

Articles

Between words and knowledge: narratives from indigenous Javaé teachers about bilingual school education

Entre palavras e saberes: narrativas dos professores indígenas Javaé sobre a educação escolar bilíngue

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Abstract

The study investigates the narratives of Javaé Indigenous teachers regarding Indigenous School Education, aiming to analyze the educational processes experienced by the Javaé community in the Kanoano village, located on Bananal Island, with a focus on bilingual school education. Employing Oral History methodology, the research seeks to document the community's educational history and empower teachers to promote a more inclusive and intercultural education. Authors such as Ricoeur (1993), Ferreira (2001), Candau (2011), Alberti (2012), and Macedo and Santos (2023) support the discussion. The analysis of the interviews highlights the struggle for a specific, differentiated, intercultural, and bilingual education that preserves the culture and language of the Javaé Indigenous people. The Javaé teachers display a genuine commitment to creating an educational environment that respects their people's knowledge, safeguards their cultures and language, and reflects a pedagogical approach extending beyond formal teaching. This approach incorporates everyday life as objects of study, fostering interaction and positive relationships among students, teachers, and the community.

Keywords: oral history; bilingual education; indigenous education; Javaé People.

Resumo

O estudo investiga as narrativas dos professores indígenas Javaé sobre a Educação Escolar Indígena, com o objetivo de analisar os processos educativos vivenciados pela comunidade Javaé na aldeia Kanoano, localizada na Ilha do Bananal, com o foco na educação escolar bilíngue. Utilizando a metodologia de História Oral, a pesquisa visa registrar a história educacional da comunidade e capacitar os professores na promoção de uma educação mais inclusiva e intercultural. Autores como Ricoeur (1993), Ferreira (2001), Candau (2011), Alberti (2012), Macedo e Santos (2023) fundamentam a discussão. A análise das entrevistas revela a luta por um ensino específico, diferenciado, intercultural e bilíngue, que preserve a cultura e a língua do povo indígena Javaé. Os professores Javaé evidenciam um compromisso genuíno com a criação de um ambiente educacional que respeita os saberes de seu povo, preserva suas culturas e língua, e reflete uma abordagem pedagógica que vai além do ensino formal, incluindo objetos de estudo do cotidiano, promovendo interação e relações positivas entre estudantes, professores e a comunidade.

Palavras-chave: história oral; educação bilíngue; educação indígena; Povo Javaé.

INTRODUCTION

Historically, the trajectory of Indigenous peoples in Brazil concerning education is complex and can be divided into three distinct phases. The first phase, known as the pre-colonial period, is characterized by the Indigenous communities' own educational systems, which were based on oral transmission and the preservation of their traditions. The second phase began with the

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Data availability: The materials and data are under the authors' custody. The study was conducted at UnirG, Gurupi, TO, Brasil.



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arrival of European colonizers in the 16th century, marking the start of missionary influence and educational practices tied to Christian values and European culture, often aiming to assimilate Indigenous peoples. The third phase emerged with Brazil's Federal Constitution of 1988, which introduced public policies aimed at valuing and preserving Indigenous cultures and languages, as well as implementing an intercultural, differentiated, and bilingual school education system tailored to the specific needs of Indigenous communities.

The Brazilian Federal Constitution (Brasil, 1988) in Article 210 establishes minimum content for elementary education to ensure a common basic education while respecting national and regional cultural and artistic values. Paragraph 1 ensures that religious education, which is optional, will be part of the regular curriculum in public elementary schools. Paragraph 2 guarantees that regular elementary education will be taught in Portuguese, while Indigenous communities are ensured the use of their native languages and their own learning processes. It is evident that the Constitution's provisions bring Indigenous people into education and learning processes on an equal footing, ensuring the appreciation of Indigenous languages, knowledge, and traditions, thereby promoting intercultural, differentiated, and bilingual educational processes.

In this context, based on the narratives of teachers from the Kanoano village, the present study seeks to address the following question: How do the educational processes, emphasizing bilingual Indigenous school education in the Kanoano village, contribute to preserving the Javaé people's culture and identity and influence the continuity of cultural traditions and practices? Thus, this article aims to discuss the educational processes experienced by the Javaé community in the Kanoano village, located on Bananal Island, with a focus on bilingual Indigenous school education.

This study employs the Oral History methodology, defined as "a methodological procedure that seeks, through the construction of sources and documents, to record, through induced and stimulated narratives, testimonies, versions, and interpretations" (Delgado, 2006, p. 15). Based on the principles of Thematic Oral History and through a structured script, the study selected informants who experienced the beginning of schooling at the institution and are involved in the educational processes developed in the school practice. Their narratives, therefore, guided the historical account logically, sensitively, and chronologically.

According to Alberti (2012, p. 5), "historical knowledge is conditioned by the sources we have, or rather, by the questions we ask of the sources we have. There is no other way to approach the past." Ricoeur (1993, p. 68) adds that "to narrate is to tell; it is to value the human. It is to confer order to events, align characters, weave a plot; it is also to transgress the official discourse in search of creation."

These authors emphasize that the construction of historical knowledge is intimately linked to narrative. Historians do not merely extract information from available sources; they also shape them into meaningful narratives that allow us to understand and interpret the past more profoundly and contextually. Historical narrative is, therefore, a fundamental tool for making sense of events and processes, connecting isolated facts into a logical sequence that reveals the complexities and dynamics of human experiences over time.

