

THE “LANGUAGES WITHOUT BORDERS” PROGRAM AS AN EDUCATIONAL PUBLIC POLICY

O PROGRAMA IDIOMAS SEM FRONTEIRAS COMO POLÍTICA PÚBLICA EDUCACIONAL

EL PROGRAMA “IDIOMAS SEM FRONTEIRAS” COMO POLÍTICA PÚBLICA EDUCACIONAL

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ABSTRACT: The development of the Science Without Borders program, which allowed Brazilian university students to study abroad for a period of time, had some obstacles. One of them was the lack of proficiency in foreign languages among candidates. As a solution to correct it, the program Languages Without Borders (IsF, Portuguese initials) was created. This study aimed to build a theoretical and conceptual understanding of IsF as a public policy. This is a qualitative bibliographic-documentary research, whose sources were documents related to the IsF, information from government databases and others. The theoretical-conceptual framework included Secchi (2015), Rodrigues (2015), Goodin, Rein and Moran (2006), Majone (1989) and others. The results place IsF as a public policy (as a solution to a public problem) whose creation unfolded in a cycle (planning, implementation, evaluation and conclusion). As such, IsF underwent reformulation to be continued. Continuity is its critical point due to the necessary investments in quality of basic education, development of science and technology.

KEYWORDS: Language proficiency. Languages without borders. Public policy.

RESUMO: O desenvolvimento do programa *Ciência sem Fronteiras*, que permitiu a universitários brasileiros estudarem temporariamente no exterior, teve alguns entraves. Um deles foi a falta de proficiência em idiomas estrangeiros entre os candidatos. Como solução para supri-la, foi criado o programa *Idiomas sem Fronteiras (IsF)*. Este estudo objetivou construir uma compreensão teórico-conceitual do IsF como política pública. Trata-se de pesquisa qualitativa bibliográfico-documental cujas fontes foram documentos relativos ao IsF, informações de bases de dados do governo e outras. O referencial teórico-conceitual incluiu Secchi (2015), Rodrigues (2015), Goodin, Rein e Moran (2006), Majone (1989) e outros. Os resultados situam o IsF como política pública (como solução de problema público) cuja criação se desdobrou em um ciclo (elaboração, implementação, avaliação e conclusão). Como tal, o IsF passou por reformulação para ser continuado. A continuidade é seu ponto crítico em

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razão dos investimentos necessários em qualidade da educação básica, desenvolvimento das ciências e tecnologia.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Proficiência em idiomas. Idiomas sem fronteiras. Política pública.*

RESUMEN: *El desarrollo del programa “Ciência sem Fronteiras”, que permitió a los estudiantes universitarios brasileños estudiar temporalmente en el extranjero, tuvo algunos obstáculos como la falta de competencia de los candidatos en hablar idiomas extranjeros. Como solución, se creó el programa “Idiomas sem Fronteiras” (IsF). Este estudio buscó construir una comprensión teórica-conceptual del IsF como política pública. Es una investigación bibliográfica-documental cualitativa basada en documentos del IsF, informaciones gubernamentales y otras. Sus referencias conceptuales fueron Secchi (2015), Rodrigues (2015), Goodin, Rein y Moran (2006), Majone (1989) y otros. Los resultados muestran el IsF como política pública (solución a un problema público) cuya creación se desarrolló en un ciclo (de elaboración, implementación, evaluación y conclusión). El IsF continúa activo después de reformulaciones; pero su continuación aun es crítica porque depende de inversiones en la calidad de la educación básica, en el desarrollo de la ciencia y en la tecnología.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Competencia en idiomas. Idiomas sem fronteiras. Política pública.*

Introduction

On 24 April 2007, two federal decrees (no. 6,094 and 6,096) instituted the Program to Support Federal University Restructuring and Expansion Plans (REUNI) and the All for Education goal-commitment plan. Such initiatives were the beginning of the realization of an agenda of public-educational policies whose consequences included, for example, the creation of the Science without Borders program. Through this, university students enrolled in public Higher Education Institutions had the opportunity to study abroad for a certain period. One of the conditions to take advantage of this possibility was to have mastery of the official language of the country chosen as a destination. In order to support students in developing language skills in foreign languages, Language without Borders (*Idiomas sem Fronteiras* - IsF) was created, formalized by ordinance 1.466, of 18 December 2012, whose design focused on the English language at first, and other languages later.

