

ENGLISH PROFICIENCY IN LATIN AMERICA: FACING INEQUALITIES

PROFICIÊNCIA EM INGLÊS NA AMÉRICA LATINA: ENFRENTANDO DESIGUALDADES

EL DOMINIO DEL INGLÉS EN AMÉRICA LATINA: AFRONTANDO LA DESIGUALDAD

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ABSTRACT: According to the World English Proficiency Ranking 2019, one more time, Brazil ranked in the low proficiency category. Therefore, in this study, we intend to expose the results of this Ranking from 2011 to 2019, and to compare Brazil and the other Latin American countries' proficiency results. Thus, we aim to propose suggestions and possibilities that would help Brazil reach higher English proficiency categories. This bibliographic study, of quantitative-descriptive parameters, seeks to understand the concept of proficiency, and some aspects of learning English as a second language through the perceptions of authors like: Orlandi (2007), Scaramucci *et al.* (1999; 2000), Megale (2019), Vasudevan (2010) among others. English proficiency level in Brazil remained stagnant in the categories of low proficiency from 2011 to 2017. In 2018 and 2019, it presented lower results.

KEYWORDS: Proficiency in english. Brazil. Argentina. Categories. World ranking.

RESUMO: De acordo com o Ranking Mundial de proficiência em inglês de 2019, o Brasil se classificou, mais uma vez, na categoria de “baixa proficiência”. Portanto, neste estudo, pretendemos expor os resultados deste Ranking de 2011 a 2019, bem como comparar os resultados de proficiência do Brasil com os de outros países da América Latina. Assim, objetivamos propor sugestões e possibilidades na tentativa de alcançarmos categorias mais avançadas na proficiência em inglês. Este estudo bibliográfico, de parâmetros quantitativo-descritivos, busca compreender o conceito de proficiência e de alguns aspectos da aprendizagem do inglês como segunda língua, por meio das percepções de autores como: Orlandi (2007), Scaramucci *et al.* (1999; 2000), Megale (2019), Vasudevan (2010) entre outros. O nível de proficiência de inglês no Brasil permaneceu estagnado nas categorias de “baixa proficiência” de 2011 a 2017. Em 2018 e 2019 apresentou resultados inferiores.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Proficiência em inglês. Brasil. Argentina. Categorias. Ranking mundial.

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RESUMEN: De acuerdo con el Ranking Mundial de Dominio del Inglés 2019, Brasil, una vez más, presentó bajo índice del Inglés. Por consiguiente, en este estudio pretendemos exponer los resultados del Ranking de 2011 a 2019, también comparar los resultados de nivel de la competencia entre Brasil y otros países latinoamericano. Por lo tanto, nuestro objetivo es proponer sugerencias y posibilidades en un intento de llegar a categorías más avanzadas en el dominio del inglés. Este estudio bibliográfico, de parámetros cuantitativo-descriptivos, busca comprender el concepto de competencia y algunos aspectos del aprendizaje del inglés como segunda lengua a través de las percepciones de autores como: Orlandi (2007), Scaramucci et al. (1999; 2000), Megale (2019), Vasudevan (2010) entre otros. El nivel de dominio del inglés en Brasil se mantuvo estancado en las categorías de bajo dominio de 2011 a 2017. En 2018 y 2019 presentaron resultados menores.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Dominio del inglés. Brasil. Argentina. Categorías. Ranking mundial.

Presentation

It is imperative to exercise bilingual education [and that of foreign languages] in Brazil based on our demands and aspirations. Only in this way will we be able to raise deeper issues and anticipate problems that are unfolding, but that have not yet emerged (MEGALE, 2019, p. 10, our translation).

We begin with this epigraph to, first, reflect on questions that guide the understanding of what we seek to investigate in this article: the reason why Brazil is unable to reach higher categories in the World Ranking of English Proficiency. It shares the same perspective as Megale (2019) in rethinking the Teaching of Foreign Languages, starting from our aspirations, thinking about the educational, social, cultural, economic aspects, among others, that are integrated in Brazil. In this way, we will arrive at the clashes that the country has been facing and which may be the causes for which Brazil does not reach high positions in the indexes.