In this process, the selection of sources, the questions asked, and the organization of events into a coherent narrative play key roles in the production of historical knowledge, as highlighted by Macedo and Santos (2023, p. 39):

Oral History, by giving voice to the excluded—that is, those who in traditional history never even existed—now gains strength, pointing out gaps, confronting, analyzing, and uncovering issues previously hidden, now visualized in the historiographical field.

This approach underscores the importance of critical and reflective analysis, going beyond mere description to provide a broader understanding of historical processes and their implications for the present and future. According to Verena Alberti (2004), oral history methodology is particularly suited for studying the history of memories, that is, representations of the past. Oral History enables the recording of testimonies and access to "stories within history," thus expanding the possibilities for interpreting the past.

The study's informants are teachers at the Tainá Indigenous School, located in the Kanoano village, who share memories of the school's implementation and the bilingual schooling process, including when and how it was introduced in the village. They discuss their roles as Indigenous teachers in transmitting traditional knowledge and promoting school education in language teaching. The interviews explore their experiences and challenges, as well as bilingual education's impact on younger generations and its role in preserving Javaé culture.

Through their narratives, the informants emphasize their importance in the community, not only as formal educators but also as guardians and transmitters of the Javaé culture and language. They highlight the need to balance traditional knowledge with formal school content, fostering an education that respects and values students' cultural identities. Bilingual education is seen as a crucial step in ensuring that future generations continue to value and preserve their cultural heritage.

These accounts reveal how Indigenous school education, especially bilingual education, plays a fundamental role in shaping new generations, enabling them to navigate both the traditional and contemporary worlds. Bilingual education not only facilitates the learning of school content but also strengthens students' self-esteem and cultural identity, contributing to the social and cultural cohesion of the Javaé community.

According to Alberti (2004, p. 31-32),

Oral History as a method emphasizes the importance of starting from the interviewee's place in the group and the meaning of their experience. This research method argues that individuals who participated, experienced, or witnessed facts or situations related to the subject under study can provide relevant, significant, and meaningful testimonies and information.

The author further explains that "the past only 'returns' through the synthesis work of memory: it is only possible to recover lived experiences through the lens of the conceived" (Alberti, 2004, p. 17). Therefore, gathering information from society is not limited to ideas expressed individually or in isolation; it reflects the set of accumulated relationships throughout existence but is intrinsically linked to collective memory and the culture in which the individual is embedded.

Thus, by analyzing these narratives, this study seeks to highlight the persistent struggle for specific, differentiated, intercultural, and bilingual education aimed at preserving the Javaé people's culture and language. The Javaé teachers emerge as true guardians of this legacy, demonstrating an authentic and faithful commitment to creating an educational environment that preserves their people's knowledge and linguistic and cultural traditions.

The pedagogical practices of the Tainá Indigenous School teachers reflect a holistic and inclusive approach, integrating traditional knowledge with formal education and promoting a more meaningful and contextualized education for Indigenous students. Their practices transcend the boundaries of formal teaching, incorporating elements of daily life, fostering meaningful interactions, and building positive bonds among students, teachers, and the community.

In this context, oral history emerges as a significant tool, revealing the resilience of the Indigenous school education at the Tainá Indigenous School, emphasizing the schooling process and strengthening the Javaé students' identity through the school, in pursuit of cultural preservation.

The study was conducted in collaboration with the Observatório de Povos Tradicionais do Tocantins (OPTTINS) research group at the University of Gurupi (UnirG) through the research project "Multi(literacies): Contributions to Teaching," an interinstitutional project of UnirG in partnership with the Federal University of Tocantins (UFT) and the Regional Education Office (SRE) of Gurupi. It is a subproject of the macro-project "The Literacy Process of Javaé Children: A Contribution to Language and Culture Preservation," approved by CONEP under opinion no. 3.926.694.

THE SUBJECTS, THE INSTITUTION, AND THEIR MEMORIES

The study of the history of Indigenous school education is essential to understanding the transformations and challenges faced by these communities over time. In the Brazilian context, the

trajectory of Indigenous school education reflects a complex interplay of different cultures, values, and educational systems. In this sense, analyzing the narratives of Indigenous teachers themselves becomes crucial, as they have directly experienced the educational processes within the villages. In this research, three Indigenous teachers from the Tainá Indigenous School, located in the Kanoano village, were selected. These teachers played a fundamental role in the early stages of schooling at this institution and remain actively involved in the educational processes developed in school practice. Their accounts form a logical, sensitive, and chronologically ordered historical narrative.

Based on the interviews, it is possible to outline the teachers' profiles, highlighting essential information as established in the script, such as their names, ages, degrees, years of service, and connection to the Indigenous community, as shown in [Chart 1](#).

Chart 1. Profile of the Indigenous Teachers Interviewed.

Name	Age	Degree	Years of service
T. J.	54 years	Bachelor's in Cultural Sciences, Specialization in Indigenous Literacy, and Master's in Environmental Sciences	29 years
S. J.	44 years	Bachelor's in Intercultural Indigenous Education	15 years
M. J.	35 years	Bachelor's in Intercultural Indigenous Education	3 years

Source: Interview guide (2024).

When analyzing the profiles of the teachers, it is relevant to highlight that all of them chose to pursue degrees focused on Intercultural Indigenous Education. This choice evidences the commitment of these professionals to the preservation and promotion of the culture and traditional knowledge of the Javaé people.