Indeed, such initiatives have come under discussion, whether among interest groups, political groups, the media or researchers. But IsF was somewhat alien to the debate, as well as to the interest of university students. In the case of the latter, the “lack of interest” in the opportunity that such an initiative offered was evident in the so-called Language Centers (NucLi, Portuguese initials) formed at federal universities to supply the demand for foreign

language learning associated with the IsF. An example of alienation from IsF was noted at the Federal University of Triângulo Mineiro, in Uberaba, MG. The teaching experience at the NucLi of that institution was a circumstance to observe the low demand for language courses. However, conversations with professors from other groups at events such as the national meeting of IsF, in Brasília, DF, pointed out that the problem was not local.

Despite this lack of projection, especially in the midst of its target audience, the IsF expanded in a short period of time, to the point that its existence and maintenance demanded financial investments from the federal government to supply the need created in the universities participating in the Program. More than that, while Science Without Borders ceased, IsF remains active; and this condition underlies the motivations of this study to speculate on this question: what does it mean to call the IsF public education policy? In other words, what is IsF as a public policy? The study presented here started from this inquiry with the objective of building a theoretical-conceptual understanding of IsF, the context of its emergence and its potential as a public policy.

The research underlying this unfolded according to the precepts of qualitative research, considering that the actions associated with the existence and functioning of the IsF were derived from decision-making that was not exempt from contradictions. Likewise, the understanding desired with the research was linked to the experience of teaching practice in the activities prescribed by the Program. This experience is full of subjectivities and individual desires, among other attributes that permeate educational action. In this sense, the qualitative approach became relevant because - as Chizzotti (2014, p. 26, our translation) says - it assumes objective reality as “fluent and contradictory”, that is, as something that has no “unique pattern”; moreover, it supposes research processes that “[...] also depend on the researcher - his conception, his values, his objectives”.

The research unfolded through procedures such as critical reading of theoretical-conceptual bibliography on public policies and survey of documents related to the ISF (decrees, ordinances, internal rules and others that could be useful for analysis and discussion) and information contained in databases from the federal government (Electronic System for Citizen Information Service, Transparency Portal and IsF website). The product of such a survey constituted the corpus of research sources, to which were added an interview with the president of the IsF managing group and data from the book *Do Inglês sem Fronteiras ao Idiomas sem*

*Fronteiras: a construção de uma política linguística para a internacionalização*³ (From English without Borders to Languages without Borders: the construction of a linguistic policy for internationalization), produced by members of the nucleus and which contains elements of an internal collective vision of IsF.

The research used a theoretical framework that could support a solid understanding of the process of constituting a public policy. In this sense, Secchi's vision (2015) was central; but it was not the only one. It was also considered what Rodrigues (2015), Goodin, Rein and Moran (2006), Majone (1989) and others say about public policy.

The development of the study considered two contextual fields. A contextualization approach focused on the understanding of the ISF as a public policy, considering its history, its design and having the 2012 ordinance that created it as a legal temporal framework. Another aspect covered the discussion on public policies, considering the IsF according to its cycle (of stages) as public policy, as (SECCHI, 2015). Concepts of public policy are presented, of its functioning, and the actors involved in it (the way they act).

The concept of public policy

Indeed, the theoretical and methodological bases on which the concept of public policy is founded are still diffuse and unclear. There is no lack of definitions of public policy, among which Souza (2006) brought together some. Examples include the definition by Mead (1995) - which defines public policy as an object of study of policy relevant to government and its public policy issues; Lynn's (1980) - who sees public policy as a government action designed to have specific reactions; that of Peters (1986) - which deals with public policy as the sum of governmental activities that influence the life of the citizen, in which actions can emanate directly from the government and be delegated; and, the definition of Dye (1984) - for whom public policy is what the government chooses to do or not. Despite the synthetic tone of such definitions, it is important to note that they are centered on the State, that is, they presume government action (whether federal, state or municipal).

Authors with Secchi (2015), Goodin, Rein and Moran (2006) and Rodrigues (2015) emphasize the idea of public policy as a problem-solving process. In the words of Secchi (2015, p. 9, our translation), "[...] the concept of public policy is linked to the attempt to face a public

³ The book *Do Inglês sem Fronteiras ao Idiomas sem Fronteiras: a construção de uma política linguística para a internacionalização*, was published by the publisher of the Federal University of Minas Gerais, in 2016.

problem". In this case, the problem distinguishes between the ideal situation and the status quo. It is worth clarifying that a given situation becomes problematic when it is seen as such by many people or an actor (individual or collective) that influences, for example, the political sphere or that can provide actions in favor of a solution. The problem may even be perennial in the daily reality of people, that is, being left without a solution for a long time, in such a way that they get used to living with it. Likewise, it can appear suddenly or appear discreetly and grow little by little. Above all, the problem can be subjective, as people see and understand reality differently.

