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THE ASL:
A motivational resource in English classes for deaf students

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Abstract

Teaching English to Brazilian deaf students faces specific challenges, as English is their third language, followed by Portuguese and Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) as L2/L1, respectively. Traditional English classes emphasize oral production and comprehension; thus, personalized guidance that addresses the specific linguistic needs of deaf students is lacking in national educational documents. This study highlights the importance of New Literacy Studies, advocated by Street (1984, 2000) and Barton et al. (2000), which emphasize literacy practices in diverse social and cultural contexts, crucial to meeting the linguistic and communicative needs of minority groups. Incorporating sign language could increase deaf students' motivation to acquire English as L3 through visual learning, language transfer, cultural connection, multimodal learning, and student engagement. Wauters and Knoors (2008) found that integrating sign language into English language instruction improved the comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and overall language skills of deaf

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students. Our research explores whether American Sign Language (ASL) could be a motivational resource for these students. The study involved observing six lessons in two classes of a regular inclusive school with deaf students, collecting questionnaire responses, and analyzing discourse sequences provided in interviews. Following an intervention in the language laboratory of the Federal University of Pará (UFPA), where English classes were taught in Libras, interviews revealed that the combination of Libras, ASL, and English significantly increased students' interest and motivation to learn English.
Keywords: Deaf Students; English language; ASL; Literacy Studies.

A ASL: um recurso motivacional em aulas de inglês para estudantes surdas e surdos

Resumo

O ensino de inglês para estudantes surdas/os brasileiras/os enfrenta desafios específicos, pois o inglês é a sua terceira língua, seguido do português e a Língua Brasileira de Sinais (Libras) como L2/L1 respectivamente. As aulas tradicionais de inglês enfatizam a produção e a compreensão orais; dessa forma, orientações personalizadas, que abordem as necessidades linguísticas específicas para discentes surdas/os, carecem nos documentos educacionais nacionais. Este estudo destaca a importância dos Novos Estudos do Letramento, defendidos por Street (1984, 2000) e Barton et al. (2000), que enfatizam práticas de letramento em diversos contextos sociais e culturais, cruciais para atender às necessidades linguístico-comunicativas de grupos minoritários/minorizados. A incorporação da Língua de Sinais poderia aumentar a motivação de alunas/os surdas/os para adquirirem o inglês como L3, através da aprendizagem visual, transferência de língua, conexão cultural, aprendizagem multimodal e envolvimento discente. Wauters e Knoors (2008) descobriram que a integração da língua de sinais no ensino de inglês melhorou a compreensão, a aquisição de vocabulário e as habilidades linguísticas gerais de alunas/os surdas/os. Nossa pesquisa explora se a Língua de Sinais Americana (ASL) poderia servir como um recurso motivacional para essas/es alunas/os. O estudo envolveu a observação de seis aulas em duas turmas de uma escola regular inclusiva com discentes surdas/os, coleta de respostas a questionários e análise de sequências discursivas fornecidas em entrevistas. Após uma intervenção no laboratório de línguas da Universidade Federal do Pará (UFPA), onde foram ministradas aulas de inglês em Libras, entrevistas revelaram que a combinação de Libras, ASL e inglês aumentou significativamente o interesse e a motivação discente para aprender inglês.
Palavras-chave: Estudantes Surdos; Língua Inglesa; ASL; Estudos do Letramento.

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La ASL: un recurso motivacional en las clases de inglés para estudiantes sordos

Resumen
La enseñanza del inglés a estudiantes sordos en Brasil enfrenta desafíos específicos, ya que el inglés es su tercer idioma, seguido del portugués y la Lengua Brasileña de Señas (Libras) como L2/L1, respectivamente. Las clases tradicionales de inglés enfatizan la producción y comprensión oral; de esta manera, las orientaciones personalizadas que aborden las necesidades lingüísticas específicas de los estudiantes sordos son escasas en los documentos educativos nacionales. Este estudio destaca la importancia de los Nuevos Estudios de Alfabetización, defendidos por Street (1984, 2000) y Barton et al. (2000), que enfatizan las prácticas de alfabetización en diversos contextos sociales y culturales, cruciales para atender las necesidades lingüísticas y comunicativas de los grupos minoritarios/minorizados. La incorporación de la Lengua de Señas podría aumentar la motivación de los estudiantes sordos para aprender inglés como L3, a través del aprendizaje visual, transferencia de lengua, conexión cultural, aprendizaje multimodal y participación estudiantil. Wauters y Knoors (2008) descubrieron que la integración de la lengua de señas en la enseñanza del inglés mejoró la comprensión, la adquisición de vocabulario y las habilidades lingüísticas generales de los estudiantes sordos. Nuestra investigación explora si el Lenguaje de Señas Americano (ASL) podría servir como un recurso motivacional para estos estudiantes. El estudio involucró la observación de seis clases en dos grupos de una escuela regular inclusiva con estudiantes sordos, la recopilación de respuestas a cuestionarios y el análisis de secuencias discursivas proporcionadas en entrevistas. Después de una intervención en el laboratorio de idiomas de la Universidad Federal de Pará (UFPA), donde se impartieron clases de inglés en Libras, las entrevistas revelaron que la combinación de Libras, ASL e inglés aumentó significativamente el interés y la motivación de los estudiantes para aprender inglés.
Palabras clave: Estudiantes Sordos; Lengua Inglesa; ASL; Estudios de Alfabetización.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past century, socio-cultural and political changes have led to more multilingual societies, where learners engage with multiple languages and literacies through different processes (Ibrahim, 2017). These processes are shaped by linguistic power tensions, including between minority and majority language rights. Recent research has shifted from viewing literacy and identity as fixed to understanding them as dynamic and socially constructed.