T.J., for example, holds a degree in Cultural Sciences, which denotes his broad knowledge of the history, traditions, and cultural practices of the Javaé people. Additionally, his specialization in Indigenous Literacy reveals a specific interest in methods and pedagogical strategies adapted to the community's needs. T.J.'s Master's in Environmental Sciences reflects his concern with sustainability and the environment, essential aspects for the survival and well-being of the Javaé community.

Regarding professional experiences and contributions, both S.J., with 15 years of experience, and T.J., with 29 years, bring profound knowledge of the dynamics of intercultural indigenous education and the specific needs of the Javaé community. The extensive professional trajectory of both suggests a continuous and enduring commitment to education and the well-being of the community. M.J., on the other hand, although having a more recent experience of three years, brings with him a fresh and updated perspective, potentially offering new ideas and approaches to educational practice within the community.

To walk the path toward answering the study's objective, it was fundamental to give voice to the teachers residing in this village who work at the Tainá Indigenous School, whose foundation dates back to 1970. T.J., one of the leading indigenous teachers, was present from the very first steps of the school's implementation and shares¹ his memories about this initial period:

The school was implemented in the 1970s, and there were no structures. Literacy was entirely in Iny. Everything was the responsibility of FUNAI. Over time, we all—back then, everyone—

¹ The transcribed interviews underwent a process of reformulation with the aim of making the content clearer and more comprehensible for the readers. This revision included adjustments to the wording to ensure textual cohesion and accuracy in conveying the ideas expressed by the interviewees. It is important to highlight that the modifications made did not alter the original content of the statements, faithfully preserving the meanings and intentions of the interviewees. The goal of the reformulation was to facilitate the reading and interpretation of the texts while maintaining the integrity of the data obtained from the interviews. (Iny – dialect), the indigenous language of the Iny/Javaé peoples is Iny Rybè, which belongs to the Macro-Jê linguistic family. These peoples refer to themselves as Iny, meaning “human being” or “people”. Iny Rybè is the traditional name of the indigenous language, with Iny meaning “people” and Rybè meaning “language”. Matos (2023, p. 34).

*became literate in the indigenous language. The ones teaching were missionaries from Macaúba, like Vanda and Almerinda, who taught complementary lessons in the Tori (non indigenous) language, Portuguese [...]. But in the beginning, **the school was just a small clay-walled, straw-roofed hut**. Right here, where I studied with Dona Teresina. Our teacher was indigenous, and he is still alive. (T.J., 2024, our emphasis).*

In his narratives, he also mentions:

So, FUNAI built this one. FUNAI was from São Félix do Araguaia, not from here at FUNAI, so, from that point on, some Tori (non-Indigenous) came to teach Portuguese, and the Iny people were trained. We didn't have our own people, there was no information about training, about study, it wasn't just during the dictatorship, but back then, people studied and learned for real. During the time of the dictatorship. Even those in the third grade already knew how to write.

However, teacher S.J. describes the event through his mother's words:

No, my mother says that before FUNAI, back in the time of SPI. My mother tells me, right, that they started building a school that wasn't made of straw, right, and then the Indigenous people started studying to learn and speak Portuguese, to write their names, right, and then it passed over to FUNAI. SPI, the Indian Protection Service. (S. J. – 2024).

The teachers' statements refer to the research by Ferreira (2001), who highlights the importance of the 1970s in the history of Indigenous school education in Brazil. During this period, Indigenous education was part of a broader movement for the demarcation of Indigenous lands and the recognition and preservation of ethnic differences. Meetings and discussions arose that systematized demands and proposals, contributing to the formulation of specific legislation regarding Indigenous schools. These debates occurred in a political transition period, at the end of the military dictatorship, which allowed for more active participation from Indigenous peoples in the Constituent Assembly. This historical movement culminated in the promulgation of the 1988 Constitution, which was an important milestone for Indigenous school education, as it recognized and guaranteed their rights and specific needs.

Currently, the school building has a structure comprising six classrooms, an administrative room, a teachers' room, a computer room, a kitchen, a storage room for school food items, and another for teaching materials. The space also includes an internal bathroom and two external full bathrooms, separated by gender, to meet the needs of students and staff.

From a physical infrastructure perspective, the school has undergone significant transformations since the early 1970s. Previously, its configuration was simpler, with a basic rectangular shape. However, today, the building has been completely remodeled, featuring more elaborate and functional architecture. The walls have been reconfigured to create different spaces, which are now equipped with tables, chairs, whiteboards, and include areas such as corridors, entrance halls, and gates. These changes aim to provide a more suitable and welcoming environment for students, teachers, and other members of the school community. As shown in Figure 1.

According to Tocantins (2024), according to data from the School Management System (SGE) in 2024, the school records a total of 128 students enrolled. However, this number represents a reduction compared to the previous year due to dropouts school. As for the teaching staff, the school unit is made up of eight indigenous teachers, who have training ranging from teaching to Master's degrees. In addition, it has two non-indigenous teachers with degrees in Literature and one in Physical Education, contributing to a diverse and qualified team.

Thus, the school environment serves as the main stage for the teachers' narratives, where their contributions and experiences intertwine with formal content, social and emotional interactions. It is a space filled with memories, not only related to the individual journeys of the teachers but also to their childhoods and the struggles they faced to reach the position of educators. In this context, a complex web of unique and meaningful stories unfolds, contributing to shaping the identity and educational mission of the Javaé community.



Figure 1. Tainá Indigenous State School. Source: Author's archive, November 2023.