That said, while Secchi (2015) deals with public policy as a guideline to solve a problem of public interest, Goodin, Rein and Moran (2006) see it as an answer to a problem. In turn, Rodrigues (2015, p. 13) understands public policy as a process in which social groups marked by "divergent interests, values and objectives" decide, collectively, on behalf of the whole of society. In this sense, the destination of public policy - its target, its recipients - is known as policytakers (something like the recipients or consumers of public policy). They can often be passive actors in public policy; but, as Secchi (2015, p. 115) says, there are conditions in which recipients can not only shape public opinion, but also articulate the interest of diffuse groups.

In effect, as it is of collective interest, the public problem presupposes the association and involvement of several agents whose interests vary as to the solution or maintenance of it. They are the actors of public policies. The political science literature conceives them as individuals and groups/organizations that play roles in the political arena, on different fronts. In a public policy process, the relevant actors go beyond the government, as they include those who, directly or indirectly, influence the content and results; above all, those that raise public awareness about problems of collective relevance. The actors influence the decision of what enters or does not enter, for example, the governmental agenda; study and prepare proposals; decide and convert intentions into actions (SECCHI, 2015).

As individuals, actors can be a politician with an elected office; a media personality, that is, who acts in public opinion; an entrepreneur who controls media; an ordinary citizen with a network of relevant contacts; in short, it can be a participant in the various operational steps that mark the implementation or execution of public policy. As a collective, the actors can be organizations, public or not; for example, government institutions and bodies, political parties, associations, unions, companies with public or private legal personality, among others that can influence public opinion, represent common interest groups and play, directly or indirectly, a role in decision-making. The media are powerful actors because they have the strength to

influence and control public opinion. In fact, the public opinion item “[...] is a central concept in this debate, as a collective judgment on a given theme, which is capable of influencing political choices” (SECCHI, 2015, p. 115, our translation). In other words, as something public and collective, the problem to be solved presumes the interest of the population in matters that are related to it.

Another type of important actor are the think tanks: organizations active especially in the analysis and research on public policies. They differ from the consulting firm because they focus not only on application, but also on the production of knowledge in favor of organizational changes or public policies. They are also distinguished from the academic research group because they do not produce theoretical knowledge, as they turn to advice, that is, they pass on knowledge of immediate application in the various stages of the public policy cycle (SECCHI, 2015). Anyway, a think tank can be neutral about the subjects it studies and research, as well as it can defend specific causes and act in activism to form agendas.⁴

In summary, public policy is the action that aims to solve the public problem, whether emanating from the State or any other actors that act in order to solve such problem. Therefore, it can involve civil society, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and other actors whose interests include them in the process of solving public order problems. This understanding affects, in part, the action of the actors - what they do.

Even if those who decide are state agents, conceiving public policies as a response to a problem of public nature that affects society in whole or in part, supposes adopting a way of approaching them as a multicentric action. Indeed, when conceptualizing public policies, Secchi (2015, p. 4) refers to a multicentric approach, that is, a “more interpretive approach”, which allows the researcher to broaden his horizons because he frees him from state political-administrative bonds. Likewise - argues the author -, analyzing public policies presupposes considering that there are different analytical currents, among which the positivist - which he calls rationalist - and the post-positivist - also called by him argumentative. In his studies, Secchi (2016, p. 16) sought to reconcile these aspects, that is, to take advantage of the rationalist analysis (positivist) and its advantages (simple and didactic methodology), and the argumentative analysis and its quantitative analytical tools (participatory and decisions and plurality of actors).

⁴ Brazilian think tanks cited by Secchi (2015) include the Institute for Applied Economic Research, the Institute for Statistics and Socioeconomic Studies and the Institute for Labor and Society Studies.

As Secchi (2015) says, the multicentric approach assumes different nuclei in decision-making which are supported by a legal and institutional set of the State. Thus, if a given organization, entity or association starts work or a campaign that aims to solve a certain problem of society or a community - a public problem - guided by a public policy, they will be executing a public policy; however small the problem may be. It can be replicated as a model/basis in action or in a government program; and it may even gain more scope than that of the initial presumption. Thus, the action on which the state actor was inspired or which he appropriated was a public policy from the beginning.

