

**WHY DO I HAVE DIFFICULTY IN DEVELOPING ABILITIES IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE? A STUDY WITH PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS IN BRAZIL**

***POR QUE TENHO DIFICULDADES EM DESENVOLVER HABILIDADES EM LÍNGUA INGLESA? UM ESTUDO COM PROFESSORES EM FORMAÇÃO NO BRASIL***

***¿POR QUÉ TENGO DIFICULTAD PARA DESARROLLAR HABILIDADES EN EL IDIOMA INGLÉS? UN ESTUDIO CON PROFESORES EN FORMACIÓN EN BRASIL***



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**ABSTRACT:** This paper discusses the issue of the difficulty of a group of pre-service teachers in developing abilities in the English language. It has specific objectives to map the difficulties related to the development of abilities in the English language, to figure out the possible reasons for these difficulties, and to understand how the participants of this research develop their abilities in the English language. Therefore, we took as a paradigm the participants' beliefs and attitudes and as base the studies of Barcelos and Vieira-Abrahão (2006), Borg (2001, 2002), Despaigne (2010), Walker *et al.* (2004) and Gardener (1985). It is a qualitative study with a group of pre-service teachers and students of the course titled English as a modern language and signs languages from Recôncavo of Bahia Federal University. The data were generated from a free narrative interview with seventeen participants. The relevance of this study lies in the possibility of shedding light on the difficulties mapped and presenting alternatives to the respective changes.

**KEYWORDS:** Difficulties. Development. Abilities. English language.

**RESUMO:** Este artigo discute as dificuldades de um grupo de professores em formação para desenvolver habilidades em língua inglesa. Tem como objetivos específicos mapear as dificuldades relacionadas com o desenvolvimento de habilidades em língua inglesa; compreender as possíveis causas dessas dificuldades e como as habilidades em língua inglesa são desenvolvidas pelos participantes da pesquisa. Para tanto, tomamos como paradigma as crenças e atitudes dos participantes e como base os estudos de Barcelos e Vieira-Abrahão (2006), Borg (2001, 2002), Despaigne (2010), Walker *et al.* (2004) e Gardner (1985). Trata-se de um estudo qualitativo, realizado com um grupo de professores em formação, estudantes do curso de Letras/LIBRAS/Língua inglesa, da Universidade Federal do Recôncavo da Bahia. Os dados foram gerados com base em uma entrevista do tipo livre narrativa, realizada com dezessete participantes. O objetivo desta pesquisa é mostrar as dificuldades mapeadas e, assim, poder apresentar soluções para as respectivas mudanças.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Dificuldades. Desenvolvimento. Habilidades. Linguagem Inglesa.

**RESUMEN:** Este artículo aborda el tema de las dificultades de un grupo de profesores en formación en el desarrollo de las habilidades del idioma inglés. Sus objetivos específicos son mapear las dificultades relacionadas con el desarrollo de las habilidades del idioma inglés; comprender las posibles causas de estas dificultades y cómo los participantes de la investigación desarrollan las habilidades del idioma inglés. Para ello, tomamos como paradigma las creencias y actitudes de los participantes y basado en estudios de Barcelos y Vieira-Abrahão (2006), Borg (2001, 2002), Despaigne (2010), Walker *et al.* (2004) e Gardener (1985). Se trata de un estudio cualitativo, realizado con un grupo de profesores en formación, alumnos del curso de Letras/LIBRAS/Inglés de la Universidad Federal del Recôncavo da Bahia. Los datos fueron generados a partir de una entrevista narrativa libre, realizada con diecisiete participantes. La relevancia de este estudio radica en la posibilidad de arrojar luz sobre las dificultades mapeadas y poder presentar alternativas para los respectivos cambios.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Dificultades. Desarrollo. Capacidad. Idioma Inglés.

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## Introduction

Facing the advance of the English language on a planetary scale, whose manifest presence drives the teaching of this language in the different educational stages and the most diverse professional branches, aiming at meeting contemporary social demands, and justifies a research agenda from multiple perspectives. As part of this agenda, this paper plans to discuss the difficulties in developing English language skills (speaking, listening, writing, reading) based on a group of teachers in training. Considering that many in-service teachers have difficulties with language skills, such as not speaking the language they teach, it would be relevant to conduct research with teachers still in the initial training process. We know that, with rare exceptions, language courses prepare students to acquire the four skills. Pallu (2008) argues that undergraduate courses are not preparing foreign language teachers well enough, and one of the main causes is the outdated and obsolete curricula. Schmitz (2009) believes that there is no doubt about the difficulties in preparing students adequately in two majors (Portuguese-English) because of the low amount of time dedicated to them:

Preparing a professional competent in all four skills is difficult, even in four-year courses. Aware of the problems, some colleges sign agreements with language institutes to improve their students' proficiency (SCHMITZ, 2009, p. 20, our translation).