We did not have, our people did not have that information on training and study. It wasn't just during the dictatorship, but back then, people studied and really learned. During the dictatorship, even those in the third grade already knew how to write. (T.J. – 2024).

I was born here, at the age of 6, 7, and 8 I studied here. The teacher Tewaxi was my teacher at the time. Then my father enrolled me in Fundação Bradesco. Since there were no spots in the second grade, I skipped to the third grade, from second to third, even though I was still doing the second year. I didn't know how to read, and stayed there for 4 years, leaving in the 7th grade. At that time, my parents lived in Formoso. I went there, studied, and in July, I was in the third year of high school, and went to Anápolis where I graduated. Then I came back, worked as a health agent for two or three years, and later I had the opportunity to study outside. I took the entrance exam for UFG, passed, but couldn't go because I had a loan at the time. I didn't want to go because I wanted to pay off my debt. I had to choose between work or college. So I stayed one more year to finish paying my bank debt. Later, I did it again and passed in 2014. (M. J. – 2024).

[...] back in the village, there wasn't an indigenous school, it was more like a settlement. There was a regular school, so I started studying there when I was about 10 years old. Since there was no school there, it was hard to come here to the São João village island. I came here and started studying. I was in the fourth grade. I did the fourth grade here at Kanoano School. [...] I started studying here in 1993. I started studying here, right? I did the fourth grade here in '93. (S. J. – 2024).

When analyzing the teachers' narratives, it is clear that, despite the different circumstances faced by each of them, all share similar experiences of overcoming educational challenges. The lack of proper schools in their communities is a common obstacle they had to face, yet their perseverance in seeking access to education was a determining factor that drove not only their personal growth but also their professional development. These experiences of overcoming and resilience demonstrate the indigenous teachers' commitment to promoting education in their communities and highlight the transformative role that education can play in people's lives. Undoubtedly, as teachers, they have the privilege not only of transmitting knowledge but also of inspiring and helping other students overcome challenges similar to those they faced. Additionally, they have the important mission of fighting for cultural preservation through the students' learning, aiming to reflect the complexities of community life within the school.

By sharing their own experiences and stories of overcoming, the indigenous teachers not only enrich the educational environment but also strengthen the connection between formal education and the cultural traditions of their community. In this way, they play a key role in the construction of a more inclusive, intercultural, and meaningful education for everyone involved.

NARRATIVES OF JAVAÉ TEACHERS: EXPERIENCES, LIVED REALITIES, AND CHALLENGES

According to Brasil (1998), the question arises about how to decolonize the indigenous school and how to evaluate whether the new legislation, which proposes a community-based, intercultural, bilingual, specific, and differentiated indigenous school, has been effectively experienced by indigenous peoples, in this case, the Javaé ethnicity. In this sense, the narratives of indigenous teachers provide a clear and detailed view of the historical trajectory of the educational processes developed at the Tainá Indigenous School, as well as the impacts and meanings in the preservation of the Javaé culture and identity. By sharing their experiences and challenges, these teachers offer many insights into the progress and obstacles faced on the path toward a more inclusive, intercultural education that aligns with the needs and values of indigenous communities.

When reflecting on their trajectories, the indigenous teachers of Javaé highlight the community's perception of education and the school, reflecting an interaction between cultural values, practical needs, and aspirations for the future. Teacher T. J. says,

[...] looking at the indigenous people of our tribe, I think I'll speak generally. Nowadays, it arises that culture is dynamic, language is dynamic, and our coexistence. There's been a lot of change, right? What about our use of language? Languages, right? Our daily life is always in Portuguese. And, looking at the community, it encourages its children to learn Portuguese. And to register these times now, to register, understand their own language, they cannot lose their cultures, because some cultures, some languages, have already been lost, right? So, in this part, the community is looking at it. (T.J. – 2024).

This perception is also evidenced in the speech of teacher S. J. (2024):

Look, some people say that the children intend to learn Portuguese, right? Because we indigenous people have a lot of difficulty speaking Portuguese correctly, right? Then some people say they have to compete, for example, in a competition, any contest in the city, compete with non-indigenous people, right, to be equal, right? But some, like older people, say that the important thing is the indigenous language, which is the identity, right, of the people, of the people themselves.

Still on the topic, the teacher continues:

And if we look at the past, when there was no school, the educational practices regarding culture were based on oral tradition, right, you taught orally, right. And how is it now? It's about the curriculum, methodologies, educational practices within the classroom, the application of this culture. (S. J. – 2024).

The interview excerpts reveal unique conceptions of interculturality, in which indigenous communities are developing their own perspectives and approaches to promote dialogue and exchange between different cultures within the educational context. This movement reflects a search for pedagogical methods that incorporate and value the cultural diversity present in indigenous communities. Among the methodologies incorporated into the curriculum as educational practices during this movement of change, approaches like intercultural pedagogy stand out, which recognizes and respects traditional knowledge and the forms of knowledge of indigenous peoples, and bilingual education, which promotes teaching and learning in the native languages of the communities, alongside the official language of the country. These methodologies aim not only to preserve and strengthen the cultural identity of indigenous peoples but also to promote a more inclusive, contextualized, and meaningful education for students.

According to Candau (2011, p. 246),

It is not easy to implement a change movement, but it is necessary, because there is no way to think of another way of conceiving cultural diversity if we do not accept that these differences are constitutive parts of individuals and social groups and, for this very reason, they cannot configure homogeneous realities, because they are dynamic constructions and deconstructions that are shaped in social relationships and are crossed by issues of power.

