

Analysis of the essay prompts submitted by deaf candidates in the 2017 ENEM exam

Análise das proposições de candidatos surdos na redação do ENEM de 2017

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Abstract

Education for disabled people offers different types of provision in mainstream schools and in schools with bilingual approaches, posing challenges to their implementation. In the 2017 ENEM, the essay prompt addressed this issue through the theme “*Challenges for the educational development of deaf people in Brazil*,” giving visibility to discussions about deaf education in the country. This study aims to analyze the propositions presented in essays written by deaf students in response to this theme in the 2017 ENEM. It is a documentary study that uses a corpus of 50 essays produced by deaf candidates. The findings indicate that participants highlighted the need to implement various actions to improve deaf education, such as establishing bilingual schools and producing teaching materials in Brazilian Sign Language (Libras).

Keywords: special education; bilingual education; deafness; text production.

Resumo

A educação de surdos oferece diferentes tipos de atendimento em escolas comuns e em escolas com propostas bilíngues, apresentando desafios para a sua execução. No ENEM de 2017, a redação tratou desse assunto por meio do tema: “*Desafios para a formação educacional de surdos no Brasil*”. Essa temática proporcionou visibilidade para discussões acerca da educação de surdos no Brasil. Esta pesquisa tem como objetivo analisar proposições presentes em redações feitas por estudantes surdos, em relação ao tema, no ENEM de 2017. Trata-se de uma pesquisa documental, tendo como *corpus* uma amostra de 50 redações de candidatos surdos. Verificou-se que os participantes apontaram a necessidade de criação de diferentes ações que visem melhorar a educação de surdos, tais como implementação de escolas bilíngues e a produção de materiais didáticos acessíveis em Libras.

Palavras-chave: educação especial; educação bilíngue; surdez; produção de texto.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout its history, deaf education has been marked by diverse understandings of deafness and distinct methods of educating this population. Since the legal recognition of Libras (Brazilian Sign Language)¹ as a means of communication and expression for the deaf community (Brasil, 2002) and the regulation of deaf education based on Decree 5.626 (Brasil, 2005), the approach described as most pertinent to deaf individuals is bilingual education, considering the right of access to learning through sign language (Martins; Lacerda, 2016). However, deaf education in Brazil has been implemented in a pluralistic manner.

The different ways of implementing bilingual education for deaf people in Brazil have led to a weakened educational background, which can impact the continuity of studies (Martins; Lacerda, 2015).

¹ For this article, we will base our reflections on Libras (Brazilian Sign Language); however, we recognize the existence of other sign languages in the national territory, such as indigenous sign languages, and with that, the diversity of deaf people and deaf communities in Brazil.

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In this context, the education of deaf people, seen as a challenge, gained prominence when it became the essay topic for the 2017 National High School Exam (ENEM), the year the exam was first offered in Brazilian Sign Language (Libras). The essay topic was “Challenges for the educational formation of deaf people in Brazil” (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira, 2017b, p. 18).

The inclusion of this topic in a nationally relevant exam increased the visibility of Libras (Brazilian Sign Language) and deaf education, as this theme was analyzed and discussed by millions of Brazilian students (Rocha; Lacerda, 2023). This fact enabled analysis of the essays of deaf candidates and the proposals they presented regarding the challenges in their own education.

2017 ENEM essay on the theme “Challenges for the educational formation of deaf people in Brazil.” With this investigation, we seek to contribute to the field of deaf education. In this sense, we consider it fundamental to highlight what the main subjects involved in this process say, that is, the deaf students. Thus, presenting the propositions developed by these students in their essays provides visibility to their experiences and needs.

It is important to highlight those deaf candidates who took the ENEM exam in 2017 experienced, throughout their schooling, the effects of relevant legislation, such as Decree No. 5,626/2005, which establishes guidelines for the education of deaf people, whether in bilingual schools or in regular schools within the public education system, with the presence of sign language interpreters (TILS) (Brasil, 2005). In this context, analyzing their written work is relevant, as it enables a deeper discussion of deaf education in Brazil, highlighting these students’ perceptions of their educational experiences, needs, and proposals to improve this scenario.

Thus, to achieve the purposes of this study, we begin with a theoretical discussion that, in the first subsection of the introduction, presents different forms of educational provision for deaf students in the Brazilian context. In the second subsection, we discussed the concept of Portuguese as a second language (L2) for deaf people. In Section 2, we present the methodological aspects. Section 3 is dedicated to the results and discussions, in which we present the organization of the data based on the indicators and the core meanings, and in the discussions, we analyze the propositions elaborated by deaf candidates in the 2017 ENEM essay, allowing reflections on the aspirations of this public for their educational formation. Finally, the work concludes with a set of final considerations.