Foreign Language Education (FL), in Brazil, has been seeking, through innovative and diversified proposals, to promote the expansion of learners' linguistic practices, which can communicate with other individuals globally through the target language, build social relationships in person and/or remotely, to expand cultures through languages and digital information and communication technologies (TDICs), that is, to have translinguistic practices through this multiplicity of actions. In this sense, the self-reflection of FL teachers is important, as Larsen-Freeman (2001, p. 21) points out: "You also have thoughts about yourself as a teacher and what you can do to help your students to learn". This leads us to rethink our pedagogical practices and how we can provide language teaching that motivates students to seek the appropriation and proficiency of English.

Rosar and Krawczyk (2001) emphasize that in the last ten years, several countries in Latin America have carried out educational reforms based on diagnoses substantiated in previous international comparative studies. Therefore, going deeper into these documents will guide us to the urgent need to rethink the teaching of English in Brazil, which leads the student to obtain fluency and proficiency in the language.

In view of the above and the current innovations proposed in FL teaching, we sought in this investigation for reasons why Brazil is unable to advance to high levels of English proficiency and, in comparison, Argentina maintains a high level of English language proficiency in the World Ranking. According to Paula and Fernández Lamarra (2011, p. 55, our translation), "Comparing Brazil with Argentina, our country has higher levels of inequality in all aspects [...]". These questions refer to per capita income, investments in education, especially higher education, among others. When looking at the categories of countries in the EF - EPI, Argentina is the only country in Latin America that presents itself in the high category and has remained in that position, while Brazil remains in low categories. In view of this finding, we seek to develop, in this study, a brief comparative analysis to discuss the positions of these two countries on the World English Language Proficiency Index. With this intention, the diagnosis regarding English language proficiency in Brazil will be presented: to point out some possible reasons why proficiency results in Brazil remain in low categories; compare the proficiency indexes of Brazil and the countries of Latin America. For Fonseca da Silva, Azevedo and Rocha (2011) it is important to compare studies even between realities that do not follow the same data model. The author considers that the necessary analysis and evaluation of comparative methodological approaches contribute to qualify the methodological process.

To this end, this study follows quantitative-descriptive standards in an attempt to, as Geva (2006, p. 1) states, "[...] compare performance among groups in a systematic way". Results from Latin American countries are analyzed, with an emphasis on data from Brazil and Argentina in the study of the World Ranking of English Proficiency - EF EPI. In this study, human resources are not used, but bibliographic, since the analysis will be performed based on results found in the EF - EPI World Ranking. In order to understand the empirical material, we raise some questions below: Why do English language proficiency rates in Brazil remain in low categories? How important is it for Brazilian students to be proficient in English from high school to high school?

English language proficiency

Reflecting on target language proficiency for FL teaching is essential when it “[...] can be seen as the result of learning, a goal, defined in terms of objectives or standards and, therefore, of interest to teachers, administrators, curriculum designers, test builders, researchers, parents and students” (SCARAMUCCI, 2000, p. 12, our translation). In view of this, the assessment of oral proficiency has been the subject of investigation in several studies developed at an international level (BROWN, 2006; BROWN; TAYLOR, 2006; CAMBRIDGE ESOL, 2009; DOUGLAS, 2000; FULCHER, 2003; LAZARATON, 2002; LUOMA, 2004, among others), emphasizing quantitative data. Elder's studies (1993), for example, present the concern with the issue of oral proficiency for teachers, as well as the evaluation of this process.