The educational processes, guided by teachers and supported by various methodologies, play an essential role in the holistic development of students. The way teachers plan and implement their lessons, interact with students, and adapt their practices to meet the individual needs of each student has a profound impact on their learning and development. Indigenous education at the Tainá Indigenous School is a clear example of this, where teachers not only teach formal content but also incorporate cultural and traditional elements into their pedagogical practices.

These educational processes are fundamental in promoting an education that respects and values the cultural identity of students. By using intercultural and bilingual methodologies, teachers ensure that students have access to an education that integrates academic knowledge with traditional wisdom. This approach allows students to develop a sense of belonging and pride in their culture while also preparing them for the challenges of the contemporary world.

Furthermore, the constant interaction between teachers and students creates a collaborative and supportive learning environment. The adaptability of teachers to meet the individual needs of students demonstrates a commitment to inclusive and equitable education, essential for the full development of students. In this way, the educational processes at Tainá Indigenous School not only transmit knowledge but also build bridges between the past and the future, preserving Javaé culture while preparing young people for a constantly changing world.

In this context, this concern is observed in the speech of the three teachers during their daily classroom activities. T.J., for example, incorporates interculturality into his lessons and uses the native language to emphasize the importance of both oralizing and using the code of that language through writing. Interculturality in this teacher's Javaé lessons not only facilitates comprehension of the content but also strengthens students' cultural identity. By incorporating the native language into school activities, he highlights the relevance of preserving and valuing the native language, promoting bilingual literacy. This pedagogical method helps keep Javaé culture alive and ensures that students develop language skills in both languages, which is crucial for their academic and personal development.

The methodologies we use with our students in the classroom, we show them through drawings, like in Portuguese, right? And our methodology, like in the Iny class, we have to show things, the orality, our history, literacy as well, names of some objects. So, my method is dynamic, music, little games, and that moves the children forward. In fact, as we are indigenous, and I, personally, always use Portuguese day to day. But in my indigenous class, I speak in indigenous, but I always translate the words, the names. In my indigenous class, for the 6th and 8th grades, I speak, translate. Or I work with sounds, where I work with open sounds, only oral. Because some, we work with vowels, and in indigenous vowels, they are not like the vowels of the white people, I think there are 5 vowels, but we have 13 to 14 vowels, we need to know the use, placement of accents, crasis, tilde, right? Where we use them? When do we use them, right? So that's what I do. (T.J – 2024).

T. J.'s practice exemplifies how the educational processes at the Tainá Indigenous School go beyond conventional teaching. They include the integration of cultural and linguistic practices, creating an educational environment that respects the students' culture. By doing so, it not only transmits academic knowledge but also reinforces the importance of culture and identity, preparing students to act in a multicultural and multilingual world. Teacher T. J. clearly emphasizes the importance of the indigenous teacher being a researcher, as it is through research that knowledge is acquired. As stated in his words, the indigenous teacher cannot remain indifferent to what happens both in non-Indigenous society and in their own community.

This perspective highlights the need for a continuous commitment to research and constant updating. For T. J., the role of the indigenous teacher goes beyond merely transmitting knowledge. They must be deeply involved in investigating the cultural, social, and educational

practices that impact their community. By being an active researcher, the indigenous teacher can better identify and understand the needs and challenges faced by their community, develop more effective pedagogical strategies, and promote education that is truly relevant and meaningful for their students.

I always tell myself, because I am an indigenous teacher and researcher. It's very difficult for young people nowadays to engage more, interact more with knowledge. Everyone here is using technology, but as mandatory, mandatory for middle school, they have to teach indigenous knowledge, indigenous cosmology, the indigenous language. I have to speak, explain how it was passed down. I don't always talk about the past, nowadays there's no way for anyone to at least understand, as I have been a teacher for a long time in the classroom, at least understand. Ah, so the past was this. Today, there's no such thing anymore. That's how I work, right? I always explain. (T.J – 2024).

In this context, during a conversation about cultural transmission, teacher T. J. highlighted the importance of not only oral tradition but also formal education. He mentioned using bilingualism as a tool to introduce students to the scientific world. T. J. referred to a research project promoting scientific knowledge through intercultural exchange with students from the Bom Jesus High School in Gurupi, TO. He observed that, when applying the same methodology with his elementary school students, he noticed great enthusiasm and engagement. Therefore, T. J.'s position emphasizes the importance of an education that is both rooted in indigenous culture and open to the outside world. By acting as researchers, indigenous teachers not only preserve and strengthen their own traditions and knowledge but also contribute to a more just and diverse society, where different cultures can coexist and enrich one another.

I have, and particularly, because Professor Valterlan brought his students, kind of an exchange, right, with electives. And I was particularly amazed by their presentation at UnirG. Each student, because that project, the elementary school doesn't do research there. [...] it inspired me a lot as I taught 9th grade Portuguese, and this also inspired the students who produced research. From there, I took those themes about Rio Javaés and my students wrote about it in intercultural Portuguese. They wrote so much, let's do it just like this. You saw there Professor Valterlan's students, they presented to you, now it's your turn. Then they tried, it inspired them a lot. As a teacher, as my student, it was really good. (T.J – 2024).