Deaf education in Brazil: different “appearances”

Throughout history, the education of deaf people has been shaped by different conceptions of how this population should be taught, even being denied at times (Lacerda, 1998). However, achieved through resistance movements of the deaf community, the right to bilingual education is guaranteed in Brazilian legislation (Brasil, 2005, 2021).

Despite the progress, numerous challenges persist in the education of deaf people. Among them, we can highlight that, even with the guarantee of access to education, this provision has been carried out in very diverse ways. On this point, Lacerda, Albres and Drago (2013, p. 78) state that “deaf people have diverse needs and conditions, and that the social inclusion of these individuals, concerning education, can take on different forms”.

A quality education program for deaf people should be structured with sign language as the central focus, and should include bilingual professionals in the school – teachers, sign language instructors, and sign language interpreters (Lodi; Lacerda, 2009; Lacerda; Albres; Drago, 2013).

According to Decree No. 5,626/2005, bilingual education schools or classes are those in which Libras (Brazilian Sign Language) is the language of instruction, and Portuguese is taught as a second language (L2) in written form. They must be offered in bilingual schools and/or classes, with bilingual teachers, in early childhood education and the initial years of elementary school, so that Libras is the language of instruction. In the final years of elementary school, high school, and/or vocational education, bilingual education may be mediated by the presence of sign language interpreters (TILS) in regular or bilingual schools, and by teachers’ awareness of the... The linguistic uniqueness of deaf students (Brasil, 2005). It is worth noting that, recently,

Bilingual Education for the Deaf was included in the Law of Guidelines and Bases (LDB) as a specific teaching modality (Brasil, 2021). However, in practice, schools or classes serving deaf students are organized in different ways, not always as specified in the legislation.

2022 School Census (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira, 2023): data on students with special educational needs. The data show that 17,141 deaf students and 37,625 deaf students are enrolled in regular classes, while 3,558 deaf students and 2,642 deaf students are enrolled in exclusive classes. This data reveals that the majority of deaf and hard-of-hearing students are enrolled in regular classes, while a minority of this population is served in exclusive classes. This data is shown in Figure 1 from INEP (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira, 2023) on the enrollment of deaf and hard-of-hearing students.

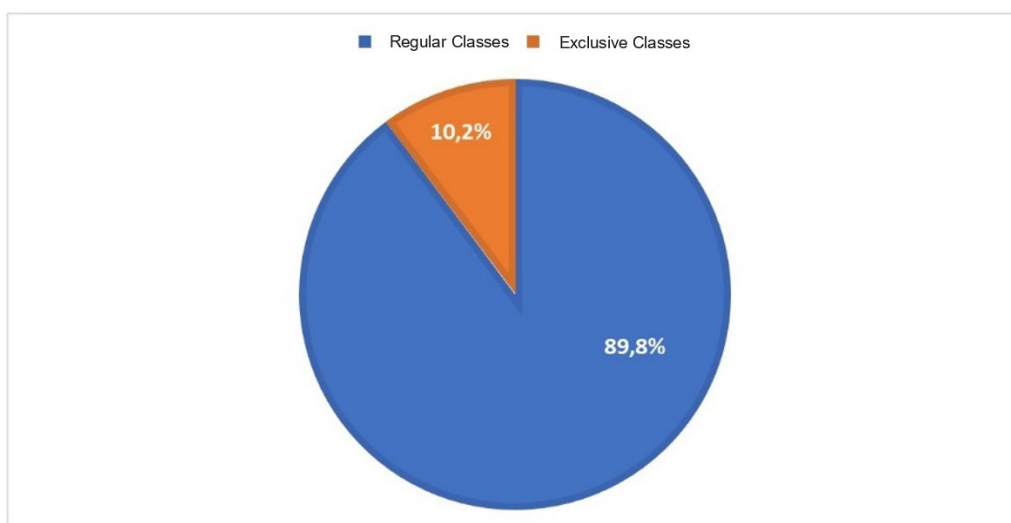


Figure 1. Enrollment of deaf and hard-of-hearing students. [[Q1:Q1]]

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira (2023).

Regular classes, in which 89.8% of deaf/hard-of-hearing students are enrolled, include students with and without disabilities (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira, 2023). In this context, however, the TILS (Translator and Interpreter of Sign Language), who would translate the content, is not always present; on the other hand, some students identify as hearing-impaired but do not use sign language. Thus, despite the presence of TILS in the legislation, they are sometimes not implemented in practice (Moura; Leite; Martins, 2017). Furthermore, pedagogical strategies depend on teachers who need to be attentive to the linguistic uniqueness of deaf students, which is not always the case. This type of service offered to deaf students, even when the school content is translated into Libras (Brazilian Sign Language), does not provide full interaction in Libras, since the language of instruction in the classroom is Portuguese (Lacerda, 2006; Lodi; Luciano, 2009; Turetta; Lacerda, 2018). This approach to including deaf students is problematic and has been criticized by researchers in the field, especially when applied in Early Childhood Education and Elementary School 1.