Schmitz (2009) highlights a great paradox because if the central purpose of a course of Arts is to train skilled teachers, especially in the four skills, resorting to other institutions to perform such a task configures itself as another educational inconsistency. As an example, along the same lines, the state government of Bahia, utilizing a decree issued in 2022, instituted the "Outras Palavras" (Other Words) Program, which will implant language learning centers in the state public schools. The initiative, at first, has good intentions. However, in a meeting with members of the public universities, the program's coordination revealed that the purpose is to implement the centers with teaching resources from the British Council and that the teachers will not be the same as those in the permanent staff of the schools; they will be outsourced, hired by the state education secretariat. Now, it seems another paradox. With the creation of the centers, why can't effective teachers, who are part of the school staff, teach? Although the answer is obvious, the truth is that it is necessary to think about the root of the problem: Do the teachers not know how to teach the language they teach? Do they have a qualitative deficit in their training?

However, the policy of "make-believe" still burdens the state by ignoring the teachers' lack of skills to teach, and the government, as a strategy, chooses to invest in implementing language centers with high financial resources, discarding, this way, the effective teachers. The ideal would be to invest in the continuing education of teachers, intensively and extensively, to develop their skills with the language, which requires time and a larger workload that entails intensive contact (SCHMITZ, 2009).

It is necessary to investigate the root of the problem. If teachers do not speak, listen, write, or have a good understanding of the language they teach, it is necessary to review their training, especially their initial training. It is precisely the skills of speaking, listening, writing, and reading that most qualify and accredit us as language teachers. In this sense, Schmitz (2009) asks: what do we expect from an English, Spanish, or Japanese teacher? They speak the language and have professional competence in terms of methodology. He also argues that all higher education institutions need to prepare students in the four skills, and when this is not done, the reflex is reflected in basic education as a kind of domino effect. The limited education of the English language teacher also leads us to the sphere of exclusion since the excluded cannot include; I cannot give what I don't have and, in this aspect, Leffa (2009) provokes reflection when he says that the teacher who does not know the language he teaches cannot love what he does, considering that we only love what we know and, therefore, he argues that if we do not love, we end up excluding, representing a threat to both the teacher and the student. This situation is even worse when the teacher comes from the lower social classes:

Those who are poor will encounter more obstacles to their professional training and more **difficulties** in acquiring proficiency in language use and teaching. The community of speakers of a foreign language is of restricted access, and the poor teacher, due to the scarcity of opportunities, often needs to overcome himself to belong to it. The lack of mastery of the language they teach is a reality for many foreign language teachers in Brazil, so they end up being excluded and, as such, unable to include the student (LEFFA, 2009, p. 123, our translation).

Because of this negative picture, the belief that it is impossible to learn English in public schools is established, a negative perception based on the teacher's limited training. The truth is that few skills are developed in primary education in the context of language education in foreign languages, with rare exceptions. Therefore, the belief of impossibility comes from there. Thus, it is crucial to think about the training of language teachers, especially those from the lower social classes who have not had a solid foundation in the language they will teach. These difficulties should be discussed so that new programs can be implemented, with the objective

of training teachers who can act with more confidence and, in this way, have the desired social effect.

The difficulties seem to have a direct relationship with the amount of time dedicated to studies with the teaching methodology adopted, among other logistical factors. We intend to research these difficulties from the point of view of those interested in this issue, being teachers in training, scrutinizing their roots.

### Investigations into difficulties in developing English language skills

For us researchers, "difficulty" is a keyword in this study. Etymologically, "difficulty" relates to what is difficult, what impedes, hinders. People's difficulties in developing English language skills are an obstacle, a hindrance, a hindrance that offers the risk of not participating, of inclusion, converging to a trajectory of unequal relations.

Several studies have been conducted to understand the difficulties of developing English language skills, including logistical to socio-psychological factors. For example, Despaigne (2010) surveyed two groups of university students in Mexico and verified negative perceptions and attitudes toward English language learning because of linguistic imperialism. This researcher points out that, despite the educational reform, English language teaching is deficient, attributing this to the fact that teachers are not specialists trained to teach English, and some do not even speak this language well. In this sense, this researcher warns that one of the most severe difficulties in the educational system in Mexico is the growing gap between public and private schools.