Since “The conceptual essence of public policies is the public problem [...]”, in Secchi's words (2015, p. 5, our translation), then what “[...] defines whether a policy is public or not is their intention to respond to a public problem”. In this case, an understanding of the usefulness of public policies is outlined there. This author refers to the idea of essence because the definitions of public policy would be arbitrary (SECCHI, 2015). In fact, it is worth emphasizing: the definition of public policy is not consensual.

Public policies are guides or guidelines for a planned action to take shape in a given way. More than that, a public policy designed to solve a certain public problem supposes following guidelines and taking measures in favor of the resolution. Heidemann (2009, p. 31, our translation) endorses this understanding when writing that

[...] the perspective of public policy goes beyond the perspective of government policies, insofar as the government, with its administrative structure, is not the only institution to serve the public community, that is, to promote “public policies”.

To this understanding, it is worth adding what Majone (1989) says about the relationship between public policy and discourse: language is part of the subject from which public policy is made. This is because, whether in written or oral form, the argument fundamentally permeates the stages of the process that results in public policy. The argument supports the debate, in such a way that a system of government, even if it is dictatorial, can be called a government marked by debate. In the presupposed parts of a democratic government - political parties, the electorate, the powers (Legislative, Executive and Judiciary, etc.), in addition to the media and interest groups and independent experts - the debates and persuasion mechanisms are presumed in a continuous process (MAJONE, 1989). The thought of Goodin, Rein and Moran (2006, p. 12, our translation) broadens this reasoning regarding the debate and the

argument: “[...] governing is less and less a matter of commanding through hierarchical authority structures and more about negotiating through a series of quick alliances”.

In this context of public policy as a result of debate and argument, it is worth saying what Donahue and Zeckhauser (2006, p. 496, our translation) think of the so-called collaborative governance, that is, of the “[...] search for public objectives authoritatively chosen by means that include engagement and effort by, and criteria shared with, producers outside the government”. Such “producers” are agents able to participate in the elaboration and decision-making, as well as in the execution of public policy (their programs and their actions in general) in favor of solving public problems outlined by the government. Such participants are part of what is known as public-private partnerships, that is, alliances between the public and private sectors. From these, the formation of interest groups derives, whose participation is associated with the accumulation of sympathizers, among which the majority helps to strengthen the argument and, therefore, create decision-making power. Of course, quantity does not imply prominence. This is more the result of increased power.

Indeed, in the political game, power relations are a central force. The greater the power - institutional, legal, economic or influential - the greater the tendency to persuade an agent and a coalition. In this case, the power of control and decision is imposed. As Foucault (2017, p. 369, our translation) said, “[...] power is a bundle of relations more or less organized, more or less pyramided, more or less coordinated”. Therefore, power relations exist not only in the institutions where it is institutionalized, such as the State, the family, the school, the prison, the hospital and others.

Power must be analyzed as something that circulates, or rather, as something that only works in a chain. It is never located here or there, it is never in the hands of some, it is never possessed as wealth or good. Power works. Power is exercised in a network and, in this network, not only do individuals circulate, but they are always in a position to be subjected to this power and also to exercise it. They are never the inert target or consenter of power, they are always their intermediaries. In other words, power passes through individuals, it does not apply to them (FOUCAULT, 1999, p. 35, our translation).

In this logic, obtaining power supposes the alliance of the discourse of different groups and individuals, that is, it presupposes the concrete use of language. If so, then it is worth noting that, once the objective of obtaining power is fulfilled, the union and alliance of discourses aligned with each other loses unity: each participant starts to compose another search for power. After all, as stated by Foucault (2014, p. 9-10, our translation), “As much as the discourse is

apparently scarce, the interdictions that affect it quickly reveal their connection with desire and power”.

This understanding is projected in the words of Goodin, Rein and Moran (2006, p. 23, our translation): “[...] the biggest limitation in which public policies operate [...] is the pure selfishness of entrenched interests provided with sufficient power to promote these interests in the most indefensible ways”. At this point, the public policy process subjects society - especially the target of problem solving - to the order of interests that, often, may be obscure or oblivious to the purposes of public policy because they are colluding with selfishness. If it can be said that not all actors interested in the common good, in the collectivity have such attributes of selfishness, one cannot lose sight of the fact that the sustaining of interests (personal, of smaller groups, etc.) in the conquest of power motivates the functioning of the political arena. Here is the synthesis of Goodin, Rein and Moran (2006, p. 27, our translation): in the end, “[...] the persuasive appeal returns to power and interests. In other words: politics”. Thus, this is the keynote of the motivations and functioning of public policy.