In early childhood education, this approach is questionable, since children often lack knowledge of Libras (Brazilian Sign Language), thereby limiting their learning to interpretation-mediated activities, which are based on orality and prevent full participation in these proposals (Martins; Lacerda, 2016). However, for the following levels of education (Elementary School 2, High School, and Higher Education), the presence of a TILS (Interpreter of Libras) may be appropriate, provided that the specific needs of deaf students are considered (Belém, 2010; Pereira, 2013; Schefer; Furnival; Lacerda, 2022). Even in these spaces, it is sometimes possible to find proposals for teaching Portuguese as a second language (L2), with a bilingual teacher specifically designated for this task (Carvalho; Lacerda, 2012).

Exclusive classes, in which a minority of deaf/hard-of-hearing students are enrolled—10.2% (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira, 2023)—are characterized by schools for deaf students and by exclusive classrooms in mainstream schools. Deaf students staff these spaces, and the professional staff is frequently bilingual in Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) and Portuguese/Portuguese and/or Libras as their first language (L1). In these spaces, sign language stands out as the language of instruction in the classroom. Within this context of exclusive classrooms, there are bilingual education proposals for deaf people in mainstream schools. In early childhood education and elementary school (1st-5th grades), multi-grade classrooms, bilingual teachers, and instruction in Libras (Brazilian Sign Language) are common. This generally occurs because there are insufficient numbers of deaf students to form a school for deaf students (Lacerda; Santos; Martins, 2016).

According to Martins and Lacerda (2016, p. 164), bilingual education allows “the use of two languages with the same proportion of usage, in this case, Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) and Portuguese (written modality).” Through a bilingual approach, deaf students have the opportunity to develop as subjects through sign language. Furthermore, the construction of this bilingual space is designed to promote the development of deaf students through activities that value Libras and the written modality of Portuguese, and that are meaningful to deaf students.

Regardless of the teaching model adopted in the education of deaf people, the authors Lacerda, Albres and Drago (2013, p. 67) emphasize that “any pedagogical action needs to consider their [the deaf person’s] linguistic condition and offer Libras [Brazilian Sign Language] as a form of access”. In this way, the linguistic uniqueness of the deaf student should be a fundamental factor in building a school that promotes quality education.

Thus, deaf education in Brazil is not uniform, as it is implemented differently across localities according to each locality’s educational management. This fact is mentioned by Nascimento and Moriconi (2022, pp. 130-132):

It is necessary to highlight the notable divergence in the interpretation and understanding of national laws by public administrators regarding the concept of bilingual education for deaf people, since, according to the actual possibilities of the municipalities and the state, the education of deaf people is implemented in different ways, which is directly reflected in the school education of the individuals involved.

Therefore, Brazilian educational legislation is interpreted differently regarding the education that deaf students should receive. As a result, public school administrators implement distinct types of services for deaf students, leading to different school experiences that may contribute more or less to their educational progress.

Writing for the ENEM exam and Portuguese as a second language for deaf people

The ENEM requires the writing of a persuasive essay and includes, among its main elements, a proposal for intervention on the topic presented (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira, 2017a).

The ENEM essay accounts for a significant portion of the candidate’s final grade and is highly relevant to their admission to a public university or other higher education access programs, such as the University for All Program (PROUNI). However, for deaf students, writing the ENEM essay can represent an even greater challenge, since Portuguese is their second language (Lodi, 2004; Peixoto, 2006).

Considering this specific need, INEP established a commission to develop specific criteria for evaluating deaf candidates, intending to make the exam more accessible to this population (Junqueira; Lacerda, 2019). Thus, the essays of deaf candidates are evaluated by a specialized panel, taking into account Portuguese as a second language (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira, 2017a). According to the guide that deals with this specialized correction:

The ENEM (Brazilian National High School Exam) offers specialized essay correction that takes into account the specific linguistic characteristics of deaf and hard-of-hearing

individuals [...] To correct the essays of participants who declare themselves deaf or hard of hearing, evaluators with experience in writing for students with this diagnosis are selected. In addition, they undergo an Evaluator Training Course, complemented by specific training, in which they become familiar with the evaluation criteria and the written productions of these participants. (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira, 2020, p. 4).