The area of studies on vocabulary has also grown considerably (FITZPATRICK, 2007; LEWIS, 1993; MEARA, 1980; STÆR, 2008, among others), and it is possible to find studies involving vocabulary and oral production at the international level (HILTON, 2008; READ; NATION, 2006). And in Brazil, still, there seem to be very few studies aimed at assessing oral proficiency by both teachers and students. Scaramucci (1999; 2000) is one of the few Brazilian scholars who has developed her studies in this field, whereas studies related to the low results of English language proficiency in Brazil have not been found.

Working on language proficiency presupposes working on the learner's skills to communicate in L2, writing, understanding reading etc., and EF - EPI proficiency tests are essential to have feedback on what should be worked on when it comes to the development of proficiency of Brazilian students. Scaramucci (2000, p. 12, our translation) points out that “in research on the acquisition/learning and teaching of L2/FL, therefore, proficiency assessments are used as sources of information on the success/efficiency of learning and teaching”. In this perspective, the World Ranking of Proficiency Indexes in English presents the results of exams and from them the aspects to be improved in teaching will be rethought. Thus, it is possible to present both the efficiency and the inefficiency of FL/bilingual education in Brazil.

In view of this reflection, we realize that fluency and proficiency are inextricably linked, since proficiency is based on results of development in linguistic skills of the language (writing, reading, structural aspects), and fluency deals with language under the bias of speech development (speaking). For Vasudevan (2010, p. 14), “[...] students’ proficiency increases because of teachers’ commitment in the teaching process and techniques that are evident in

increasing student participation in the classroom”. In this logic, aspects such as the teaching methodology of schools, the pedagogical practices of teachers, among others, contribute to the development of fluency and proficiency of English students. Having made this discussion, we will analyze the EF-EPI documents (2011-2019) and then look for possibilities and measures that can be taken in an attempt to lead Brazil to higher categories in the World Ranking.

The EF-EPI World Ranking - analysis of editions 2011 to 2019

Outstandingly, the English language is the most widely spoken language in the world, the most accepted and applied in grades of large schools and universities worldwide. Several research institutions analyze the English proficiency of each country, in the case of this study, we chose EF-EPI research, considered the highest index of English proficiency in the world.

Thus, analyzing the way the EF-EPI editions (2011 - 2019) are carried out has helped us to understand Brazil's decline. According to Moreno (2018, our translation), “The index for each country or region represents the average score of these adults in a large-scale standardized English test, which can be done free of charge over the internet”. In this sense, adults take the tests (possibly online) and their scores will generate the country indexes.

The first EF EPI edition started in 2011 by which it started the work of “standard assessment of English proficiency among adults, which allows for comparison between countries, over time” (EF-EPI, 2011, p. 3). However, relying on past editions to make a comparative analysis of the results would not be possible, as we started with this edition, comparing English exam results of 2 million older adults worldwide.

The second EF EPI (2012) brings a different proposal from the first edition to

to use a unique set of data collected from 1.7 million adults who completed free English tests over a 3-year period, from 2009 to 2011. For the first time, it includes data on the variation in English proficiency among men and women, adults of different ages, employees from different sectors and professional levels and of adult immigrants in countries whose official language is English. The data are presented in this report (EF EPI), in a series of country insights, and in a separate report for Companies (EF EPIc) [...] (EF EPI, 2012, p. 7, our translation).

Consequently, results collected from 2009 to 2011 are analyzed and used to generate the 2012 data. In addition, knowledge inequalities in English, gender variation, English by industry, among other topics, are also discussed during the edition. In the next EF EPI (2013), for 5 years, the language skills of 5 million adults are examined. The changes (or not changes) perceived during these years are reported in this same edition.

The in-depth work with the categorization of countries and territories starts at the fourth EF - EPI (2014), when it makes use of the tests of 750,000 individuals (of legal age) who took the English language tests in the year 2013. The edition, then, categorizes 63 countries in total, and emphasize: “[...] we also look at data from 7 years (2007), the first year that we have data from EF EPI, to see which countries and regions have improved and which have not” (EF EPI, 2014, p. 4, our translation).