This account illustrates how integrating cultural and linguistic elements in teaching can enrich the educational process, making it more relevant and stimulating for students. By using the native language and interculturality, T. J. not only preserves the students' cultural identity but also facilitates the understanding and assimilation of scientific concepts, showing that education can and should be a space for the meeting of different knowledges. This method not only motivates students but also paves the way for an inclusive, equitable education that is deeply connected with the life and challenges of the indigenous community.

For the teacher, the indigenous community is beginning to realize that their culture and language are in decline. He observes that there is a continuous effort to balance the preservation of indigenous culture with the need to acquire broader educational skills, such as mastering the Portuguese language and mathematics. This balance is essential but also reveals the challenges faced in this process of integrating different forms of knowledge and expression.

Today, the community encourages its children more to learn Portuguese and math, right? Our language is not as much, but now the community noticed that our culture, our language, is almost, it's already starting, you know, to diminish. They said that, but as a student of Professor Valterlan, it was a much bigger incentive here at school, and my student said to them, 'Look, they produced, did a project just like yours, 9th grade.' Then they succeeded, understood? But our language, Portuguese, you know very well, it's not like your Portuguese, and the Portuguese comes out the way they learned it, so they write it down like an indigenous teacher, in my Portuguese, in my view, it's okay, but a non-indigenous teacher's view is very different. So that's it, now he's in high school. (T.J – 2024).

The teacher emphasizes that, while trying to preserve and revitalize the indigenous language and culture, it is also necessary to ensure that students acquire the skills that will allow them

to participate fully in the broader society. This includes not only learning traditional curricular content but also developing critical and analytical skills that are valued in modern education. These challenges are particularly evident in implementing bilingual and intercultural practices in schools. While it is crucial to teach and value indigenous language and culture, it is equally important to ensure that students are proficient in Portuguese and in scientific and mathematical subjects. This integration process is complex and requires a sensitive and well-planned approach so that cultural identity is not lost while new skills and knowledge are acquired. The teacher emphasizes that, to achieve this goal, a collaborative effort between the community, educators, and public policies that support inclusive and integrative education is essential.

When we address the same issue during the interview with teacher M. J., we observe that she stands out as a literacy teacher using systematic techniques, incorporating scientific methods of syllabication and phonetics.

Well, generally, I work more with syllables, syllabics in the classroom, until then, because the native language teacher also teaches, but there was a different sound and then I try, right, to differentiate that sound even in writing. It's the acute accent they always confuse with the native language accent. (M. J. – 2024).

Professor M. J. uses these methods to facilitate the literacy process, ensuring that her students acquire essential reading and writing skills in an effective and structured manner. She combines the syllabic method, which involves teaching syllables as basic units of reading, with the phonetic method, which focuses on the sound of letters and their combinations. She recognizes the importance of phonetics in learning to read and write. Her approach is not limited to the application of these methods, but also adapts them to the cultural and linguistic needs of the Javaé community.

M. J. works to ensure that, in addition to learning to read and write in Portuguese, her students also maintain and develop the ability to read and write in their native language. She believes that bilingual literacy is crucial for preserving cultural identity and strengthening the self-esteem of indigenous children, allowing these students to develop fundamental decoding skills and recognizing sound patterns in written language, thus facilitating the bilingual literacy process.

The method used by the teacher exemplifies the literacy theory proposed by Soares (2016), in which the learning process is structured around the encoding and decoding of the alphabet through the phoneme/grapheme system. According to Soares, this approach implies that each grapheme (letter) is learned in correspondence with a phoneme (sound). M. J. applies this theory practically in her literacy classes, during which students learn to recognize and associate each letter of the alphabet with its respective sounds. This phonetic-syllabic method allows students to develop a solid understanding of the basic principles of reading and writing, facilitating the transition to textual fluency.

The teacher adapts Soares' principles to respect and incorporate the students' native language, promoting a bilingual learning environment. The emphasis given by this teacher to bilingual literacy, using Soares' theory, reflects a commitment to education that is both pedagogically effective and culturally relevant. This teaching method not only facilitates the acquisition of basic reading and writing skills, but also values and preserves the linguistic and cultural heritage of the students, contributing to a comprehensive education that respects their roots and prepares them for the future.

By using these methods, the teacher seeks to overcome the difficulties identified in the narrative of teacher S. J., as seen below when asked about the challenges of bilingual education.

*We had a meeting here from the 2nd to the 5th grade. It's complicated because it's different. The letter because, for example, the letter 'R' is the sound of 'H', and they get confused, right, in writing, [...]. **The sound, how do you write, for example, Hetohoky, for example, it's written with 'h', right, but some write it with 'R' because it starts with the 'r' sound, right, 'rô', but in writing it's actually with 'H', right, and they get confused with the letter, the sound too.** (S. J. – 2024, our emphasis).*

For Professor M. J., it is important to emphasize that, within the scope of literacy and cultural preservation through the native language, this role is not only the responsibility of the school;

she emphasizes that collaboration between the school, community, and families is crucial to the success of this process. Literacy and cultural preservation are not isolated tasks that can be accomplished solely within the four walls of a classroom. On the contrary, they require a joint and ongoing effort that integrates the experiences and knowledge of community members. The teacher believes that the active participation of parents and grandparents, transmitting stories and oral traditions, as well as incorporating cultural events and festivities into the school curriculum, are essential for keeping the language and Javaé culture alive.

Furthermore, she sees the school as a space of intersection where academic knowledge meets traditional knowledge. In this sense, the school must act as a facilitator that values and promotes indigenous culture while offering a quality formal education. For M. J., this integrated approach not only strengthens the students' cultural identity, but also enriches their learning process, creating an educational environment where indigenous culture is respected and celebrated.