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The English curriculum in mainstream schools is uniformly applied to both hearing and deaf students, even though deaf individuals use the four traditional language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, differently than their hearing peers. This discrepancy has raised concerns about the effectiveness of teaching methods in inclusive classrooms for deaf students. To address these concerns, a study was conducted to examine classroom interactions among teachers, students, and interpreters[4], explore the role of contextualized language instruction (including cultural education), and assess the potential of American Sign Language (ASL) as a motivational tool for enhancing deaf students' literacy skills.

The study's objectives were to investigate these factors, and to that end, a qualitative research methodology was employed, incorporating observations and interviews, followed by data triangulation to ensure validity.

This research is structured into two main sections: the first is a comprehensive literature review that covers some teaching methods, the status of English as a Foreign Language, the role of visual culture, and the potential of ASL as a motivational resource under the perspectives of the New Literacy Studies according to Street (1984, 2000) and Barton et al. (2000). The second part delves into the research methodology, detailing the design of the method, data collection and analysis processes, participant selection criteria, and the analytical framework used.

The findings from the study revealed that participants expressed motivation and interest in learning ASL and immersing themselves in the culture of native deaf English speakers. They also appreciated the visual elements integrated into the classroom when teaching English, which helped to contextualize the language through signs. These results suggest that ASL can

[4] It is necessary to clarify the conventional difference between translator and interpreter, whether in oral or sign languages. The translator works with written texts while the interpreter deals with oral and/or signed speech (Santiago, 2012). This study chose the term "interpreter" since, in the educational context, the main role of these professionals is to transpose oral speech into Libras, or vice versa.

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play a crucial role in enhancing literacy skills among deaf students by leveraging their visual strengths and cultural identity.

Our findings have paved the way for further research into teaching English to deaf students, emphasizing the advantages of a bilingual education approach that includes American Sign Language (ASL). By recognizing the unique linguistic and cultural needs of deaf learners, educators can better support their acquisition of high-level reading and writing skills, ultimately fostering greater literacy and academic success.

DEAF STUDENTS AS LEARNERS OF AN ORAL FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Deaf students face unique challenges when learning a foreign language, particularly primarily oral, such as English. They must adapt to various factors, including their inclusion in different school settings (whether they attend bilingual or mainstream schools), their proficiency in sign language (such as Libras for deaf Brazilians), and their awareness of visual culture within themselves and the school environment. Learners and teachers must also recognize that English is a foreign language and serves as a third language (L3) for Brazilian deaf students.

For deaf students, learning an oral foreign language like English involves overcoming significant barriers related to auditory input and spoken interaction. These students typically rely on visual cues and sign language for communication, making acquiring oral language more challenging. Effective teaching strategies for deaf students often include visual aids, sign language interpreters, and bilingual education approaches that integrate sign language with the target oral language.

In their historical review of literacy development for deaf learners, Power and Leigh (2000) highlight a long-standing perspective that reading and writing could serve as compensatory mechanisms for the lack of hearing. This view posited that deaf individuals could effectively use reading as a substitute for auditory input, allowing them to access information and knowledge typically conveyed through sound. Similarly, writing was seen as a replacement for spoken communication, enabling deaf individuals to express their thoughts and

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engage in dialogue with others. This approach underscored the importance of literacy skills in bridging the communication gap experienced by deaf individuals, emphasizing the role of written language as a vital tool for comprehension and expression.

In bilingual education settings, where both sign language and oral language are used, deaf students can leverage their visual strengths to develop literacy skills in the foreign language. For instance, ASL or Libras can contextualize English vocabulary and grammar, making abstract concepts more accessible. This bilingual approach supports language acquisition and fosters a deeper understanding of the cultural aspects associated with the language being learned (Wilbur, 2000).

Moreover, teachers play a crucial role in this process. They must be trained to understand the unique needs of deaf students and to employ teaching methods that cater to visual learning styles.

Deaf students, as learners of an oral foreign language, require specialized instruction considering their reliance on visual communication and their potential bilingualism. By providing a supportive and visually oriented learning environment, educators can help deaf students overcome the challenges of learning an oral language and achieve proficiency in English as an FL.