The EF EPI (2015) edition proposes placing 70 countries under categories, based on the test data applied to adults who participated in the English program's online tests in 2014. At EF EPI (2016), they presented the positions of 72 regions, following the same model used in 2015, to gather the data from the last edition: starting from tests carried out with adults who participated in the English tests in 2015.

In this seventh edition (2017), the EF English Proficiency Index in was gathered and 80 countries and territories are categorized, based on the results of the adult tests carried out in 2016. In the eighth edition (2018), the same path is followed: the results of 1.3 million English test participants from the previous year (2017) are analyzed. Finally, to prepare the latest edition already published (2019), the tests of 2.3 million adults who took the English tests in 2018 were analyzed.

The editions and their proposals are differentiated, according to each year. It is worth noting that the exams are carried out with adults, but that, in the same way, it is also worth reflecting on the English proficiency of other age groups (children, adolescents etc.) and schooling (high school, universities etc.).

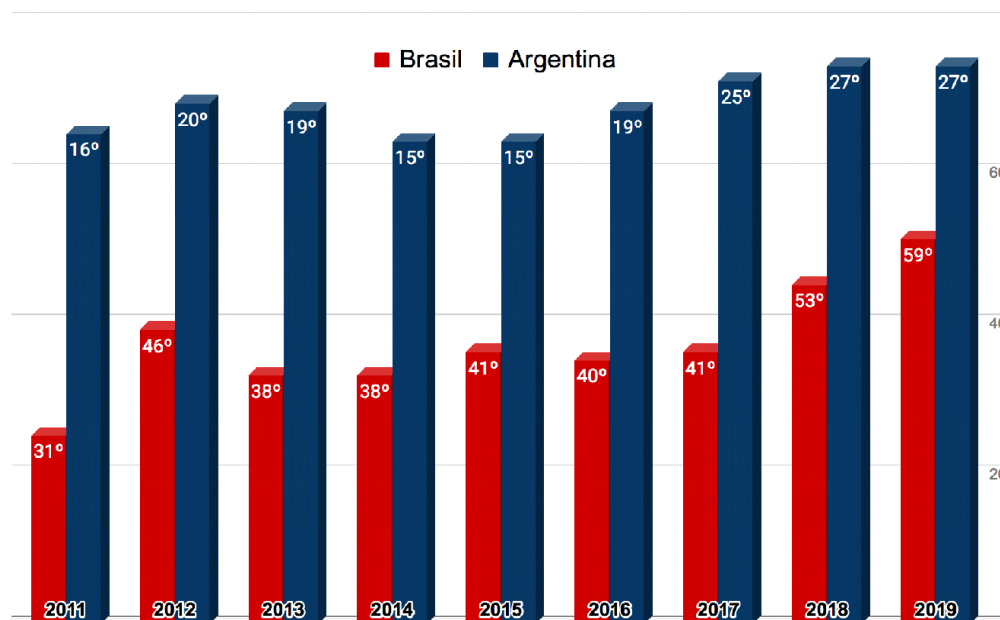
We can see from the studies carried out on the editions of the indexes from the years 2015 to 2019, that the results of the Rankings for these following years are based on the results of exams from past editions (For example: 2017 edition uses the results of exams from the 2016 edition, etc.) and the process of searching for new results continues, but the analysis for this study ends in 2019. As for the proficiency groups presented in the document tables, these “[...] facilitate the identification of countries with similar levels of proficiency and comparisons between and within regions [...]” (EF EPI, 2016, p. 9, our translation).

Facing inequality between Brazil and Argentina

Proficiency levels are classified into 5 differentiated categories in colors: **Very High Proficiency**, **High Proficiency**, **Moderate Proficiency**, **Low Proficiency**, **Very Low Proficiency**. In the scores placed in the table below, Brazil appears in all editions in low

places in the proficiency indexes. And, in addition, we can see from the scores in the graph below that Brazil has continued to lose positions since 2011.