In my view, I believe it doesn't depend just on the teacher, but on the community as a whole, right, the parents, not just the chief, because nowadays they value football more, right, when it comes to culture, they hardly participate, so it really comes from the community. This disadvantage of them wanting to learn to value their own culture. So, the school is there to teach. Of course, the teacher is always there, wanting to give their best, but it really depends on the community and the families. (M. J. - 2024).

Her remarks bring us to the year 1988 with the promulgation of the Constitution, in its Article 227, which stipulates that it is

[...] the duty of the family, society, and the State to ensure, with absolute priority, the right to life, health, food, education, leisure, professionalization, culture, dignity, respect, freedom, and family and community coexistence, in addition to protecting them from all forms of negligence, discrimination, exploitation, and oppression. (Brasil, 1988, p. 148, our emphasis).

Thus, literacy, in a way, begins before school life, is independent of it, and also occurs in daily life and in contact with reading and writing, even if not systematically. In this sense, Soares (2010, p.39) presents the understanding of the word literacy: "[...] the result of the action of teaching and learning the social practices of reading and writing; the state or condition that a social group or individual acquires as a result of appropriating writing and its social practices."

This understanding highlights the importance of a literacy context that transcends the formal classroom and encompasses social practices in everyday life. Professor M. J. integrates this vision into her pedagogical approach, recognizing that daily interactions with the native language and with Portuguese play a crucial role in the students' formation. She observes that continuous immersion in environments where reading and writing are valued and practiced meaningfully helps consolidate formal learning.

The practice of literacy is not limited to the systematic teaching of phonemes and graphemes, but extends to all forms of interaction with writing, such as reading community signs, writing letters, or participating in cultural activities that involve reading and writing. M. J.'s approach demonstrates that, to preserve the Javaé language and culture, it is vital to create a support network involving the family, school, and community.

Professor T. J. emphasizes this importance as a teacher and literacy educator,

[...] as a teacher, I always work in literacy. In literacy, the Portuguese language and also worked in my language, because my first language is maternal, I always spoke. [...], my way of being, using my methods, my students, right, leading them with dynamic games. I work with knowledge and it was like a custom, traditional, in fishing, forms of fishing, Timbó, turtle fishing, hunting, I always, like the use of canoes, bows, arrows, right? Always I speak, traditional farm, mat, clay pots, I talk and rituals too, before it was very lively rituals, nowadays it has weakened everything. (T.J. - 2024).

By illuminating these narratives, one can see the connection between the three teachers in the use of instruments and methodologies in school education for cultural preservation, aligned with the profile of each one. Teacher S. J. often refers to stories told by elders, such as his

mother, grandmother, as well as studies carried out by researchers, integrating indigenous knowledge with scientific context. This is evident in his speech:

When I was around 9 or 10 years old, my mother used to tell stories, right, about nature, myths, stories, legends at night, for example, she would point to the stars, each star has a name, right, meaning, what it is, I have some that are formal. And she would tell a story at night, right, we would lay on the mat and everyone would listen, the grandmother would tell, the grandfather, mother. And now? Nowadays, they learn only in school, only in school. (S. J. - 2024).

This approach allows students to see the relevance and importance of traditional knowledge in the context of contemporary education. S. J. believes that this methodology enriches the students' understanding of the world around them. He emphasizes that integrating indigenous knowledge and scientific knowledge promotes a more holistic and meaningful learning experience.

Therefore, S. J. observes the change in the current scenario, where stories and traditional knowledge are increasingly being replaced by formal teaching in school. He emphasizes the importance of recognizing and valuing both traditional teaching methods and oral narratives in formal schooling. For him, a balance between these two forms of learning can ensure that future generations of indigenous students have access to a complete and integrated education that values their cultural roots and prepares them to face the challenges of the modern world. This approach is evident in his pedagogical practices, in which he incorporates both traditional knowledge and the formal curriculum content. When asked how this happens in his classes, S. J. highlights:

Written, right, writing through drawing, always writing through drawing, making the graphics. Then, in this case, it's just text, they write. I myself work more with drawing, right, I make drawings, then they assemble the text, right, based on the drawing, right, my conversation. [...] The work of Patricia Mendonça opens the idea, right, because our grandfather told her, she wrote in Portuguese, right. Have you seen her thesis? Yes, there is a lot of stuff there, right, sometimes I go in to research, sometimes I print, it even has a map of Ilha do Bananal. Yesterday, I worked with her thesis about Ilha do Bananal, the ancient villages. (S. J. - 2024).

The teacher employs graphic representation, an intrinsic cultural knowledge that originates from the intentionality of the social contexts in which it is embedded, as well as the scientific context constructed by the indigenous community itself.

According to the National Curriculum Guidelines for Indigenous Schools – RCNEI (Brasil, 1998, p. 65), "writing and drawing, for example, serve multiple functions: they record, tell, and recall subjects that may be in Sciences, Mathematics, History, Geography." These areas of study contribute to a comprehensive understanding of reality without the need for fragmentation of the knowledge resulting from this study.

For S. J., both writing and graphic representation play an important role in the identity of the Javaé people. In his classes, the teacher always strives to demonstrate to the students the relevance of mastering this writing in a bilingual manner, especially to integrate them into higher education, such as in the Indigenous Intercultural Degree program, as highlighted in the interview excerpt below.