English as FL/L3 for Brazilian deaf students

There are two main modalities of teaching/learning for deaf people in Brazil. The first one is bilingual schools, where all classes are taught in Brazilian Sign Language. Libras is considered the First Language[5] (L1) for Brazilian deaf students. This L1 enables these individuals to express themselves, to be in their culture, and to study. These classes in bilingual schools help the deaf student

[5] There is a terminological difference between deaf and hard of hearing people (Surdas/os e pessoas com deficiência auditiva-DA in Portuguese). This difference is centered in Sign Language. In both cases, the point is the hearing loss, but those ones (the deaf) identify themselves with SL and a visually cultural experience (Moura, 2000). It is about those individuals we are talking about in this study.

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to develop their cognitive and intellectual abilities, their visual perception, and ability with SL (Campello, 2008).

The second modality, the one that this paper will focus on (mainstream schools), where the knowledge is "transferred" from the teacher to the interpreter, then to the learner.

Mainstream schools in Brazil, by law, must offer an interpreter to deaf students. This professional helps teachers by intermediating explanations about the content and discussions during classes. Also, the student acquires the L2 (Portuguese in its writing and reading abilities) that they will need for their lives, considering they will be living in Brazil, because this is the language of most of society. It is always used when they want to write, for example, academic papers or daily life.

According to Quadros (2004), sign language is used as a resource to teach oral language literacy and not as the only reason that justifies itself: the deaf people's right to use their language, a visual language. This means that in learning/teaching, students and teachers might work together to acquire knowledge easily and efficiently. The way the classes flow must achieve the learner's needs through visual interaction/experience.

This language, L2, is also used to grow up into the levels at school until the test to get into a university. The deaf student will use it for personal, academic, or/or professional purposes. In addition, Brazilian deaf students study English as a foreign language (FL)/Third Language (L3) in their writing and reading abilities.

For a better learner, deaf students must be involved in the learning process and feel motivated, so the environment of teaching/learning might support both teachers and students. For this, teachers should be prepared to teach deaf students; as Dotter (2008, p. 107) says, "In contrast to this high motivation to learn on the part of the deaf, there is a massive and widespread ignorance about them in the teaching profession".

The school's staff, the classroom, the hearing students, and the teachers must be prepared to include the deaf student in the learning

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environment. The National Program of the Didactic Book and Material (PNLD[6]) distributes the books used in Brazilian schools.

This program attends public schools from preschool until high school. It also changes those books every four years. However, the didactic materials used to teach English in Brazil are developed for hearing people, which means that the deaf culture is not mentioned or considered. In addition, deaf people in regular classrooms are still a small group compared to the hearing ones, which means that there is not a variety of materials available to help teachers in the school or even deaf students' self-studying. The teacher needs to adapt that material to make deaf students feel included during the classes (Dotter, 2008).

"Educational activities with deaf persons must include adequate sequencing of visual information from different sources, with adequate time lags in between" (Ibid., p. 107). Palma and Steyer (2013, p. 42) agree with Dotter and add, "The more visual input you give to deaf students, the better they learn".

Another strategy that may help students learn English outside the classroom is on the internet, where they can visually interact with others through video calls, watching videos, reading online, and texting friends. At the school, teachers can use technology to support their classes, developing activities to answer, read, speak, and listen (these two last abilities for hearing students) that can be executed on computer or mobile devices.

The learner of English as FL/L3: motivational aspects

Studying another language involves some aspects that are more than just learning to speak or write in that language. For deaf people, learning a foreign language, as any other language, will let them incorporate aspects beyond grammar rules, vocabulary, or idioms, as Williams (1994, p. 77) argues:

> The learning of a foreign language involves far more than simply learning skills, a system of rules, or grammar; it consists of an

[6] PNLD stands for Programa Nacional do Livro Didático in Portuguese. For further information, acces the link: http://portal.mec.gov.br/component/content/article?id=12391:pnld.

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> alteration in self-image, the adoption of new social and cultural behaviors and ways of being, and therefore has a significant impact on the social nature of the learner.

Foreign Language teachers must help students be aware of the learning process. As the author says, when learning another language, students will develop a new identity due to their culture plus aspects of the language they are learning. Then, teachers might expose their students to situations where they can access cultural elements of that language, which include more than some vocabulary or grammar.

Sign Language as a Motivational Resource

According to McKee et al. (2014, p. 1), "(…) learners of sign language aim to make use of their language skills to interact with members of the local target community (…)". These goals can be understood in the field of teaching/learning, like reasons for learning. We know that motivation is complex because:

> (…) human behavior is very complex, influenced by a great number of factors ranging from basic physical needs (such as hunger) through well-being needs (such as financial security) to higher level values and beliefs (such as the desire for freedom or one's faith in God) (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 7).

