disadvantages of using the term ‘diversity’ for the implementation of policies aimed at deaf people. The advantages are: (i) the awareness of multiple differences in society; (ii) new perspectives on culture and humanity; (iii) different types of differences; (iv) the recognition of multiplicity and intersectionality; and (v) avoidance of essentialism and over-specification. The disadvantages are: (i) the designation of people outside the norms of society; (ii) reinforcing the idea of normal/abnormal binary strength; (iii) overshadowing social, political, and economic exclusion; and, (iv) helping to shift the focus of attention from inequality factors to ‘feeling good’ measures, instead of thinking about real improvements in structural conditions.

According to Kusters et al. (2015), from the point of view of deaf diversity, ‘inclusion’ can present a perspective of incorporating the advantages of using the term ‘diversity’. This implies an awareness of what it means to be deaf as part of

deaf communities; to understand that culture and humanity have different ways of translating and paying attention to sign language (as a different language used by deaf Brazilians from Brazilian deaf communities in large Brazilian urban centres); to recognise the existence of multiple cultures and identities (among them, the deaf identity and cultures); as well as, to avoid the essentialism of equality and the over-specification of what would be termed as “in common”. These are important issues for the inclusion of deaf people in Brazilian society. ‘Inclusion’, in this sense, is established as part of the way through which society interacts with the different social groups that it is made up of. Everyone, thus, needs to be included, but not individually. ‘Everyone’ needs to be included as a composition of different socio-cultural and linguistic groups, making inclusion much more dynamic and eclectic.

In the Letras Libras courses at the Federal University of Santa Catarina, diversity and inclusion were considered based on another aspect that allowed for much more creative ways of guaranteeing the access of deaf people to higher education. ‘Diversity’, in this context, was accomplished through the recognition of Libras collectively. The ‘diversity’ present in the design and implementation of these courses was obtained by their authors, who were also deaf. These deaf people, Master’s students, and those who had completed their Master’s and Doctoral degrees had a positive impact on teaching and learning from the perspective of the deaf. All teams that were put together to prepare the materials and offer the courses included deaf people. This ‘inclusion’ guaranteed the recognition of the difference (i.e., the ‘diversity’). This was possible, precisely because the deaf were then seen as a collective, not individually, and they took part in designing the courses. However, at the level of basic education, we still need to guarantee the right of deaf children to access education via this perspective. Therefore, this topic deserves further discussion. Notwithstanding this need, our purpose was to discuss deaf educational policies in the Brazilian context and the impact it has had on education. In the future, it is important to conduct studies addressing the fact

that deaf children need to have sign language in their social environment (see more about this in Humphries et al. 2013; Murray, De Meulder and Maire, 2018; Allen, 2016, 2018; specifically for linguistic rights, see Skutnabb-Kangas, 2018)⁵.

6. AGENDA FOR THE FUTURE

The presence of Libras in scientific meetings (conferences, meetings of scientific associations, symposia, etc.) has increased substantially in the last ten years. Libras has a guaranteed place in the Brazilian Society for the Progress of Science (Sociedade Brasileira para o Progresso da Ciência - SBPC), the Brazilian Association of Linguistics (Associação Brasileira de Linguística - Abralín), and the National Association of Research and Graduate Studies in Letras and Linguistics (Associação Nacional de Pesquisas e Pós-Graduação em Letras e Linguística - Anpoll), whose working group has been regularly bringing together researchers in order to present and discuss their work and research policies at a national level for more than 20 years.

The Letras Libras courses have provided academic degrees for deaf students, as well as helped to break down the idea that the selection and assessment of students must happen via the Portuguese language. The understanding of ‘diversity’ among deaf people was established through various actions in recent years, including the offering of Letras Libras courses, which allows selection and assessments to be carried out in Libras. From that point on, several other processes began implementing these actions after ensuring that they paid more attention to the differences among deaf people: Enem (the National High School Exam), civil service entrance examinations, and several nationwide programs are also offered in Libras. Therefore, deaf people were being effectively included and recognised as part of a social group, the deaf community. The guidelines provided in

⁵ There are successful cases of bilingual education reported by other countries such as Sweden (see for example, Svart-holm, K. 1993), which were not discussed here because of various limitations. We chose to focus only on the Brazilian context.

the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities makes sense and clearly have an impact on the lives of deaf people based on the understanding that the term ‘diversity’ refers to the differences in a socio-cultural and linguistic group that is associated with a sign language, identity, and culture. From this moment on, the notion of inclusion most definitely needs to take on a different form in order to be carried out effectively from within social groups that are part of the deaf community. This means understanding the education of deaf people from within deaf people’s groups, as well as considering the encounter between them as a basis for ensuring their access to education grounded on deaf people human rights.

Here are the main points that must be considered in order to define future work:

- (1) To guarantee the necessary conditions for the implementation of bilingual education for deaf people, based on the understanding of ‘diversity’ as a socio-cultural difference and ‘inclusion’ as the possibility of grouping deaf people together to ensure that sign language is disseminated through the social and cultural interaction of deaf children (deaf peers) and their contact with deaf role models at school.
- (2) To enable the dissemination of sign language in all school spaces, especially in bilingual schools for deaf people and bilingual classes.
- (3) To continue to invest in the training of deaf researchers and authors.
- (4) To maintain, reinforce, and expand the support of agencies that promote research and training.
- (5) To create databases that gather systematic information about institutions, training programs, research projects, researchers, and publications focussed on disseminating information on sign languages.
- (6) To create networks that connect institutions and researchers to allow for constant exchange of ideas, discussions, updates, and the planning of research projects.

7. FINAL REMARKS

The legal recognition of Libras in Brazil has had a significant impact on deaf education. However, we must acknowledge that bilingual education for deaf people has not yet been given priority “status” in the government’s political agenda. This is because public authorities have misunderstood the meaning of the term “inclusion” in the context of Brazilian education. We are aware of the complexities associated with the development of bilingual education for deaf people and the challenges that need to be overcome, but given the current National Education Plan, it is clear that these challenges need to be faced along with the input and support of deaf leaders and intellectuals. The deaf representatives of the National Federation of Education and Integration of the Deaf (FENEIS) and the intellectuals who are currently conducting research in the field of deaf education and sign language linguistics - including deaf people with Master’s and Doctoral degrees - should be invited by public policy agents to implement bilingual education in Brazil. Numerous challenges must be overcome in order to ensure that the type of school advocated by the Brazilian legislation can be developed and bilingual education systems can be put into practice. These bilingual schools for deaf people can have a huge positive impact on the Brazilian deaf communities. The main challenge is to implement the existing guidelines provided in the National Education Plan.

The big step that educational agents need to take involves the effective participation of the deaf community in planning this implementation, both in relation to bilingual education itself and in all issues involving the rights of deaf people, including access to different social spaces through the presence of professional translators and interpreters of Libras and Portuguese.

Another important step is to support actions that involve the production of teaching materials in Libras, starting from a Libras corpus, as well as materials that require the elaboration of formal methods of learning Libras as a first and a second language, and Portuguese as a second language.

We argue that a partnership between deaf and hearing people is necessary to generate significant innovations not only by discussing evidence, but also negotiating strategies that keep ‘diversity’, identity, and deaf culture in mind (as implied by Libras). Such an approach can guarantee true ‘inclusion’ and allow deaf people to effectively exercise their citizenship in Brazilian society.

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