The ENEM exam has been accessible in Libras (Brazilian Sign Language), with a version of the exam prepared in this language. In this way, deaf candidates can watch the exam via a video translation into Libras. Regarding this fact, Junqueira and Lacerda (2019, p. 15) state:

The provision of video exams in Libras (Brazilian Sign Language) and exams in Portuguese as a second language does not constitute undue privilege, nor does it violate the equality of the exam. On the contrary, it is a fair, safe, and correct way to ensure rights, guarantee equity, and maintain the equality of the exam.

Thus, as highlighted by the authors, it is understood that the evaluation of writing as a second language (L2) for deaf candidates constitutes a right, which justifies the need to analyze the writing of deaf individuals with a differentiated perspective, given their linguistic uniqueness (Peixoto, 2006; Lodi, 2014; Almeida; Lacerda, 2019).

Learning to write Portuguese for deaf students requires a different approach than teaching the same language to hearing students, considering that “while the hearing student reconstructs the history of their relationship with language through spoken language, the deaf student follows this path guided by sign language” (Almeida; Lacerda, 2019, p. 900). Because they rely on sign language, deaf students often repeat the syntactic structure of Libras (Brazilian Sign Language) when writing in Portuguese. Therefore, their writing may exhibit linguistic features that deviate from the syntactic structure of Portuguese, as Portuguese is considered their L2 (second language) as deaf people.

From this perspective, we emphasize the importance of providing appropriate, differentiated assessments for deaf candidates that take into account their linguistic uniqueness. However, accessibility in the ENEM exam involves not only the test’s objective questions but also the essay. In this test, the candidate must write a discursive-argumentative text, which is evaluated using a specific correction rubric. Among the analysis criteria are the grammar of the Portuguese language, the ability to relate other areas of knowledge to the essay, the ability to argue and defend a point of view, the ability to use appropriate cohesive resources in a text and, finally, the ability to develop a proposal for intervention (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira, 2017a). The proposal for intervention is an important part of writing the ENEM essay. When presented clearly and completely, it accounts for 20 percent of the candidate’s essay grade, or 200 points out of a possible 1,000 (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira, 2017a). Thus, the candidate is expected to write an essay proposal that addresses or mitigates the social problem outlined in the topic.

For this research, we specifically highlight excerpts from the intervention proposals in the essays of deaf candidates. These excerpts will be kept in their original spelling, not to point out errors or successes in writing, but to emphasize the importance of deaf individuals’ protagonism in their educational development.

METHOD

This study is characterized as documentary research, conducted using primary sources (Marconi; Lakatos, 2003). Furthermore, due to the limited exploration of the theme of “ENEM and deaf people,” this research is characterized as an exploratory study (Gil, 2008).

As a data source, we relied on digitized and anonymized copies of 50 essays from students who took the first ENEM exam in Libras (video exam), with the essay topic “Challenges for the educational formation of deaf people in Brazil”.

To select the essay templates from the 50 essays, microdata from the 2017 ENEM (National High School Exam) were used and analyzed in R. Students who took the “green” exams, available in Libras (Brazilian Sign Language), were considered. The essay templates were randomly selected and spanned scores from 0 to 980. Access to the material was granted by the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP) for research purposes. This is the same sample used in the research conducted by Rocha and Lacerda (2023), but with different analytical focuses and without the text analysis software employed in that research.

This study aims to qualitatively analyze essay samples. Regarding document selection, we read all the essays in their entirety and, to support the analysis, applied inclusion and exclusion criteria aligned with the research objective.

As an inclusion criterion, the research included essays that presented at least one proposal to address the problem, namely, the challenges in the education of deaf people in Brazil. As exclusion criteria, we discarded blank texts, texts that deviated from the essay topic, texts that presented proposals without outlining at least one action, illegible texts, and texts that presented proposals with copies of the motivating texts.

Regarding the intervention proposal, the Participant's Guide provides information on what it should contain. This material establishes that the intervention proposal (proposal) should reflect the participant's world knowledge, including the exposition of the intervention action on the proposed theme, as well as the social actor that makes the action executable (individual, family, community, social, political, governmental, and global) and the means of acting and its possible effect (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira, 2017a). Furthermore, according to this material, the candidate is advised to “avoid vague or overly generic proposals; seek more concrete actions, more specific to the theme and consistent with the development of their ideas” (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira, 2017a, p. 24).