Dörnyei also argues that:

> (…) the central motivating force in people's lives (unlike in rats' or dogs') is the self-actualizing tendency, the desire to achieve personal growth and fully develop the capacities and talents we have inherited (2001, p. 8).

Sign language learners must fulfill the "Hierarchy of Needs" to feel motivated to learn. They can develop certain self-management skills to deal with distractions during the learning process; these skills might be developed with teachers' help.

Deaf students who learn an FL motivate themselves for different reasons to achieve their goals. However, one question may appear about which language learners should learn to interact with other deaf communities. Should they learn English (writing and reading abilities) or a SL? We know, as discussed

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before, that SL is the natural language of deaf people, and the SL known as *Lingua Franca* is ASL, as English is for hearing people (Silva, 2013). Palma and Steyer (2013, p. 40) says that

> (…) Learning a foreign sign language is a great motivator for a student's foreign language studies; however, it may not play a vast role in helping the student cognitively proceed with the written language itself.

In Brazil, SL cannot substitute for the written ability of the major community's oral language. This also applies to a FL. However, in the PCNs (National Curricular Parameters), there is no mention of an option to teach both a foreign sign language and an oral language. A teacher who knows students' sign language helps a lot in the classroom, even if an interpreter is available.

American Sign Language as a motivational resource for learners of English as a Foreign Language

American Sign Language "(…) like any language, can meet the needs of its linguistic community in expressing specific thoughts, ideas, and feelings, as well as abstract concepts" (Holcomb, 2012, p. 82). Perhaps ASL originated in the USA and Canada; it means that countries with English as the major community language, like New Zealand, Australia, and England, have their own SL (Palma; Steyer, 2013).

Brazilian deaf students who learn English at school as a foreign language follow a sequence of learning first Libras, next Portuguese, and English – writing and reading abilities. However, there are no specific guidelines for teaching FL for deaf people. The recommendations are the same for hearing people, and it can be questioned if it considers the needs of deaf people.

Zuffo (2010, p. 4) discusses how teaching English to Brazilian deaf students. The author suggests a sequence that the teacher might manage to let the learner feel motivated, which is:

> a) Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) – the first language (L1) the deaf student learns since a kid, a Sign Language (Visual and gestural). b) Portuguese language – to deaf students, their second language (L2) is used to read and write. c) English Language – their third language (L3), taught as a Foreign Language to any student. d) American Sign

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Language – a fourth language (L4) that the teacher would need to learn even a little to correctly direct the contents to deaf students, guiding them to establish communication using specific English vocabularies and functions.

However, the author says that in the classroom, where teachers must deal with deaf and hearing students besides learning four different languages, it is very hard. In addition, the teacher must be aware of the level of motivation in the classes because the learner can feel demotivated dealing with an FL- English just writing and reading, even if it is taught in Libras.

THE NEW LITERACY STUDIES (NLS): A SHIFT IN UNDERSTANDING LITERACY

The New Literacy Studies (NLS), as advocated by Street (1984, 2000) and Barton et al. (2000), represent a significant shift in the understanding of literacy. Traditional views of literacy often focused on the ability to read and write in a standardized form of a language, typically associated with formal education. In contrast, the NLS approach emphasizes literacy's social and cultural dimensions, recognizing that literacy practices are shaped by context, identity, experience, and social interaction.

The relevance of NLS to minority/minoritized groups, including deaf people, is not just about reading and writing in the spoken language of the surrounding community but also involves the use of sign languages, which are complete and complex languages with their grammar, syntax, and lexicon. The NLS perspective allows for a broader understanding of literacy, including sign language literacy, visual-spatial literacy, and the use of written language.

Concerning how the NLS can be considered crucial for addressing the linguistic-communicative needs of deaf people, there are a) sign language recognition as a literacy practice: The NLS framework acknowledges sign language as a legitimate form of communication and literacy. This recognition is vital for deaf individuals who may use sign language as their primary means of communication. It validates their linguistic practices and supports the development of educational and social policies that cater to their needs; b)

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inclusive education: by understanding literacy as a social practice, educators can create inclusive learning environments for deaf students. This includes using sign language interpreters, providing written materials in accessible formats, and incorporating visual-spatial learning strategies that align with the strengths of deaf learners; c) empowerment and identity: the NLS approach encourages exploring how literacy practices shape identity and community. For deaf individuals, this can mean recognizing the importance of Deaf culture and the role of sign language in preserving and promoting this culture. It empowers deaf people by valuing their language and cultural practices, which can be crucial for self-esteem and social integration; d) accessing information and communication: The NLS highlights the importance of diverse literacy practices in accessing information and participating in society. For deaf people, this means advocating for the provision of resources such as captioning, sign language videos, and other accessible formats that enable them to engage with written and spoken language content; e) an advocacy and policy change by understanding the social and cultural aspects of literacy, advocates for deaf rights can make stronger arguments for policy changes that support the linguistic-communicative needs of deaf people. This includes pushing for legislation that mandates accessibility in education, media, and public services; f) interdisciplinary research: The NLS encourages interdisciplinary research that examines literacy from various angles, including linguistics, education, sociology, and anthropology. This holistic approach can lead to a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by deaf individuals and more effective strategies for supporting their literacy development.