Figure 1 – Scores from Brazil and Argentina



Source: Devised by the authors, adapted from EF *Education First EPI* (editions 2011-2019)³

The decline of Brazil and the rise of Argentina are noticeable when we analyze the development of Argentina. In other words, Brazil has shown itself to be in the opposite direction of Latin America in relation to the teaching of the English Language, since of the 19 Latin countries evaluated in this Ranking, 12 improved their proficiency between the period of 2017 and 2018. Let us see the table of the classifications of Latin countries to understand how Brazil is in a position far below the global average and the average of our continent. Argentina stands out in first place in English proficiency in Latin America. It is worth mentioning that it is the only Latin American country that has achieved and remained in the "High" category in the World Ranking of English.

Chart 1 – Latin America Regional Classification

EF EPI Average (Score)
Argentina - 58,38
Costa Rica - 57,38
Uruguay - 54,08
Chile - 52,89
Cuba- 52,70
Dominican Republic - 52,58

³ Available: <https://www.ef.com.br/epi/downloads/>. Access: 20 Apr. 2020.

Paraguay - 52,51
Guatemala - 52,50
Bolivia - 51,64
Honduras - 50,53
Peru - 50,22
Brazil - 50,10
El Salvador - 50,09
Nicaragua - 49,89
Panamá - 49,60
México - 48,99
Colombia - 48,75
Venezuela - 47,81
Ecuador - 46,57

Source: Devised by the authors

Brazil's position in scoring in Latin America is #12/19. This score is of particular concern, not only at global levels, but at levels in Latin America as well. While the placement of Argentina in the Ranking surpasses those of European countries such as: Italy, Spain, France - one of the countries most sought after by those who wish to do tourism in Europe, as well as Eastern European countries, India, Hong Kong and even the powerful China in terms of global import and export. Anyway, all these countries lagged behind the global placement of English proficiency in Argentina.

In contrast, countries such as Costa Rica, Uruguay, Chile, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Paraguay, Guatemala, Bolivia, Honduras and Peru, despite being countries that have economic, political, social and educational vulnerabilities, are countries with higher positions to Brazil in the English proficiency ranking. How to explain this evident unfavorable situation in Brazil, the largest country in Latin America, recognized for its scientific research, but with such low proficiency in English among the Latin regions covered by the ranking?

The National Confederation of Industry (CNI) released data on the Global Innovation indices, on 2 September 2020, in which Brazil would have been in 62nd position, again, compared to the 37 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, Brazil appears in the fourth position behind Chile (54th), Mexico (55th) and Costa Rica (56th). Let us see what the president of CNI, Robson Braga de Andrade (2020, author's highlights) warns us about this result: "We need to improve financing for innovation, strengthen partnerships between government, the productive sector and **academia, structure long-term policies and prioritize the formation of qualified professionals**". Curious, these two situations presented above do not seem to be incompatible with the fact that Brazil is positioned as the 9th largest economy in the world?

It is also important to draw attention to the fact that most countries in South America have implemented efficient educational reforms to teach English more efficiently and comprehensively, one example being Uruguay that

[...] launched in 2015 an ambitious plan to improve the proficiency of public school students, investing in technology to enable remote education where there were no qualified local teachers. The result is that almost 80% of those at the end of elementary school achieved A2 or higher, compared with 56% in 2014 (EXAME, 2019, our translation).

In Bolivia, extreme poverty rates have been halved in the last decade, investing in education and a surprising 2.77 points in the EF study in 2018, compared to the previous year. In relation to Brazil, there is still no action by Public Policies that prioritizes the teaching of quality English for the general population in Brazilian territory. Through this investigation, the elitization of English as a language can be seen, since the first public policies aimed at teaching the language in the country, with the arrival of D. João VI to Brazil, in 1808.

What has been verified is that these were public policies that in practice ensured that only the elite held knowledge of English, either during the 19th century or in the 20th century, with policies aimed at training workers for industries in Brazil, because, in the view of the rulers, there was no need to guarantee a large part of the population to learn a foreign language; whoever wanted such knowledge, should pay for education in private institutions.