It is worth noting that, in this study, we considered essays that presented a proposition outlining at least one proactive or interventional action. This is justified because the participant's guide instructs the candidate to develop an intervention proposal that answers the question: “What can be presented as an intervention proposal for the problem addressed by the theme?” (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira, 2017a, pp. 24-25). Thus, a selection was made from the analyzed essays that highlight proactive actions, provided they indicate an action to be taken to modify a given reality, in this case, the challenges of deaf education in Brazil. These proposals were selected from any part of the text, considering that, although they are more common in the conclusion, they can also appear in the introductory and development paragraphs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The organization of the propositions present in the essays of the deaf candidates was carried out through the proposed analysis of meanings present in discourse. In this proposal, developed by Aguiar and Ozella (2013), the data are organized into meaning nuclei. From this analytical perspective, pre-indicators must be developed, defined as “speech fragments composed of articulated words that make up a meaning” (Aguiar; Ozella, 2013, p. 309). Subsequently, based on these pre-indicators, indicators are developed that aggregate the previously elaborated categories, organized according to the similarity or complementarity of the collected data. The next step is the elaboration of the nuclei of meaning, which aim to synthesize the ways of thinking, feeling, and acting of the subjects. Finally, these nuclei of meaning are analyzed “in the light of the historical social context [and] in the light of theory” (Aguiar; Ozella, 2013, p. 311).

Applying this data analysis methodology, we read a sample of the 2017 ENEM essays written by deaf candidates, extracted the passages that presented proactive actions, and organized the pre-indicators. Then, based on further readings and seeking to synthesize the highlighted passages, we organized the indicators by similarity and/or complementarity. Finally, to organize and create the core meanings, we articulated similar and complementary content, as shown in Chart 1.

Chart 1. Organization of Indicators and Core Meanings.

Indicators	Core meanings
1) Interaction with colleagues	1) Deaf people's perception of themselves 2) Proposals for the educational development of deaf people
2) Raising public awareness	
3) Mobilization of the deaf community	
4) Family involvement	
5) Linguistic accessibility	
6) Bilingual Education	
7) Training of education professionals	
8) Production of teaching materials in Libras (Brazilian Sign Language)	
9) Creation of public policies	
10) Raising public awareness through government action	

Source: Prepared by the authors based on research data.

We found 79 propositions in the essays, considering that some presented more than one proactive action. We highlight that, of the 50 essay templates analyzed, 2 were blank and 4 did not include a proactive action. We consider this number significant, as 44 of the analyzed essays included some form of proactive action.

Below, we present excerpts from the essay prompts of deaf candidates in the 2017 ENEM exam, which we consider most relevant for explaining the core meanings (Deaf people's perception of themselves and Proposals for the educational development of deaf people) and for facilitating analysis.

Senses and meanings based on the core meanings

In this section, we highlight the perceptions of deaf candidates that underlie desires that permeate their social, cognitive, and affective constitution, manifesting as observations about their needs. Furthermore, we will present, in italics, excerpts with proposals for interventions to address the challenges that permeate the educational development of deaf people.

We begin with the indicator "Family Participation," which presents excerpts from deaf candidates' perceptions that clearly appeal to their families to be more present in their daily lives.

Essay 37: *It is necessary to learn how to communicate in education; studying more is difficult for those who do not know Brazilian Sign Language (Libras).*

Essay 45: *Families also need to understand their deaf children and should send them to deaf schools, as well as introduce them to friends and various teams at the association. There are also celebrations on Deaf Day.*

The family is the first social nucleus and plays an important role in a person's overall development. In the case of deaf individuals from hearing families, the active participation of this nucleus in the development and understanding of deafness's uniqueness necessarily involves knowledge of and interaction through sign language. However, research on daily communicative interactions between hearing families and deaf children indicates a predominance of spoken Portuguese, gestures, mime, and, more frequently, bimodality (spoken and sign language) (Cappellini; Santos, 2020). The authors emphasize the need to highlight with families the possibility of using Libras (Brazilian Sign Language) and to avoid situations that may surface feelings of guilt and inadequacy.

In this context, the school is configured as a support space not only for students, but also for their families. In schools that develop an inclusive bilingual education proposal for deaf students, the provision of training activities in Libras (Brazilian Sign Language) and support for students' families can and should be carried out (Lodi; Lacerda, 2009; Cappellini; Santos, 2020).

Still addressing the theme of social interactions, we present excerpts from the "Interaction with peers" indicator that highlight deaf people's desire to form friendships in the school environment. The school is the social space that provides new interactions and possibilities for coexistence with others, becoming a privileged and significant place for overall development and an essential part of the constitution of the individual.

Essay 3: *Difficulties not only with teachers, but also with classmates, where the vast majority believe that deafness is contagious; the student ends up isolating themselves.*

Essay 4: *The importance of friends in communication.*

Essay 28: *New friendships among listeners are important.*

Essay 38: *It is important to stay in touch with other friends at school.*

Essay 50: *I want [name omitted], friends.*

Even though they speak a different language, we notice that deaf people repeatedly express interest in developing friendships with other hearing people. In schools with a bilingual, inclusive approach, one of the main objectives is to provide linguistic peers for deaf students, since social interaction is fundamental to their linguistic, psychological, and subjective development (Lodi; Lacerda, 2009). In addition to providing deaf peers, another objective of the bilingual inclusive school is to ensure that sign language and knowledge of the deaf community circulate among hearing students and professionals, increasing the likelihood of contact between deaf and hearing people.