NLS provides a valuable framework for understanding and addressing the linguistic-communicative needs of deaf people. Recognizing the diversity of literacy practices and the social contexts in which they occur helps to ensure that deaf individuals are included in broader societal conversations and have access to the tools they need to participate fully in society.

On the other hand, sign language is integral to the identity and culture of deaf learners. It is a means of communication, a cultural marker, a tool for empowerment, and a form of artistic expression. Recognizing and supporting

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sign language is essential for respecting and celebrating the diversity of human cultures and languages. When educators incorporate ASL into the curriculum, they can enhance deaf students' engagement, confidence, and overall motivation to learn because it can provide a more inclusive, supportive, and motivating learning environment. It not only respects the linguistic and cultural identity of deaf students but also enhances their academic performance and overall educational experience.

Concerning deaf people, when thinking about critical literacy in a foreign language, a representative methodology is being provided, implemented through bicultural bilingualism, thus becoming an alternative for an emancipatory change with a literacy practice conducted by/for/in a standardized logic. This movement highlights and makes clear the power relations present in traditional literacy that insists on standardizing the curriculum in teaching a foreign oral language for two audiences with distinct sociolinguistic needs (deaf and hearing) or, in the words of Magalhães (2012), this standardization can be seen as a cultural inheritance in language teaching that disregards the real demands of students.

Street (2003) states:

> The alternative, ideological model of literacy, offers a more culturally sensitive view of literacy practices as they vary from one context to another. This model starts from different premises than the autonomous model; instead, it posits that literacy is a social practice, not simply a technical and neutral skill; it is always embedded in socially constructed epistemological principles (p. 77).

In the context of this research, this raises awareness of the duty of schools (academic literacy) to keep up with the real and current needs of their alums, their discourses, their productions (in their languages), and their specific learning styles. Drawing a parallel to the aforementioned cultural heritage, we can note an audiocentric vision that influences literacy in inclusive regular education, in which many deaf people still find themselves in Brazil and around the world.

Barton et al. (2000) and Street (2003, 2012) present a social theory of literacy that emphasizes the importance of understanding reading and writing

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within the broader context of social practices and institutions. The authors argue that literacy is not a monolithic entity but comprises multiple socially situated practices influenced by power dynamics and institutional support.

This perspective is particularly relevant for deaf students learning English with American Sign Language (ASL) as a motivational component. For these students, literacy involves not just the mastery of written English but also the navigation of a linguistic landscape that includes sign language, written text, and the integration of various semiotic systems.

By mentioning "sign language" in this context of FL/L3 teaching to Brazilian deaf people, we need to elucidate the role of Libras as their mother tongue and, consequently, the language of instruction in a bilingual/multicultural/bimodal approach (Zilio; Witchs, 2024). Besides, as we address in this study, Deaf students' motivation to learn English, considering ASL as a resource to this end, is deeply intertwined with social goals, cultural practices, and the need to communicate effectively in deaf and hearing communities.

Brueggemann (2004) asserts that instead of teaching to an ideal, we need to focus on the individual. Therefore, deaf educators need to consider the uniqueness of deaf students, especially in literacy contexts, as addressed in this study. The school must consider students' life background to take advantage of their strengths, such as their language and culture.

METHODS

This research employed a qualitative data collection method, including observations and interviews. These tools enabled us to analyze the data from two perspectives: one from the researcher, informed by theory, and the other from the participants themselves.

The instruments, observation, and interview used for data collection were defined according to the goals of the research, which had some criteria to select the participants: being deaf, fluent in Libras, being a student of

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Specialized Educational Care (AEE)[7], study English as a foreign language (their L3), and know Portuguese reading and writing abilities (PL2). Following these criteria, three participants were selected for this study.

The objectives of this research needed an instrument that should get as much information as possible to analyze the data, ensuring that there was no researcher interference, as per Lüdke (1986). If such an instrument is well planned with criteria that can self-regulate, one can safeguard accurate data collection. The author says that it allows the researcher to do so:

> Get closer to the "subject's perspective", (...) As the researcher follows in loco the daily subjects' experience, can understand their world knowledge, it means the meaning that they add to the reality around them [...] (Ibid., p. 26).

To analyze the interactions in the classes, we employed a comprehensive observation method focusing on the Engage, Study, and Activate stages. The observation occurred in two classrooms — one for sixth-grade students and another for seventh-grade students — throughout six 45-minute English classes. These classes were held at an inclusive mainstream school in Altamira City, Para State, Brazil, which integrates deaf and hearing students.