In summary: although it is delimited, the field of political action is not fixed, as it includes varied possibilities in its composition: the passage of time; the beliefs - which are changeable; the diversity of institutions and leaders, among other elements that affect the viability of results. As Galston (2006, p. 545) says, the “visionary” is separated from the “eccentric” by a fine line that cannot be defined by any algorithm; and this reasoning points to the idea that difficulties and limitations translate into numerous contexts and variables that influence the dynamics of public policies. Minimal changes alter its course and its understanding. Given that an actor was seen as a visionary at a certain moment, due to bold and revolutionary ideas, he can become a selfish or demagogue because of changes in a certain variable. This possibility positions public policy as something that can be delicate and fragile due to the degree of subjection to which projects outlined as important subject society.

Regarding what public policies are, their usefulness and their functioning, it is worth considering Secchi's understanding (2015) in the relationship between strategic and structural level guidelines, which are distinguished by the theoretical position of each one. According to this author, some scholars see public policy only as a macro-directive, that is, as actions and programs implemented. In this view, public policy would be something structuring, while programs, plans and projects would be something operating; that is, they make up that one, so they have no individuality. As Secchi understands (2015) - an understanding that we endorse - , recognizing a public policy by the level of operationalization of the guideline would be an

inappropriate criterion; such delimitation can exclude from the analysis, policies for municipalities, regions, states and organizations, also configured as responses to public problems. In this case, public policies would be the strategic guideline and operational guideline. It is not by chance that the theoretical construct surrounding the analysis of public policies supposes an analysis of these at other levels (that of the region and that of plans and programs).

A metaphor by Secchi (2005) is illustrative here. The author takes the steel cable to analyze higher education. The cable would be a macropolitics (something strategic) whose formation includes the “legs” (the bundle of steel wires), that is, programs and actions (something operational). In the context of this work, the steel cable would be the policy of a strategic level: to expand and internationalize Higher Education Institutions. The “legs” would be actions and programs related to this objective, among which REUNI, Science without Borders and IsF. In the case considered here - the IsF -, the metaphor can refer to online and classroom courses, proficiency tests and the installation of NuLi, for example, as the wires of each “leg”, that is, levels each time operational aspects of the three major actions of IsF.

As it turned out, the actors involved in public policy can be collective - organizations, media, public opinion, policytakers and think tanks - because they are made up of more than one individual. In addition, public policies can be subject to possible influences and variables - and to the interests of the actors involved in them. If this description helps to understand who the actors are and what they do, then it is necessary to understand the relationships between groups and entities of influence and participation in discussions and in the implementation of public policies, as well as phases and stages of what is known as public policy cycle.

Public policy cycle

It was Stephen Ball and Richard Bowe (1992) who first reflected on the public policy cycle and presented it. The presentation assumed three contexts: influence, text production and practice, which are interrelated and non-linear. To these elements two more were added: the results (or effects) and the political strategy. Very widespread, this model was reformulated and restructured by other researchers, who even proposed cyclical models. One of them was that of Secchi (2015), whose public policy cycle results from the combination of other models of the cyclic archetype (and it is the notion adopted in this study). This author's model includes the following steps.

The initial step is to identify the problem. Its relevance is in the selection of what will compose the political agenda of a given actor interested in the solution. But Secchi (2016, p. 50, our translation) warns that "defining a problem" would be an enormous challenge in the process because of "[...] the difficulty of separating the problem from its causes and consequences and of delimiting the problem in a sentence that capture its essence [...]", with which the ideas of "excess", "scarcity" and "risk" are related. The entry into the cycle presupposes that the actors involved in solving a public problem have seen and highlighted it. Thus, they can include it on the government's agenda to then be considered as an object of intervention and the related public policy cycle begins. The agenda is the forum that brings together the various public problems to be solved.

The second stage of the public policy cycle involves thinking about the problem in question: causes and viable ways of solving it. It is time to propose and build alternatives; that is, it is the "[...] moment when methods, programs, strategies or actions are developed that can reach the established objectives. The same objective can be achieved in several ways, in different ways" (SECCHI, 2015, p. 48, our translation).