Nizkodubova *et al.* (2015) conducted a study with adult English language learners to investigate socio-psychological difficulties in language acquisition. The data showed that some factors negatively influenced English language acquisition, such as fear of making mistakes, lack of time to study, poor previous learning experiences, and lack of confidence in one's abilities. Faced with this picture, these researchers suggest providing learners with information about the course, such as the program, the course load, the career opportunities, and the expected results. They also suggest informing learners about their responsibilities in their learning process.

Misbah *et al.* (2017) developed the research to investigate the factors affecting students' English language performance. To do so, they used a questionnaire with a group of 116 basic education students in Malaysia. The data collected revealed three factors hindering language

acquisition: the lack of vocabulary in teaching practices, the influence of the mother tongue, and family socioeconomic status. In addition, they found that *Bahasa Malaysia*, the student's first language, being quite different from English and having a less complex structure, was most often chosen by the students in class, which, for them, was hindering the development of skills in the additional language. Finally, the researchers concluded that students from low-income families performed very poorly in English, which led them to infer that meager wages also converged to limited access to extra English language classes, learning materials, and environments in which they used English.

Ozmat and Senemoğlu (2021) also conducted qualitative research in Turkey with a group of elementary education students to identify their difficulties in learning the English language. The data were generated from a semi-structured interview based on the LLDS (*Language Learning Difficulties Scale*). These authors pointed out that the learners' difficulties were related to the lack of communicative practices in the textbooks, the insufficient use of audiovisual instruments in the classroom, low self-confidence, overcrowded classes, and disciplinary problems.

This brief analysis of some studies on the theme of developing English language skills allows us to infer that a majority of research focuses on English language students. Our research is projected from a different perspective. Our focus is on the student teacher or the teacher in training. We intend to research the difficulties based on two socio-psychological constructs: attitudes and beliefs. To this end, we recognize that in addition to our own eyes as researchers, there is nothing better than the perception of the researched about what we intend to research. In this sense, we took as a paradigm the beliefs and attitudes of the participants so that we could map the difficulties in developing English language skills.

### **Difficulties through the lens of beliefs and attitudes**

What do our beliefs and attitudes reveal? Our perceptions and the way we evaluate something or someone reflect in some way particular findings, which can, to some extent, function as thermometers for understanding, implementing, and even changing a given pedagogical scenario. These perceptions and evaluations are transposed by social, academic, and economically problematic realities. Therefore, Despagne (2010) recommends that negative perceptions by learners should be the origin of problems in the learning process, and, at this point, it is also relevant to analyze attitudes from a socio-historical perspective.

Considering the relevance of developing English language skills to participate in countless actions in contemporary times, teachers need to understand the importance of this development. When this does not happen, it is necessary to examine language beliefs. In traditional schools, when learners do not get the grade required to pass a year, teachers design another assessment and apply it but do not worry about the reason for the failure to learn at the previous stage. About learning a language, including diagnosing the ideological aspects. (KUBOTA, 2019). Most of the time, why people do not understand a particular language is not considered. Scrutinizing these roots is essential to rethink the pedagogical path, aiming to implement it. This can be done with the help of learners' beliefs and attitudes.

From this perspective, knowing the concepts of beliefs and attitudes is fundamental. For M. Borg (2001), beliefs function as a "truth element", a mental state that has as its content a proposition that is accepted as confirmed by the individual who holds it. In S. Borg's (2003) view, belief can be understood from a cognitive perspective. This researcher employs *teacher cognitive* to refer to the cognitive dimensions of what the teacher knows, believes, and thinks. Thus, cognition functions as a filter of an individual's experiences, which for Reis (2012), is articulated as an abstract mental furniture that makes it possible to interpret behavior, action, and the use of language, language, and learning.

Barcelos (2006) defines beliefs as ways of thinking and seeing and perceiving reality, which can impact teachers' practices. For this researcher, teachers' beliefs about students' beliefs influence their practices. For example, Kumaravadivelu (2012) shares this thought when he highlights that teacher beliefs intensely affect their practice and articulate themselves as a guide for teachers to define, select and organize the information to be presented to their students. For him, there is also evidence that beliefs have the potential to lead teachers to take a particular course of action in their daily teaching practice, even when they know that this course is not the best one. For this reason, it warns of moral and ethical issues surrounding beliefs, as there is a relationship between teachers' beliefs and their values.