On this point, Lodi (2014, p. 168) states that, in order to develop language, "we must be in relation with others who use a language that is accessible to us – in the case of deaf children, sign language." However, not all deaf people attend schools with this type of approach, which leads to the isolation of deaf students due to limited access to full interaction with hearing classmates who do not know Libras (Brazilian Sign Language).

This context of exclusion is recurrent, as we can observe in other discourses of deaf individuals. For example, Silva, Medeiros and Schwengber (2023) analyze the account of a deaf child named Manuela, who reports feeling very isolated at school and that her classmates do not understand her, hindering her learning and school development. In this regard, according to the authors, "we can see that it is not only Manuela who experiences/lives with fragile communication and also feels/is isolated in school spaces" (Silva; Medeiros; Schwengber, 2023, p. 17). Because of this, mainstream classes often condone the exclusion of deaf students, placing them in the same environment but failing to promote effective actions for their inclusion.

In order to solve the difficulties of interaction between deaf and hearing people at school, possible actions emerge from the essays of deaf candidates, such as "Creation of public policies," which we highlight below:

Essay 12: *All educational institutions must teach students to learn Libras (Brazilian Sign Language), as a way to include all deaf people daily.*

Essay 49: *Schools and universities should incorporate this language [Brazilian Sign Language - Libras] into their curricula so that all students know how to communicate with and help a deaf person.*

Essay 29: *We need inclusion that goes beyond simply being an interpreter in the classroom.*

Even while acknowledging the role of interpreters in communication, deaf people feel the need for a means to establish direct relationships, thereby minimizing linguistic barriers in the educational context. Thus, deaf candidates propose learning Libras (Brazilian Sign Language). In this direction, the idea is that more people, including schoolmates, learn sign language to expand the possibilities of communication, even at a basic level, with deaf students. It is proposed that schools include Libras as a subject in their curriculum, thereby improving linguistic accessibility and promoting greater interaction with hearing peers.

In the context of higher education, Libras (Brazilian Sign Language) is included in the mandatory curriculum of teacher training and speech therapy courses, as stipulated by Decree No. 5,626/2005. One year after the publication of this decree, Libras should be implemented as an elective subject in other higher education courses (Brasil, 2005). In the context of basic education, draft laws aim to make Libras a mandatory subject in the curriculum (Macedo; Nunes; Benevides, 2020). As deaf candidates pointed out in the ENEM (National High School Exam), this would be a valid proposal to improve communication between deaf and hearing students in the school environment. However, such draft laws, if implemented, must be carried out in a way that promotes the teaching of Libras as a second language for hearing people, adopting teaching strategies and methodologies appropriate to this audience. Otherwise, we run the risk of having yet another curricular subject in which the student completes their studies without having the minimum necessary knowledge, as already happens with the teaching of English in basic education (Barcelos, 2019).

Following the movement to promote knowledge within the hearing society about the context of deaf individuals, in the "Society Awareness" indicator, we present the following excerpts from the essays:

Essay 06: *Deaf people need respect.*

Essay 18: *A collective effort towards the acceptance of difference in social relations.*

Essay 20: *People need to understand deaf people; communication is not easy for those who do not know sign language.*

Article 47: *Celebrating Blue September is important.*

Essay 50: *I want a blue school.*

The excerpts from essays 06, 18, and 20 point to the difference 'of being deaf' and to the fact that knowing it is necessary for the other/hearing person to respect this way of being when participating in social interactions, and can also contribute to the acceptance of this difference as an integral part of society. In this sense, from a socio-anthropological point of view, 'being deaf' is seen as a cultural difference characterized mainly by linguistic singularity—sign language (Skliar, 1997).

Following the same line of thought, in excerpts from essays 47 and 50, the candidates highlight the desire and importance of disseminating knowledge about deaf individuals, citing 'Blue September', marked by various celebrations for the deaf community, including National Deaf Day (September 26), as an opportune moment for raising public awareness.

In schools and/or classes with educational programs for deaf people, activities in September raise their visibility, informing and educating the school community through lectures, sign language workshops, and presentations led by deaf students. In this way, we understand the desire expressed in the excerpts, highlighting 'Blue September' as a space that allows the deaf community to take on a protagonist role and to share their way of being, interacting, and living socially with hearing people.