In this necessary context, because it has to return to the community, I even give an example, I always tell my students like this, there's a student in the degree program at the university, right? And she struggled a lot with writing in the indigenous language. She said to me: Samuel, help me here, I didn't know my language was more important than Portuguese, and now I'm realizing that my language is more important. I laughed, not because when I studied, I didn't care about my language, my dream was always to know Portuguese, now I want to learn my language again, especially the writing, right? Speaking I already knew, but the writing, she didn't know how to write, right. (S. J. - 2024).

The example cited reflects a common reality faced by many indigenous youths who, after undergoing a schooling process that prioritizes the dominant language (in this case,

Portuguese), may feel disconnected or even inferior in relation to their own language and culture. This concern with indigenous schooling and the teaching of the native language is evident in the narratives of the three teachers.

Yes, as I am a teacher, and the students, young children, could be literate in the language like I am. Personally, I look at it this way, but the community's perspective isn't always the same, they want their children to learn literacy in Portuguese, because our language is spoken, right? (T. J. – 2024).

So I always stress this issue of the mother tongue alongside Portuguese, because children, whether they want to or not, Portuguese is difficult at first, imagine the indigenous language [...]. (M. J., 2024).

The difficulty among students? Hmm-hmm. We have, like, the majority of the students, they don't want to, like, participate in the indigenous language class, they say they already know how to speak it, no need to learn. Ah, but the thing is, when they get to high school, for example, or to college, and they need to know how to write, correctly, right, about myths. (S. J. – 2024).

In analyzing the narratives mentioned, it becomes clear that the Javaé indigenous teachers, by expressing their concerns and aspirations, play a fundamental role that goes beyond being mere transmitters of knowledge. They act as cultural and linguistic mediators, integrating local knowledge with formal knowledge. This holistic and intercultural approach is essential in promoting an education that values and preserves the identity and traditional knowledge of the Javaé people, while also preparing students to critically and autonomously engage in the society in which they are embedded.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The methodology of Oral History allowed for revisiting the landscape of cultural diversity in indigenous school education, even redefining the roles of the historical subjects who are protagonists in the schooling process of the Javaé indigenous people, both in their educational aspect and in their classroom daily life.

In this context, discussions emerge about the valorization of the indigenous language and culture, in which the Javaé teachers emphasize the importance of preserving the mother tongue and the cultural traditions of their people. Additionally, they encourage the learning of the Portuguese language, seeking to ensure that students can communicate effectively in different contexts without losing sight of their roots and cultural identity.

Another point highlighted in their narratives is the issue of interculturality in the educational practices of the Javaé teachers, who focus on promoting dialogue and exchange between different cultures. By establishing an educational environment that values and respects cultural diversity, the teachers contribute to a more inclusive education, where different perspectives and experiences are recognized and integrated.

Therefore, there arises the need for adapted educational methodologies. The Javaé teachers seek to tailor their educational practices to the individual needs of students, taking into account local knowledge and the students' experiences. This personalized approach allows students to engage more actively in the learning process, making education more meaningful and relevant to their lives. By integrating local knowledge with formal knowledge, the teachers promote a more contextualized and enriching education. In this sense, the role of teachers as cultural and linguistic mediators establishes a connection between indigenous culture and school education.

The entire process experienced by the Javaé teachers at the Tainá Indigenous School, evidenced through their narratives, reflects the concern with valuing cultural diversity and respecting the specificities and knowledge of indigenous peoples. This approach aligns with the conceptions of other indigenous people who describe the ideal school as a place of enjoyment, where students feel motivated to attend every day and never want to leave. This school is not limited to chairs, whiteboards, and pens, but rather an enriching experience of coexistence

and learning. The use of everyday objects, such as a fish caught from the stream near the community, as a study object exemplifies this experience-centered approach, reflecting the integration of formal knowledge with local realities and wisdom.

The Javaé teachers demonstrate a genuine commitment to creating an educational environment that respects the knowledge of their people and preserves their cultures and language. Their practices reflect a pedagogical approach that transcends formal teaching.

Therefore, the pursuit of achieving specific, differentiated, intercultural, and bilingual education has been arduous, especially in the context of bilingual education. However, the teachers demonstrate an ongoing struggle, emphasizing the urgent need to revitalize educational policies focused on Indigenous School Education. Another relevant aspect is the formation of teachers, as the narratives do not mention, at any point, adequate preparation for these professionals, nor the provision of appropriate teaching materials.

This gap highlights the importance of investing in the training and adequate support for indigenous educators, ensuring that they are equipped to face the unique challenges they encounter in their educational contexts. Thus, it is necessary to recognize that the realization of bilingual and intercultural education goes beyond the mere implementation of policies. It requires a continuous and comprehensive commitment to overcoming language barriers, promoting cultural inclusion, and ensuring the full valorization of indigenous peoples' traditions and knowledge.

This demands not only material resources and adequate infrastructure but also a deep respect for the autonomy and voice of indigenous communities in defining their own educational practices. Only through a collective and coordinated effort involving governments, educational institutions, and indigenous communities can we achieve a true transformation in indigenous school education, thereby ensuring a more inclusive and equitable future for all.

The research reveals the need for educational policies that more robustly support indigenous school education, providing adequate resources and continuous training opportunities for teachers. The Javaé teachers are on the front lines of the fight for an education that is both modern and rooted in their cultural traditions, and their efforts demonstrate that it is possible to create an educational model that respects cultural diversity, promoting both inclusive and intercultural education.

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