Considering that from the last decades of the twentieth century, the English language has assumed the status of an international, global or lingua franca (CRYSTAL, 2009; JENKINS, 2012; MCKAY, 2002; MURRAY, 2012), not guaranteeing proficient English learning for the most part of the Brazilian population is still not a practice carried out today?

Taking up again the comparison between Brazil and Argentina, we bring here, the positions and world classifications of each country. In Chart 2 for the years 2011 to 2019.

Chart 2 – Scores from Brazil and Argentina

YEAR	COUNTRIE	POSITION	PROFICIENCY CLASSIFICATION	SCORE
2011	BRAZIL	31°	LOW	47,27
	ARGENTINA	16°	MODERATE	53,49
2012	BRAZIL	46°	VERY LOW	46,86
	ARGENTINA	20°	MODERATE	55,38
2013	BRAZIL	38°	LOW	50,07
	ARGENTINA	19°	MODERATE	54,43
2014	BRAZIL	38°	LOW	49,96
	ARGENTINA	15°	HIGH	59,02

2015	BRAZIL	41°	LOW	51,05
	ARGENTINA	15°	HIGH	60,26
2016	BRAZIL	40°	LOW	50,66
	ARGENTINA	19°	HIGH	58,40
2017	BRAZIL	41°	LOW	51,92
	ARGENTINA	25°	MODERATE	56,51
2018	BRAZIL	53°	LOW	50,93
	ARGENTINA	27°	HIGH	57,58
2019	BRAZIL	59°	LOW	50,10
	ARGENTINA	27°	HIGH	58,38

Source: Devised by the authors adapted from EF *Education First EPI* (editions 2011-2019)⁴

When we follow the data above, it is clear that since the first edition, from 9 years to last year (2019), Brazil has only managed to evolve from the category “very low” to “low”, while the score level in Argentina evolved from moderate to high. For Camello (2019, p. 14, our translation), "the limited number of teaching hours, added to the difficulty in improving educational standards of literacy, social inequality and high levels of violence are factors that hinder progress in the language". In this sense, from the nine editions presented, we perceive inequality still present in our country, of a social, economic order, among others, that studies have shown these issues over the years.

According to Camello (2019, p. 22), it also “shows that the greater the national income and the introduction of the internet in the country, the higher the mastery of the English language among the participants”. It is evident in Figure 2 on the mastery of the English language, analysis of per capita incomes and internet access.

Figure 2 – English proficiency x level of income to internet access

Faixas de proficiência	Média per capita da RENDA NACIONAL líquida ajustada	Média de pessoas com ACESSO À INTERNET
Muito alta	US\$ 47.318	88%
Alta	US\$ 23.128	73%
Moderada	US\$ 13.277	66%
Baixa	US\$ 8.799	53%
Muito baixa	US\$ 6.424	49%

Source: Author’s archive

From this picture, we see the most explicit question regarding access to the internet and technologies. Social groups that have “[...] higher income and internet access, have more

⁴ Available: <https://www.ef.com.br/epi/downloads/>. Access: 20 Apr. 2020.

developed proficiency levels than any other region, corroborating the impact of these factors on proficiency index” (CAMELLO, 2019, p. 22 -23, our translation). Camello's speech (2019) allows us to reflect, once again, on the quote from Megale (2019) in the introduction of this study, in rethinking the Teaching of Foreign Languages starting from our aspirations, in the educational, social, cultural and economic aspects.

According to the American professor Beata Schmid, doctor in quality standards, pronunciation and technology on the board of English USA, countries that still fluctuate year after year in the EPI score tend to have problems with the teachers' fluency. She states that, “They [teachers] do not have such wonderful English, and that is the English that they need to pass on to students. Many are not comfortable speaking English in the classroom. But you need to lead your class in English”⁵ (reference).