Regarding raising public awareness about deaf people through government intervention, the following actions are proposed:

Essay 25: *The government should invest in awareness campaigns about deaf people.*

Essay 32: *Schools and colleges hold lectures and discussions with the participation of a speech therapist.*

Essay 48: *It is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education to provide educational content in schools that demonstrates that there are no differences between a deaf person and a hearing person.*

These excerpts address promoting advertising and lectures to reduce prejudice against deaf people. According to the participants, this should be done by the government, more specifically by the Ministry of Education. From this perspective, according to Ribeiro (2019), it is necessary to overcome invisibility in order to act upon it. Therefore, deaf education must have a space for discussion in schools and other formative environments. In this way, more people will understand that the difference between deaf and hearing people lies mainly in the language they use, not in their potential. In this sense, by saying that “there are no differences between a deaf person and a hearing person,” we understand that the participant defends the idea that everyone is equal in rights and potential, thereby demystifying the discourse that deaf people are incapable or inferior to hearing people.

Regarding the pursuit of rights that provide the deaf community with equal opportunities in society, we find passages that emphasize the need to mobilize the deaf community. Below, we present some of these proposals:

Essay 34: *We need to fight for our rights.*

Essay 42: *We must fight to ensure deaf people live safely, with fewer limitations in Brazil.*

Essay 9: *Opinion: Now, deaf people are trying to fight for education; studying is important, very good, and also fighting for the opportunity to have choices: studying, profession, and work.*

These excerpts highlight the deaf community's struggle for educational rights. For decades, this basic right was denied to this community. Because of this, deaf candidates participating in the ENEM (National High School Exam) understand the relevance of mobilization in the fight for these rights. The rights achieved so far, the most recent being the inclusion of bilingual education for deaf people as a modality in the Law of Guidelines and Bases (LDB), were achieved through the struggles of the deaf community (Brasil, 2021).

One of the candidates also emphasizes the need to fight for deaf people to have the freedom to make their own choices in studies and work. Due to linguistic and attitudinal barriers, deaf people face difficulties accessing certain academic programs and the job market. When pursuing higher education, these students may not have a sign language interpreter present, making it impossible for them to access course content. Even after graduating, they are subject to employers who deny job opportunities because they do not believe in their abilities. Therefore, it is essential to promote measures that make the academic and work environment more accessible and less ableist for the deaf community. The proposals from the deaf candidates addressing linguistic accessibility mainly point to the presence of a sign language interpreter, as evidenced below:

Essay 07: *Ensuring the presence of an interpreter and/or an aide is necessary in current educational institutions.*

Writing 10: *Each interpreter must interpret their area of expertise so that deaf people can understand it.*

Based on Decree No. 5,626/2005, the presence and work of Libras/Portuguese Language interpreters (TILSP) became one of the ways to guarantee access and inclusion of deaf people

in basic education (Brasil, 2005). With this legal achievement for the deaf community, the demand for TILSP professionals increased; however, this higher-education-level training is still a recent practice (Duarte; Cruz; Faria, 2021).

Even more precarious is the training of Libras (Brazilian Sign Language) translators and interpreters for work in different areas. It is observed that, for example, to translate or interpret content from the exact sciences, the professional needs to have a minimum knowledge of the subject to be able to perform quality work. This point is suggested in essay prompt 10, in which the candidate opines that each interpreter should interpret the discipline of their training so that the deaf person can better understand the content. However, given the precariousness of Libras interpreter training and the demand for these professionals, especially in education, this action faces several barriers to implementation.

Taking into account the possibilities that current society offers through technological advancements, especially those related to communication, the following excerpts from the essays demonstrate that deaf people consider technologies as resources that can mediate their interactions with other people—both deaf and hearing—beyond educational purposes.

Article 23: *More internet technologies for deaf people.*

Editorial 45: *More is needed, and videoconferencing is needed everywhere.*

Regarding the use of the internet and information and communication technologies (ICTs) that bring linguistic accessibility to deaf people, the use of video calls and applications/platforms for simultaneous translation of Libras (Brazilian Sign Language) stands out, making communication possible between deaf people and hearing people who are not users of sign language (Gori; Corrêa; Galon, 2020).

Still referring to technologies for accessibility for deaf people, we can relate them to proactive actions that highlight the need to create accessible teaching materials for deaf students, as evidenced below:

Essay 01: *I read Libras (Brazilian Sign Language). I do not have school; studying is difficult, and I do not understand.*

Essay 29: *It is interesting to note that we have very little in inclusive schools: material for teaching Libras (Brazilian Sign Language).*

Essay 32: *It is the responsibility of the federal government to improve assistive technologies [...] such as video lessons in LIBRAS (Brazilian Sign Language) with educational content.*

The excerpt from Essay 01, regarding the lack of textbooks, points to a problem: some textbooks in Libras (Brazilian Sign Language) already exist, but this material may not reach all schools with deaf students. The government's action, through the National Textbook Program - Libras, aims to provide textbooks accessible to the linguistic specificities of deaf students (Brasil, 2023). However, these materials pose accessibility problems, underscoring the need to consider deaf individuals in their development (Lima, 2018). Furthermore, given the visual-gestural modality in which Libras is inscribed, the most appropriate teaching material for deaf students would be video, which allows for the recording and exploration of sign language, thus respecting the linguistic uniqueness of this population (Kawase; Costa; Lacerda, 2021).