Regarding 'attitudes', we align this study with the definition that Gardner (1985) proposed as an evaluative reaction. Thus, teachers have different attitudes toward their students, the course material, the language they teach, their colleagues, etc. They can appreciate, depreciate, qualify, disqualify, and judge things around them. However, what interests us is understanding how their attitudes are formed and their nature. To facilitate the understanding of this study, we decided to work with two categories of attitudes: positive and negative. The positive ones would be favorable reactions toward something or someone. Negative attitudes

are unfavorable positions. Thus, this study aims to identify the attitudes of teachers based on these categories because we understand that to confront and transform beliefs and attitudes, it is first necessary to understand their extension and nature (WALKER *et al.*, 2004).

We also consider the studies of Walker *et al.* (2004), when they warn that teachers who hold negative attitudes about English language learners or believe in the many fallacies that surround the educational system fail to meet the social and academic demands of these learners. On this issue, the disregard with which the English language is treated as an underprivileged curricular component converges to the discouragement of teachers, eventually feeding negative beliefs and attitudes. Therefore, understanding the reasons for teachers' attitudes is much more complex than one might think since, behind their perspectives, there are other factors.

Thus, investigating teachers' attitudes, especially the negative ones, is a *sine qua non* condition for understanding the teaching/learning context. This understanding also makes it possible to shed light on why teachers act as they do and how their actions affect their students. Finally, from a combination of qualitative and quantitative data, Walker *et al.* (2004) discuss, among other things, to what extent negative attitudes exist in the school community.

Let's try to interpret the teachers' attitudes we have investigated, anchored on what we have just mentioned. Before the next section, we will present some considerations about methodological issues, the informants, and the data analysis.

### **Research context, method, techniques, and instruments for data generation**

This research was carried out with a group of seventeen undergraduate students of the English language course of the Center for Teacher Education (CFP) of The Federal University of Recôncavo da Bahia (UFRB). But for this article, we considered only the universe of five participants.

To begin this research project, we initially asked ourselves which research method to use. We decided that this study would be conducted through an interview and that it would be qualitative in nature. This option was taken because we understood it was a research model that was adequate for our investigation.

When opting for a qualitative approach, the researcher enters into an immersion process, going deeper into the phenomenon in which they are interested, "diving" into the reality they want to understand and looking for the meanings people give to the world around them. In this research model, the researcher chooses the inductive method, moving from data to theory, by definitions that involve and concretize the process, by intuition and creativity during the research process, by concepts that become explicit through properties and relationships, by holistic synthesis and comparative analysis,



and by a small, selectively chosen sample. Thus, the researcher interprets data provided by the participants of a given investigation, whose primary concern is centered on the subjective meaning constructed by the social actors.

Thus, since we had to investigate the attitudes and beliefs of a group of English teachers-in-training regarding their English language abilities and difficulties employing these methods, we resorted to the principles of qualitative research, which, of course, led us to the data generation instrument, the interview. Thus, we conducted the free narrative interview, which lasted five days, with more than 36 hours of recordings. The interviews were conducted individually, with each participant, through the virtual platform *Google Meet*, according to the recommendation of social distancing, due to the pandemic of COVID-19.

This research, whose registration has certificate number CAAE: 40688920.2.0000.0056, followed all the protocols required by the ethics committee of the Universidade Federal do Recôncavo da Bahia, obtaining a favorable opinion for its conduct. Below we discuss some of the data generated.

### Generated data

The interviews that gave rise to the data presented in this section were conducted by the three researchers and authors of this article. We followed some criteria for selecting the questions and divided them into blocks to reach the proposed research objectives. To do so, we had as specific objectives to map the difficulties related to the development of English language skills; to understand the possible causes of these difficulties; to understand how English language skills are developed by the research participants; to investigate which factors and to what extent they influence the development of English language skills, and to examine whether English language skills are related to the concept of learning and acquisition.

In addition, we took into consideration the following research questions: **I.** What are the difficulties related to English language learning or acquisition? **II.** How are English language skills developed? **III.** What factors are behind the problems in English language acquisition or learning? **IV.** What view do teachers have on how best they develop English language skills? And **V.** To what extent are English language learning and acquisition-related?

Although we intended to investigate the difficulties in developing English language skills by taking the beliefs and attitudes of the participants of this study as the basis, we were not sure that we would find, in the statements, the two objects of study. Therefore, we caution you that in specific analyses, we mention only one of them and, when possible, both.