About this evolutionary challenge in speaking the language, Souza and Santos (2011) can tell us that teaching English “[...] in most public schools is limited to the presentation of the most basic grammatical rules, exemplified with short and out-of-context sentences, trained in written repetition and substitution exercises typical of audiolingualism” (SOUZA; SANTOS, 2011, p. 3, our translation). However, teaching practices in language school contexts, despite being improved, have also been observed and criticized, as certain contexts still address language under a structuralist bias, in the same way as other teaching contexts.

In the English language teaching - learning scenario in Brazil, we have the notion of teaching languages in which students' experiences with the orality of the English language are not worked. The view of language and teaching under this bias can form disinterested students, but according to Scaramucci (2000, p. 16, our translation), “[...] the structuralist school provided one of the first theoretical frameworks to define proficiency”.

In this discussion, a question arises related to language teaching: If we consider language proficiency as an element constructed under structuralist teaching, since the "proficient individual" carries with him the mastery of grammatical elements, and on the other hand, fluency is shaped by orality, which teaching methodology to use? As an evident answer, Polidório (2014, p. 344, our translation) tells us that "there are many methods used in the teaching of the English language [...] but that [...] there is not an ideal method for teaching English language".

In the vision of Vieira (2013, p. 12, our translation) "the teaching of English as an FL in Brazil has undergone several transformations in recent times". Through studies and teacher

⁵ Available: <https://www.alagoas24horas.com.br/377458/com-proficiencia-baixa-em-ingles-brasil-fica-estagnado-em-ranking/>. Access: May 2020.

formation, contemporary teaching approaches have emerged, in which, various forms of literacy referring to the oral practices of the language are worked on. In view of so many innovations, it is understood that the profession of educator, especially that of foreign languages in public schools, brings challenges and conflicts that the teacher needs to prepare to face. In the context of certain public schools, we still “have very serious problems such as [...] very crowded classrooms, a lack of adequate didactic material, and [...] All of this has greatly hampered a profession that should be much more valued” (POLIDÓRIO, 2014, p. 342, our translation).

In this investigation process, of the reasons why Brazil remains in low positions in the proficiency index, in order to reach the possible conclusions it is necessary to reflect on some aspects related to education, such as: 1. In the context of language teaching in the Brazil, to work fluency and proficiency, the teacher's experience with the language becomes crucial; 2. Language teaching not only as a structure and linear teaching, but as a social practice, an opportunity to build meanings through language; 3. Work on the relationship of various cultures in the classroom, teaching under the bias of different cultures, and not the dominant culture; and finally, as teachers, motivate our students to study the language more intensively.

Is there a policy of silencing the English language curriculum in Brazil?

In view of the language teaching scenario in Brazil, we observed that the learning of a foreign language occupies a space of words, as it mediates international and even national relations in contexts of multilingualism, which organize certain practices and knowledge, but it also seems to be a place of silencing (ORLANDI, 2007). We understand that this discursive functioning is configured, on the one hand, by the absence of linguistic policies related to the English Language.

Orlandi (2007) discusses this problem of silencing our educational system on the result of English language proficiency indexes in Brazil. “There is silence in the words; the study of silencing shows us that there is a process of producing silenced senses that makes us understand a dimension of the unsaid as absolutely different from what has been studied under the rubric of 'implicit' (ORLANDI, 2007, p. 11-12, our translation). For Orlandi, silence is also a way of expressing power, as it is in silence that power relations can be signified, still, it highlights silence as a mediator of the relations between language, the world and thought.