Our data collection process began with a familiarization period with the school environment. During this time, we observed the interactions between hearing and deaf students and between deaf students and their English teachers. We meticulously noted the materials used during the classes, the structure and content of the lessons, and the feedback provided by the teacher. This detailed observation allowed us to comprehensively understand the teaching and learning dynamics in an inclusive setting.

This approach is useful for studies of social practice, according to New Literacy Studies. According to Street (2012), research of this nature goes beyond textual analysis, taking the form of observation of social practices,

[7] In comparison, the IDEA – Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, granted that American students with disabilities, the deaf in this case, have access to inclusive education (Katsiyannis; Shriner; Yell, 2006).

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which include literacy practices, and an awareness process through which people approach the topic of literacy and produce meaning about it.

The classroom observed was equipped with a whiteboard and markers. There was no data projector or other visual equipment such as TVs, computers, or mobile devices. To use a data projector, the teacher has to request it in advance following a schedule. There was a separate room with devices for providing visual content to deaf students (the Multimedia Room). This facility could be beneficial for deaf students to better understand the classes compared to their regular classroom. However, we noticed insufficient space for all students to use it simultaneously.

The main data source for this research is the interviews of deaf students. It was done at the Federal University of Pará (UFPA) campus in the same city as the participants' school. The campus provided a proper facility called Language Lab to achieve the goals of the research: whiteboard, markers, computer to search on the internet, data projector, enough and adequate space for students to sit (semicircle) where they can see each other and the teacher, an available internet connection to use gadgets as a smartphone.

By this time, we had planned a class (intervention) to engage and get deaf students' attention to learning English as a foreign language. Firstly, during the class, we presented some cultural aspects of countries where English is the official language (majority language). Secondly, we taught some ASL signs related to the content, such as a comparison between some tourist places in the city where they live and those countries. Then, students practiced writing and reading abilities and used computers and mobile phones to improve their abilities by learning ASL signs and answering part of the activity. Finally, a questionnaire was made to understand and take notes of deaf students' perspectives on learning English as a third language and the importance of American Sign Language in English classes.

The interview was conducted after the class for the three deaf students from the classrooms previously observed at school, according to the mentioned criteria. For Duarte (2004), interviews are not the only way to collect data, nor the easiest one; however, they help the researcher define a specific social

ISSN:1984-9540 DOI: 10.12957/periferia.2024.86159

group for collecting some information that is sometimes not explicit. In her words, an interview enables "(…) deep diving while collecting some fragments about how each one of the subjects perceives and understands their reality (…) (p. 215).

The interviews were filmed and translated into Portuguese. Previously, students/parents signed a form allowing the use of the data for academic purposes. Only the researchers had access to the videos according to the ethics of scholarly research and the intentions of this study.

For better data analysis, we chose data triangulation because it allows the researcher to view the data from different perspectives and understand it in multiple ways, thereby eliminating the limitation of a single perspective (Tuzzo; Braga, 2016).

DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis was grouped into three categories and examined in the following order: 1) Teacher-interpreter-student interaction; 2) The influence of culture on the teaching/learning process in English class; 3) ASL as a motivational resource in English classes for deaf students.

In the first category, our observations revealed how interactions occurred in the classroom. The interpreter was always central to the interaction between the teacher and deaf students or between classmates and deaf students. When learners had a question, they asked the teacher, but the teacher needed the interpreter to translate the student's question. As mentioned earlier, this interaction through interpreters was defined since Law 10.436/2002 and Decree 5.626/2005 were promulgated, which demanded the presence of Libras interpreters in the classroom. This practice directly contributes to the teaching and learning process for deaf students in mainstream schools.

A study by Gobara and Vargas (2014) found that sometimes, the interpreter needs to act like a teacher because the teacher may not be prepared to communicate directly with deaf students. By fulfilling this role, the interpreter helps integrate the student (recognizing their rights and assisting

ISSN:1984-9540 DOI: 10.12957/periferia.2024.86159

them in asserting those rights) rather than merely including them (making society aware and asking for adaptations to accommodate the individual).

Unlike the observation, during the intervention class at UFPA, students asked the teacher questions while the interpreter translated them in the background. This means that the students were the key players in the interaction process, followed by the teacher and then the interpreter. These changes in the sequence make a significant difference for the learners, allowing them to focus on the class.

This approach encompasses planning, execution, and assessment, enabling students to feel confident learning the foreign language. As student B mentioned:

> I feel that I am learning a little English.

That shows us that interaction in the classroom can develop students' autonomy.

According to the PCNs (National Curricular Parameters), the learners are the main characters in this methodology. Their experiences and background knowledge are important, making them protagonists in their learning. The interaction between teachers and students and among students themselves also contributes to developing this autonomy. Student B's statement above results from a class where the student is the key focus. They interact with each other while doing pair work, using their background knowledge to answer exercises and search the internet.