Initially, we asked them *What difficulties have you encountered or still encounter in developing English language skills?* Intending to identify the challenges in developing English language skills, we found that the participants expressed their perceptions (beliefs) and, on some occasions, their attitudes, signaling some logistical factors related to the teaching/learning context, such as time, dedication, practice, and methodology.

A1 signals her belief that her difficulty developing English language skills is related to the short time of contact with this language during her undergraduate studies, preventing a longer practical activity. Thus, A1 evaluates (attitude) time as "very short" as the cause of his difficulty in developing English language skills. This data provided by A1 is similar to that of Nizkodubova *et al.* (2015), who also pointed out the negative influence of lack of time to develop English language skills. Below is A1's statement:

*A1: Eh... I... well... the most significant difficulty in developing English language skills is time. We have very little time for contact or practice with the language, at least in my experience in the course this is the case, this contact that we have with the English language is very short for a language course.*

A2 says she had many difficulties developing English language skills and attributes it to the methodology adopted in the classroom, which she defines as traditional. Another perception (belief) highlighted by A2, which deserves much attention, is the issue of teachers' poor oral skills since she evaluates (attitude) teachers who are not fluent. A2 emphasizes that, in public schools, the problem is that teachers, in general, are not fluent. And in this sense, A2 attributes her difficulty developing English language skills to the lack of a fluent teacher. This belief is true because if we consider that people need input to develop the ability to speak a language, the lack of it will undoubtedly hinder this. But A2 places great emphasis on the fact that the methodology did not meet her learning expectations, in her own words, "the traditional methodology kept me from [learning]." Below is A2's statement:

*A2: I found it very difficult due to the methodology used by the teachers here in my region, it was a very traditional methodology, and the teachers were not fluent, so many times, I wanted to listen to them, right, talk, so, right, in public school it's not a culture of fluent teachers, at least not here. So, my most significant difficulty was because I needed a person who spoke English exactly, and I wanted to listen and talk, that was my biggest difficulty, the teaching methodology used by my teachers.*

A3 also supports the idea that the inadequate methodology leads to the non-development of English language skills and evaluates (attitude) that the classes taught in the mother tongue

converge to this picture. A3 shows dissatisfaction with the inadequate use of the language he is trying to acquire. These data agree with those of Misbah *et al.* (2017), who pointed out the negative influence of the lack of vocabulary use of the target language, which converges to hinder the development of English language skills. Below is the statement of A3:

*A3: Ok, então eh (...) eu não tenho tanto tempo, assim eu regularmente estou no segundo semestre, deveria estar indo pro quarto, mas devido à pandemia eu ainda me encontro no segundo, mas já tive algumas experiências com a língua inglesa, é a habilitação que escolhi e sinto muita falta das aulas ministradas na língua, porque **falta** de treinar e de ter contato com o que a gente estuda com a língua inglesa, produzir com a língua inglesa também. Majoritariamente a gente faz isso em português e eu sinto alguma **falta** disso da língua, da gente usar a língua em si para aprender.*

Based on A5's statement, he attributes his difficulty to his lack of language practice. This finding provided by A5 was also signaled by Ozmat and Senemoğlu's research (2021), which concluded that learners' difficulties were related to the lack of communicative practice. A5 also encourages this practice with a commitment (contract) to promote the practice of the language being learned. However, A5 seems to blame himself for not making this commitment and for not organizing himself so that this is consolidated.

*A5: Look, honestly, I think that... the difficulty is the practice itself, the discipline, and you make this contract, right, that you learn what you are going to try to have contact with, and then this contact can be of various forms, right... and then I think what makes it difficult for me is not having signed this contract with me, that I need to practice, who knows a little every day, but as... an organization correct, not just anyhow, with a commitment to that feeling that you know what you are doing*

We then asked them to give their opinion about the following statement: *the difficulties faced by an English language learner are the same for those who learned the language in Brazil as for those who knew the language in an English-speaking country. Do you agree or disagree? Please comment.*

The first statement is that those who learn English in Brazil do not have the same difficulties compared to countries that use that language as their mother tongue. Instead, he considers (attitude) that learning another language is more complicated and attributes this to phonetic and phonological issues.

*A1: I do not believe it is the same because when you have contact with the mother tongue is different from us who already speak Portuguese will have contact with another language. [...] It is more difficult for those learning*

*English as a second language, even for phonetic reasons. Of phonetics that change from one language to another, phonological issues.*

Although she considers that the difficulties may be the same for those who learn English here in Brazil or another country, A2 believes that she would perform better if she learned in another country. She believes that contact with the language, in other words, with native speakers, would inevitably favor her development in the English language. A2's belief is not true since there are fluent English speakers who have developed their skills here without ever having been to another country where English is spoken as their mother tongue, just as there are people who have traveled to other countries and do not speak the language.