Nevertheless, we still realize that there is a great insufficiency on the part of Brazil to speak and teach English, the low performance of Brazilians in English is very worrying, especially when we recognize this language as a “dominant language”, because:

In the market society, we speak of users, in multiple languages (multilingualism), in speeches, in dialects, in multiculturalism, in communities (and not society). [...] If before we should abandon local speaking, the mother tongue, due to the notion of unity, the national one, today we fragment into local speaking, hardly visible, little known (not grammatical), while on the other side, it flows freely, supported by an enormous amount of linguistic instruments, and with all the visibility and technological support, the 'universal' language (lingua franca) of communication and knowledge: English. Dominant language of the digital space, the space of the crowd of users. Users of a wide range of English. Here it is worth calling attention to what we are saying, and which explains the use of quotation marks in 'universal': what is presented as universal is precisely what is the result of dominant power. It is, therefore, a silent political issue (ORLANDI, 2007, p. 60-61, author's highlights, our translation).

Highlighting this issue of “silenced politics”, Brazil may be losing in innovation, in the area of research, in the discovery of new technologies that could be developed in Brazilian territory, and, still, we lose the chance of being connected with the rest of the world in scientific and economic fields. Now, companies also lose a lot with the result, because they cease to be globally competitive, to have access to new forms of management and use of production, they lose by not using new trends that are being applied in other countries, taking with them the worst results in the market.

The Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) has had significant and not yet fully understood impacts on society. This is an unprecedented event in history. But it is considered that a change in perception and social behavior accelerates a change in habit, however we are facing a change in the way of teaching and learning as well. However, we can think about how all of this can help to improve the quality of English teaching in Brazil, the encouragement of exchange, face-to-face exchanges seem to be postponed, but great opportunities for video classes, webinars, virtual interactions with natives arise, these resources can cooperate extensively in the development of oral skill. In this pandemic context, opportunities for improvement in orality in English for foreign language teachers in Brazil arise, through online courses on zoom, google meet, among others. Lives are prepared on the YouTube platform by universities, which discuss alternatives for remote English language teaching.

Anyway, even though we have silenced educational policies about proficiency levels in Brazil, we will need good initiatives that prioritize English language teaching and learning, facing this learning with excellence, with this perception we can encourage our students to be the protagonists of their learnings.

Final considerations

To resume this study, we return to the idea that most strongly motivated us to investigate it - that of trying to highlight the importance of undertaking English language analysis and teaching proposals regarding the proficiency of Brazilian students. Based on the analysis of the EF-EPI data (2011 to 2019), it appears that the level of proficiency in English of Brazilians, since the beginning of the World Rankings survey, has remained practically stagnant, from 2011 to 2017, in low categories, and, in 2018 and 2019, Brazil had even lower results. In 2018, the country fell 12 positions in relation to the last study, from 41 to 53, in 2019 it dropped 6 more positions, from 53 to 59.

The facts raised in this study, however, lead us to invite those who read this article, especially teachers who are dedicated to teaching English, to question the certainties that institute our praxiologies of conceiving the teaching of the English Language. Since, due to the low importance given to more proficient students in English, Brazil may be losing in innovation, in research, as well as in the discovery of new educational trends. As can be seen in the data collected from EF - EPI (years 2011 to 2019), Brazil has also occupied low global innovation rates. Several Brazilians who enroll in exchange programs also suffer from a language gap and many even lose the opportunity to study abroad because the level of English proficiency is still low.

When analyzing these data from Brazil and Argentina, there is a great importance to rethink educational, social, linguistic inequalities, among others, in our country, aiming at teaching English in Brazilian educational institutions to achieve proficiency English at more advanced levels. In this way, this research also provides us with an opportunity to conduct further in-depth research in relation to language teaching in Argentina.

For now, we interrupt this discussion by listing some alternatives, even if provisional and running the risk of incompleteness, however, in an attempt to help those interested in this topic to glimpse other paths, other questions and alternatives from - within the scope of public policies; - the scope of teacher formation processes; And finally, - within the scope of the research, which may suggest, as a counterpoint, the constitution of research agendas that

establish other efficient ways of rethinking the English language proficiency of Brazilian students. All the questions that we tried to raise during this study, although, briefly and superficially, were in the search to refer to the mandatory characteristics of an English education in Brazil compatible with the contemporary.

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