The third phase is to build alternatives. Different actors come together to analyze the problem and reflect on possibilities and ways of solving it. Public agencies, politicians, specialists, interest groups... all come together (ideally) to find a way to satisfactorily elucidate the problem. In other words, getting the program or policy off the ground requires interpreting the environment to then plan/organize actions, make decisions about the benefits and services to be implemented and the sources of funds for doing so. As Rodrigues (2015, p. 50-51) says, there is the development of political support for the policy in question so that it is authorized and legitimized.

Decision making is the fourth stage of the public policy cycle. After the studies and analyzes are done, it is time to build consensus among the actors to choose an adequate and coherent alternative with the objectives of solving the problem. Different theoretical models underlie decision-making, each with its own singularities. It is important to clarify the objectives and consequences of each alternative evaluated so that the chosen one can be the one that will maximize the benefits (MAJONE, 1989).

The next phase to choose what will be done is the implementation, that is, the concretization, of putting into practice what was thought, analyzed and elaborated as means, program actions etc., in order to solve the problem. To implement public policy is to make it work, to act in society/community in order to solve the public problem that motivated it. But

the implementation can be a complex phase, as it involves third parties who may not be involved in decision-making, who can highlight their specific interests (individual or collective), perhaps interests that are unrelated to the initial problem. In addition, the implementation phase is the one that allows to see public policy flaws, to find errors in formulation, decision-making etc. These tend to have consequences that can be translated into expressions such as "laws that do not stick", "programs that do not work" and others. Conversely, the phase shows successes and positive consequences. It is not by chance that public policies that become the object of research are commonly addressed by scholars at this stage.

In effect, as Secchi (2015) says, the phase that makes it possible to review aspects of the implemented policy creates conditions to perceive failures and successes of the previous phases, which, in turn, leaves room for thinking about corrections and adjustments that could improve the public policy. This is a complex task in terms of policy maturation (SECCHI, 2015), which can take months, even years. Given the time of maturation factor, the assessment of the adequacy of a public policy can generate sunk costs and even more problems.

The process of creating a public policy, implementing it, evaluating it and concluding that the problem it aimed to mitigate has been solved, culminates in the extinction of the policy. But extinguishing it does not necessarily mean ending it; it means that it may be improved, restructured and/or replaced by another one. Of course, within the public policy cycle, governments/governors have the autonomy to extinguish them at any time in their existence; and the reasons (political party, ideological, budgetary and other) that justify the extinction do not matter.

This didactic description of the stages of the public policy cycle is intended to facilitate the understanding of its process (emergence, existence and functioning). But it should be noted that not every policy is likely to contain such steps, nor that the steps unfold in the order described. Not only can the order be different, but there can also be simultaneity in the steps. It may happen that the political actor has a solution, but the problem is not recognized or does not have the necessary appeal to implement the solution. More: underlying a public policy there may be other policies or programs that make it functional.

In summary, whatever the paths of a given public policy until its implementation and extinction, it should be noted that the cycle of its constitution aims to address a public problem that affects part or all of the population, in order to eliminate or mitigate it; in a word, in order to create conditions as close as possible to the ideal of justice and quality. This is how IsF

presents itself in this study: as a public policy that intended to mitigate a public problem. Given the considerations made so far, it is appropriate to present such a policy.

IsF as public policy

Names such as REUNI, Open University of Brazil, ProUni (access to higher education) and FIES (financing for higher education), Federal Institutes of Education, among others, designate programs and actions aimed at higher education that formed a macro policy or a strategic public policy for the expansion and internationalization of higher education in Brazil. In this perspective, the IsF program - created in 2012, as English without Borders, it is worth remembering - was one of the actions of such public educational policy; an operational policy.

Located in the theoretical-conceptual context outlined so far, the IsF program then aligned itself with efforts to solve a public problem that is associated with a risk, a shortage or an excess. In this sense, the problem to be solved was marked by scarcity: the lack of proficiency in English among undergraduate students, especially in public higher education institutions. The understanding of this problem pointed to varied roots: education with reduced hours for foreign language subjects, public schools with deficient structure, teachers without preparation and qualification, language teaching in Elementary and Secondary Education through obsolete methodologies, among others.