According to Magalhães (2012), in this sense, the NLS defends the idea of literacy practices, manifested in writing and reading, that are not detached from social practices; on the contrary, they must be understood in the multidimensional, multifaceted, and identity-based aspect of the subjects involved. "From this perspective, knowing literacies is, in a certain way, understanding the practices of a society and a particular culture" (Ibid., p. 165).

ISSN:1984-9540 DOI: 10.12957/periferia.2024.86159

The second category discusses the influence of culture on the foreign language learning process, specifically English. Learning an FL prepares students for the job market and higher education and allows them to access and incorporate aspects of other cultures into their own. As Zacharias (2014) and Procel (2023) argue, learning an FL involves more than just grammar; it also encompasses culture. The authors emphasize that learning a FL always involves, to some extent, the target language's culture. Williams similarly suggests that engaging with a new culture while learning an FL can enrich the learner's personal development by adding new cultural characteristics to their own.

During the interviews, all students believed that learning English is important for deaf students, so they would like to learn more. When asked if they were familiar with the culture of deaf people for whom American Sign Language is the first language, their responses varied:

> I like to see videos or any visual resource in the classroom. (Student C)
> I know a little bit about the deaf culture of the American people. (Student B)
> I don't know it very well. (Student A)

These answers confirm our observations, which indicated that English is taught without emphasizing cultural aspects. Additionally, the teacher focused on explaining the culture of the majority community (hearing individuals) throughout lessons, overlooking the inclusive nature of the classroom. This approach misses an opportunity to highlight the cultural aspects of both deaf and hearing communities.

Therefore, Making critical considerations about what is “new” when it comes to (New) Literacy Studies, Street (2003) states that breaking with an autonomous literacy practice, whose dominant approaches until then have traditionally focused on the acquisition of cognitive skills, implies highlighting the nature of literacy and what it means to consider it as a social practice.

According to the author, this approach examines how access to and use of written language are linked to power, identity, and belonging relations in

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different communities and contexts. Thus, there is no singularity but rather a multiplicity of literacies situated locally and temporally. The crux of the issue is to analyze which forms of literacy exercise domination because, if there are dominant groups, there will consequently be groups whose literacy experiences stem from marginalizing processes.

As mentioned, the teacher does not discuss the culture of American deaf people, although students indicated they know a bit about it. This knowledge likely comes from the internet (background knowledge) and the intervention class taught at the UFPA, the locus of this research.

One of the participants mentioned feeling motivated to learn English due to how the class was conducted, specifically through the visual presentation of the content.

When thinking about a literacy process in English for deaf people, developed and made possible by signing logic and culture (bicultural bilingualism), the "Deaf Way"[8] is used as the way of teaching/learning, particularly for/ deaf individuals. Furthermore, regarding the fact that the L1 (SL) reflects positively on the development of reading/writing competence, the mentioned authors (Goldin-Meadow; Mayberry, 2001) explain that knowing a language, even if that language is not the same as the printed text, seems to facilitate the literacy process.

Once again, using the concept of literacy practices and its parallel with the Deaf Way approach, it can be said that those reinforce this by expanding social boundaries and situating literacy in its temporal and spatial contexts (Street, 2012).

We can confirm that some students already have an awareness of deaf culture in countries where English is the native language, particularly the United States in this case. As student C said:

> I know the American deaf culture. (…) I don't understand deaf people from the USA, (…) because their language is different.

[8] According to Erting (1994), we call this peculiar way of experiencing the world that transcends national borders the Deaf Way.

ISSN:1984-9540 DOI: 10.12957/periferia.2024.86159

Additionally, the coursebook/workbook made available by the government (produced by and for hearing people) does not address deaf culture or include activities that could help include these students. Student C's comments helped us analyze and contrast their experiences with the classes they have at the inclusive mainstream school. These insights highlight the importance of producing materials (such as books from the PNLD) that integrate deaf culture, as deaf students need a visual pedagogy to feel included and represented:

> I guess it would be interesting to learn English if the teacher used ASL. (Student B)
>
> Yes, I know ASL. It is different from Libras. Oral English with ASL would help us learn English. (Student A)
>
> My teacher at school doesn't use or talk about ASL or deaf people's lives and characteristics, but today was different. We used ASL, some signs like the Liberty Statue, and shopping. I enjoyed it. I loved the comparison between some signs in Libras and ASL. (Student C)

The answers above are related to the third category and were given after students were asked whether they knew American Sign Language and if they thought it would be interesting if the teacher used ASL during their English classes.

Zuffo (2010) mentions that ASL could be the fourth language for Brazilian deaf students, so it should be used in English teaching to guide class development and support vocabulary or communication. However, it is important to note that many teachers cannot speak (or even know) Libras, so they rely on interpreters to translate everything. Sometimes, these professionals end up acting like teachers. Student B mentioned that their teacher does not discuss or use ASL during classes. This raises questions about whether teachers are prepared and confident (academic literacy) to include ASL or any cultural aspects of deaf people in their lessons.