Bilingual education (Brazilian Sign Language/Portuguese) occupies a significant space in the written proposals submitted by deaf candidates in the ENEM essay, as can be seen in the following excerpts:

Essay 10: *The government needs to support accessibility for deaf people. It starts at school: bilingual education from an early age.*

Essay 19: *Bilingual education [...] Brazil Libras, wishing you a happy education.*

Essay 23: *Brazil is an important bilingual school that offers instruction in language 1 (Brazilian Sign Language) and language 2 (Portuguese).*

Essay 29: *It would be good if the teaching of Libras (Brazilian Sign Language) were incorporated into the literacy education of deaf people, along with the Portuguese language, in its written form.*

Essay 35: *Could teach at a bilingual school for deaf students.*

Essay 38: *Bilingual education in Portuguese as a first language and sign language as a second: learning and developing communication skills for deaf students at school.*

Essay 42: *Bilingual individuals should be encouraged to develop the ability to learn content for deaf people who are entering the world to succeed in life.*

Essay 47: *Schools have deaf students who need bilingual education.*

We identified at least 8 essays that address proactive actions in bilingual education for deaf students. These statements indicate that, for these participants, bilingual education occupies a significant place among the actions to be implemented to address the challenges of their educational development. This is justified because in bilingual schools, sign language is used as the first language and Portuguese as the second, taught in its written form. In this way, the linguistic specificities of deaf students are addressed, making the school environment accessible to this community.

Furthermore, it is noticeable that, in essays 19 and 42, bilingual education is associated with the happiness and success of deaf students. These candidates understand that offering bilingual education in Libras (Brazilian Sign Language) and Portuguese results in the full development of deaf individuals, leading to satisfaction and the possibility of a promising future. However, deaf students attending bilingual schools are a minority (only 10.2%), whereas the majority (89.8%) are enrolled in mainstream schools/classrooms, according to data from the School Census (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira, 2023). Regarding this, one of the motivating texts in the 2017 ENEM essay prompt already highlighted the enrollment factor between 2011 and 2016.

Despite being a right guaranteed by Brazilian law (Brasil, 2005), bilingual education is still not offered to all deaf students. We also observe a negative connotation associated with the provision of bilingual schools for deaf students, as they are labeled “exclusive schools” in the graph. According to Rezende-Curione (2022, p. 106), there are individuals who “insist on mistakenly characterizing Bilingual Schools for the Deaf as spaces of segregation”. Thus, even though the deaf community repeatedly expresses the desire for bilingual education and this is a right, the discourse that these schools are segregating persists.

CONCLUSION

The education of deaf people in the Brazilian context faces several challenges. Given the relevance of this topic, the 2017 ENEM (National High School Exam) proposed deaf people’s educational formation in Brazil as its essay theme. For the essay, candidates are expected to develop a proposal for intervention aimed at mitigating the problem discussed. Considering this specific aspect of the essays, this article proposes to analyze the proactive actions of deaf candidates in the 2017 ENEM essay.

It is worth noting that examining these proposals from deaf candidates increases the visibility of the ideas presented, as these participants have experience with different educational models and, therefore, their suggestions for actions to boost deaf education in Brazil are worth considering. In this way, reviewing their proposals helps us understand the deaf community’s aspirations for quality education.

Additionally, we highlight the need to deepen research on deaf students’ participation in the ENEM (National High School Exam). According to Junqueira and Lacerda (2019, p. 15), these new investigations are important so that “reflection can be deepened and the search for improved forms of accessibility for this public can continue, assuming a paradigm shift.”

Therefore, we argue that deaf education should be built on the effective participation of deaf individuals. Furthermore, research should be conducted to identify actions that can be developed and implemented to provide an education that meets the linguistic needs of deaf students. Such investigations should not ignore what these students say about the type of education they receive, thereby promoting an ongoing debate that is not limited to a topic for an essay in a national exam but also an essential agenda item in public educational policies that aim to promote accessible education for all Brazilians.

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CBFL: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, Project administration, Resources, Review. MBBC: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data visualization, Writing – original draft. EMK: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data visualization, Writing – original draft.

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