*A2: Well, I believe that, I don't know if I'm wrong, but I think that it depends a lot on the student's profile, because if you are a student who doesn't have so much affinity with the English language and you go to a country where the official language is English, the difficulties can be the same, but for me, who likes to learn English, here my greatest problem is because I don't have contact with the English language in my daily life. ) So here, my most significant difficulty is because I don't have contact with the English language in my everyday life, so learning English in another country would undoubtedly have this contact, and my development would be different, so it depends a lot on the student, but I certainly believe that the difficulties can be the same, so I go and come back.*

Both A3 and A4 believe that it is easier to develop English language skills by being embedded in the society of countries with English as an official language since it demands frequent use of the language because people are driven to use it. In other words, it is more challenging to learn English in contexts other than the native one, such as Brazil. Mota (2007), when analyzing this issue to understand the difficulties involved in the acquisition of the English language by Brazilian immigrants living in the United States, found that the time of permanence in the country proved to be an irrelevant factor, with low correlation. The two participants of the research, Sonia and Izabel, who stayed in the United States for six or seven years, presented a much lower level of competence in English than Luiza, who stayed only four years in the same country. The followings are A3's and A4's statements about this question:

*A3: Ah... I disagree, I cannot entirely agree because I think that when you are in a country where English is your mother tongue, in a certain way, you are obliged to use the language to communicate or do any other kind of thing, go to the market, go to the pharmacy or do any other social need that you have, so you try to use the language more often, you look for vocabulary more often, and you will be using it more often, so the chances of improving are much greater.*

*A4: I agree in parts because, from the moment I am in direct contact with the language, it forces me to learn, let's say, roughly. And when, for example, we are studying, I'm not going to lie, there is procrastination, and we tend to, I think it's pertinent, we tend to, let's say, procrastinate, we study, let's say, we do a half-assed study a lot of the times, so if we were in a country in contact with the language, we are often forced to learn the language.*

For A5, the difficulties would be the same:

*A5: Ah, no pro, it would be the same... equally the difficulties.*

Then we asked the participants: *From your point of view, what causes a learner's difficulties in developing English language skills?*

*A1: This is a question that can be talked about more. Because there is also the issue of access, right? As a student who comes from public school, I have studied all my life, both in elementary and high school, our reality is that we have contact with the English language in the fifth grade, today I think it is from the sixth to the ninth that speaks the new nomenclature, right? So, I believe that because of this late contact with the language, we end up having difficulties in this acquisition, even because we have already studied at the university that there is a period for children to acquire some things, and when this period passes, this age, we have difficulties in learning, for example, a second language. So I believe that this late contact has a great influence on the development of English language skills.*

A1 maintains that the difficulty in developing skills in the English language is the late contact with this language, considering the Brazilian education system. He supports the idea that there is a period in which we must go through the acquisition process, and when we miss this moment, we run into difficulties in developing skills. According to Pallu (2008), stating that an adult's difficulty in learning a language can be understood by supposedly being past the favorable age is simplistic and unsatisfactory if the thought of in isolation. However, she recognizes that the difference in levels of mastery of another language, when compared to children and adults, may be related to the critical period - explained by the decline in the rate of brain metabolism, synapses, etc. - but it may also be related to the time available for study. This researcher argues that some people's difficulties in learning a language are linked to the abstract treatment given to the language. In this sense, the conversation does not portray reality, there seems to be no sender and receiver, with vocabulary and themes far removed from the learners' world.

A2 argues that the inadequate methodology converges to the difficulties in developing skills in another language. This belief ends up being materialized in a series of attitudes on the

part of the learners. A2 also demonstrates his attitude towards the difficulties in developing skills in another language, arguing about how people devalue the English language:

*A2: The causes of the difficulties, as I said, I believe are the lack of a methodology that is not traditional, it's really because the student is not the protagonist most of the time, so I think that this **difficulty** is due to this, but one of the causes is also, of course, the culture, it's very common in our society not to value the language, so I think, I hear a lot, my colleagues always said: why do we learn the English language, the countries that border Brazil are not English speaking countries. So, one of the causes is the methodology used because we could use methods that would bring the students into the classroom more as protagonists, precisely to change this culture frequently implanted in society. I don't know if I'm being clear, but trying to.*