Since there are no official specific materials to teach English to deaf people, teachers must produce or adapt existing materials. Furthermore, the observed school does not have visual equipment available in the classroom,

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making it challenging for teachers to demonstrate ASL signs or vocabulary. Student C's comment about enjoying videos and other visual resources highlights this need. They also mentioned that a class with visual resources is both different and better for their learning:

> (…), but today was different. We used ASL (…). I liked it.

The student's answer aligns with what Steyer and Palma (2013) suggested: the more visual input deaf students receive, the faster they will learn. However, the authors recommend presenting information sequentially, adding pieces of information slowly, one by one. This is similar to what we did during the class at the language lab: first, we showed the picture, the word in English, then the sign in Libras, and finally, the sign in ASL. We showed and explained their corresponding information for pictures that were not from Brazil to help students make associations.

Some students expressed their desire to learn about ASL at school and believed it would be useful for learning English. It is important to note that they were talking about learning ASL and studying English (an oral language) with American Sign Language as a mechanism to understand information more clearly and comfortably. During our observation of the classes at school, we noticed that the teacher did not discuss ASL, which was confirmed when student C mentioned that their teacher neither uses nor explains what ASL is.

Therefore, it is necessary to understand the reality of Brazilian deaf students enrolled in non-bilingual schools (inclusive regular schools) who learn a foreign language, such as English, as a mandatory curricular component. These students have Libras (visual-spatial) as their L1 and are situated in a school context with hearing students in mixed classes, for whom English is also a foreign language but which has the same modality (oral-auditory) as Portuguese (the mother tongue of these hearing students).

Sign language, as a first language for deaf individuals, makes their understanding of the world, their linguistic competence, and both social and personal values possible. For Brazilian deaf people, Libras is their L1, just as

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ASL is for American deaf individuals. Thus, the question arises: Are deaf students developing linguistic competence and acquiring knowledge while learning English the same as hearing students?

Zuffo (2010) highlights the importance of using American Sign Language in English classes to facilitate deaf students' understanding of vocabulary. Since they already know sign language, they can relate to the structure of the new sign language. Additionally, exposure to a foreign sign language can motivate them to learn the target language more effectively. Student A mentioned that oral English and ASL can provide a significant linguistic environment at school.

Santos et al. (2014) argue that if ASL is taught to respect the limitations of the school and the teacher, it can offer deaf students a better education. This involves teaching the language in context rather than isolated signs or vocabulary.

Respecting limitations does not mean relying solely on the interpreter (when available). Instead, it means using the visual pedagogy: pictures, videos, and other visual materials in addition to the student/workbook whenever possible, considering the inclusion guaranteed by law.

CONCLUSION

The present study explored the relevance of American Sign Language (ASL) as a tool to motivate deaf students to learn English as a foreign language. The research highlighted the unique challenges faced in English literacy for deaf Brazilian students, for whom English is their third language, following Portuguese and Libras (Brazilian Sign Language) as L2/L1, respectively.

The study's findings indicate that integrating ASL into English teaching can effectively enhance deaf students' motivation and engagement. Through observing some classes at an inclusive mainstream school, collecting questionnaire responses, and analyzing discursive sequences from interviews, it was possible to identify that combining Libras, ASL, and English in the classroom can significantly improve students' interest and motivation in learning English.

ISSN:1984-9540 DOI: 10.12957/periferia.2024.86159

The multimodal approach, which includes the presentation of visual content and the use of resources such as videos and images, simultaneous translation into Libras, and the introduction of ASL elements, proved to be a promising methodology. This approach not only facilitates understanding for deaf students but also promotes a deeper cultural and linguistic connection with the target language.

Furthermore, the research reinforces the need to prepare qualified teachers to meet the specific needs of deaf students and the importance of developing and adapting teaching materials that integrate deaf culture and ASL into English teaching. The lack of clear guidelines in national educational policies on how to teach a foreign language to deaf students evidences the need for greater attention and investment in this field.

In conclusion, ASL (as a cultural resource) can be a valuable tool to motivate deaf students to learn English, promoting an inclusive and effective approach that respects their limitations and maximizes their learning capabilities. The integration of ASL into the English curriculum not only benefits deaf students but also enriches the learning environment for all students, promoting greater awareness and inclusion of linguistic and cultural diversity.

Moreover, the New Literacy Studies (NLS) principles, which emphasize the importance of literacy practices within diverse social and cultural contexts, provide a theoretical framework that supports the integration of ASL into English classes. NLS highlights the need to consider the unique linguistic and communicative needs of minority/minoritized groups, such as deaf students, and to develop teaching strategies sensitive to their cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

By incorporating ASL, teachers can create a more inclusive and motivating learning environment that caters to the specific needs of deaf students, fostering their linguistic competence and overall academic success. Future research could further explore the long-term effects of integrating ASL into English classes and develop more comprehensive teaching materials that cater to the needs of deaf learners, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and equitable educational system.

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