For A3, the cause of the difficulty in developing English language skills lies mainly in the teaching method. He believes that the teaching methodology is crucial for him to be willing to seek knowledge, which can motivate him to practice the language he learns. A3 also indicates that "fear" hinders the development of English language skills, which was also reported in the studies of Nizkodubova *et al.* (2015), when these researchers similarly concluded that fear of making mistakes is a factor that negatively influences this development. The following is A3's statement:

*A3: A3: I think that as you're learning a language, it's all practice, right, I believe that the **difficulties** would be not searching for that way of practicing a lot, I don't know, **afraid** to practice, being **afraid** to try or then the discouragement of not searching for the vocabulary, or for some practice techniques. [...] the teacher's method is decisive for (...) whether the student seeks it or not, because if the teacher uses a very old-fashioned method. So that **methodology** counts a lot that the cause would be methodology.*

The analysis of A4's statement allows us to infer that she believes that English can only be learned in language courses when she says, "My parents could never afford to pay for a course for me," discrediting other learning contexts. A4 provides similar data to Misbah *et al.*'s (2017) research, which verified the negative influence of family socioeconomic *status* regarding the development of English language skills, which, in turn, is related to what A4 also signals about the lack of technological teaching resources as an obstacle to that end:

*A4: Look, several factors make it difficult, I, for example, always wanted to learn the English language, but because I couldn't afford it, my parents never had the means to pay for a course for me. And today I see that if I had a good internet, maybe a computer, a cell phone at the time, maybe today I would be fluent, I think this also influenced the difficulties I have in learning the English language.*

Still aiming at understanding how the research participants developed English language skills, that is, if they used some learning strategy, we asked: *What methods do you use to develop English language skills?*

A1 reports that he became interested in the English language in the final years of elementary one and reveals that he used different types of strategies to develop English language skills, such as listening to music and watching series, which allows us to infer that A1 used strategies more related to the acquisition process, linked to *input*. The participant uses the term "acquisition" appropriately to refer to his strategic process of developing English language skills. These strategies are related to the concept coined by Oxford (2003) of 'cognitive strategies', which has to do with the comprehension of new utterances through the language learner's manipulation and transformation of the target language. The following is A1's statement:

*A1: So, I started to like English in the fifth grade, which was when I started to have contact, and the strategy I used at that time and still use today is to listen to music. This question of listening to music, watching subtitled series, and when I am already familiar with the subject, I watch the series with the original audio and subtitles in English for this question of acquiring even words, of knowing how to write these words, how to pronounce these words correctly, as close as possible to English. That is exactly it, I use these devices a lot, music and series.*

A2 demonstrates playful tactics and indicates using songs to develop oral production to improve pronunciation, which is related to the acquisition process. A2 also used the technique of writing down the lyrics of songs, associating it with the use of reading strategies, *skimming*, and *scanning*, thus expressing the belief that these techniques helped the development of skills such as oral production in English. This strategy seems related to manipulating the target language to develop skills, which is related to the concept of 'cognitive strategy', elaborated by Oxford (2003). Below is A2's statement:

*A2: So, I'm an advocate of active methodologies, and I use many games and many songs too, I used to write the songs, so that's one thing that I also teach my students, is to listen to the music to learn, you know, the pronunciation, the intonation of some words, but also, to improve the writing, of course, in music the grammar is not... is not so present. And so, although I recognize that I can't learn so much grammar from a song, I like to write the lyrics, listen to it, sing it, and repeat it, I believe that using this method helped me a lot, but I use many shadows [shadow reading] too, shadowing, skimming, scanning helped a lot.*

A3 reveals that he uses two strategies to develop English language skills: listening to songs and participating in conversation groups, which is more related to the acquisition. This strategy of participating in conversation groups agrees with what Oxford (2003) classified as 'social strategies', which are related to interaction and cooperation with other people to develop language skills. On the other hand, A3 reveals that she exercises by writing in the English language on different topics daily, which is more related to the learning process. The following is A3's statement:

*A3: I listen to a lot of English language music, I participate in online chat groups and free chat groups there are several, nowadays there are several meet rooms open twenty-four hours a day with people from all over the world, where you can come in and chat. I also use many apps to practice writing and talk with people around the world, and I keep a diary where... every day, I try to write about a topic in English to improve my writing.*

A4 states that he uses some technological resources, such as apps, to develop English language skills. Another fact that caught our attention was the issue of time. A4 schedules her process of developing English language skills related to the concept of 'metacognitive strategies', elaborated by Oxford (2003), which concerns the planning, control, and evaluation of learning. A4 still signals his difficulty in using the skill of speaking:

*A4: Look, I will say that I am more proactive, I have about four to five applications, I set minutes between them, I put thirty minutes to answer, another just to develop the language just by talking, in others, I practice the class in Portuguese, and some words are in English, then I write down the words that I have doubts and go there and research, I am taking two English courses today, Now a terrible difficulty that I do not understand what is happening is speaking the language, I understand, let's say, the structure of the language is already in my mind, I already know how to use it correctly, but the complicated thing for me is speaking and sometimes understanding the language.*

A5 reveals using songs to develop English language skills. A4 notes that, after listening, she also writes the lyrics as a writing practice. In addition, she highlights that she watches series in LI. The strategy of listening to songs aligns with the acquisition process and rewriting with learning. This again confirms Oxford's (2003) idea about cognitive systems, which language learners use to understand and manipulate the language they are learning. The following is A5's statement:

*A5: Look, the first of all is through music, so I like to put a song with the lyrics, listen and sing, and write. I remember that I also learned with teacher C, I*



*forget the name, but it is for us to write, it was teacher C who passed on this activity, write, write whatever comes to mind in English. So, I still do this, and I like it. I like to do that, sometimes, I watch dubbed movies, I'm not going to lie, with English subtitles, you know, or the other way around, but primarily through music.*

In this way, we finalized the data analysis. We identified that each student uses a different learning strategy and that the successful students have a more developed follow-up.

### Final considerations

This paper analyzes some difficulties that pre-service teachers of a university in Bahia have in developing English language skills, having as the primary objective the mapping of these difficulties, namely: inadequate methodology, notably traditional (concentration on grammar teaching, encouragement to translation, among others), a significantly reduced number of hours devoted to studies, resulting in slight contact with the English language, lack of didactic resources, teachers' lack of preparation and fluency, late contact with the language and lack of economic resources to devote more time to learning the language.

When analyzing these factors, we tried to identify which ones are related to learning or acquisition, as described by Krashen (2009) (learning as a formal process and acquisition as a process that occurs in natural contexts). Thus, the outcome of acquisition is the development of speaking skills and sense-making. In learning, the construction of knowledge is something conscious, focusing on form and grammar and less on the content of the messages. With this study, we understand that some techniques can help this process.

Oxford (2003) divided learning strategies for L2 into six different types: A) Memory Strategy: storage and retrieval of new information; B) Cognitive Strategies: comprehension and production of new utterances through the learner's manipulation and transformation of the target language; C) Compensation Strategies: aiding comprehension and production of the new language despite limitations in knowledge; D) Metacognitive Strategies: planning, controlling, and evaluating learning; E) Affective Strategies: regulating emotion, attitudes, values, and motivation; and F) Social Strategies: interaction and cooperation with others. Learning strategies can be more oriented toward helping the learner organize, elaborate, and integrate information (cognitive or primary strategies) or toward planning, monitoring, regulating one's thinking, and maintaining a satisfactory internal state that facilitates learning (metacognitive or supportive strategies).

Successful students have well-developed monitoring skills and can monitor comprehension, strategy use, investment of effort, and engagement in tasks, among other activities. Comprehension monitoring strategies require that the individual be aware of how much they manage to assimilate the content being taught (BORUCHOVITCH, 2001).

In this sense, students use different learning strategies. For example, to analyze how our subjects organize their learning and process the strategies they use to improve their English language skills, we took as a basis the beliefs and attitudes of these participants, identifying the following strategy: listening to music, writing the corresponding lyrics or not, watching movies and TV shows, with or without subtitles, using games, repeating words, observing their pronunciation, participating in conversation groups, writing about different topics, using diaries and using apps.

Moreover, we noticed that effective factors such as emotion, attitudes, motivation, and values interfere with language acquisition. Some testimonies, such as the impressions of unprofessional teachers, the little usefulness of the applied teaching material, and negative experiences, are some examples that contributed to their failure to acquire language skills. Despite this, the results showed us that our students are successful in the learning process and that this success is positive, primarily due to the level of critical awareness of the learning process in each of them.

Therefore, the relevance of this research is the possibility of revealing the difficulties mapped and observing the alternatives of the subjects participating in the study for their respective changes. To better understand the nature of these difficulties of our future teachers and what attitudes and beliefs they are founded on about acquiring and learning a foreign language, we can assist our work as educators and facilitators in language teaching.

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