More than recognizing such a problem, it was necessary to raise it to the condition of concern of the State and, therefore, of the government; that is, it needed to be noticed in a context whose influence was sufficient to give rise to an attitude in favor of a solution. The appeal of the problem was related to the Science without Borders program, whose repercussions aroused not only the desire of Brazilians to study abroad, but also the expectation of professors and researchers to have access to renowned research and teaching centers around the world. Thus, the lack of proficiency in a foreign language came to be seen as a serious enough problem to reach the agenda of the federal government, which saw that Program as one of its significant marks. Although the lack of proficiency in languages such as English was - and still is - a very objective measure of the deficit in basic education, it was the higher education that motivated public policy. The problem was dealt with at the level of consequences, not of causes.

The emergence of IsF - as its name suggests - was aligned with the demands and purposes related to the Science without Borders program, that is, IsF emerged to supply the government's need to supply a demand within the Program. Participating in Science without Borders - that is, going to study at a university in another country - required language

proficiency from the participants, and many did not demonstrate to have it. In addition, there were logistical problems related to the students' going abroad because access spaces had not been structured to take proficiency tests. Thus, in a demand emanating from the Presidency of the Republic - at the time personalized by the rectors of the National Association of Directors of Federal Institutions of Higher Education (ANDIFES) -, the indication of a solution was demanded by the federal government (ABREU-E-LIMA, 2017, interview).

Of course, IsF was not the only solution requested; in fact, of the other solutions that have emerged or been addressed, there have been some that have even started. But the IsF was the one that really did it, to the point that it was deployed and remains active. Indeed, in an interview given in the research underlying this study, the president of IsF, professor Denise Martins Abreu-E-Lima, shed light on how the solution of the problem was projected on the government agenda and how IsF emerged. In her words, the association of presidents at the time

[...] representative [...] in International Relations [...] my rector, from the Federal University of São Carlos, professor Targino [de Araújo Filho]. He then consults me, as I am a specialist in distance education and a foreign language - teacher formation - on the possibility of us organizing a proposal to send to the Higher Education Secretariat [SESu] (ABREU-E-LIMA, 2017, interview, our translation).

As we read, the design of the solution to the problem started in the hands of a teacher, who had the help of a teacher, with the seal of ANDIFES (area of international relations) and the work of a team to conceive ways of assist students. His interview partly detailed this stage of the process. She said:

And, in the process, we made the following proposal: instead of saying what had to be done, we brought together experts from ten Brazilian federal institutions that already had a background in English teaching, teacher formation and research, both in master's and doctorate level, and that had a well-established distance education center. Because, obviously, the solutions that we would present would have to involve remote resources. [Also] that were regionally important. In this, we selected ten institutions. From these ten institutions, then, we brought in a foreign language specialist and the coordinator UAB [Open University of Brazil] at the time. We held a meeting in Brasilia together with CNPq [National Research Council] and CAPES [Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel] in which they were able to report the entire dynamics of Science Without Borders and the problems they were facing. And we spent about three days designing the Program (ABREU-E-LIMA, 2017, interview, our translation).

This passage of the interview allows us to understand that the stage of building alternatives has passed. In fact, in view of the stages of the public policy cycle, once included in the agenda, a public problem becomes an object of formulation of solutions. It is also worth remembering that in this stage different actors are likely to take part in the process - in the studies - of finding a resolution to the problem. In the case of IsF, these actors included professionals in English language teaching and in the area of distance education. As such, they formed an individual non-state group: the “Work Group English without Borders”.

Two points should be noted: 1) actors from different regions of the country participated in the elaboration of solutions and alternatives for the identified problem; 2) the presence of specialists in the area where the problem is located: the (lack of) proficiency in a foreign language. In other words, the problem was solved by a team whose formation was not random and had a repertoire of specific knowledge so that the Program presented to solve it could be designed.

The causes of the problem - it should be noted - suggest that the heart of the problem was (is) in basic education. Therefore, the most appropriate alternative would be to invest in school infrastructure, in initial/continuing teacher formation and review the restructuring of methodologies and curricula. It was also assumed that the next stage of the IsF cycle as a public policy - decision making - focused on this core after studies and the elaboration of the solution (that is, once the alternative that was most viable and with greater chance of success was chosen).

However, the decision made did not reach the root of the problem: the failures in basic education. The alternative chosen was intervention (more immediate) in higher education. That is, the chosen target was the end, not the beginning; it was the top, not the bottom. The interviewee - professor Denise Martins - touched on this issue. She said that “Yes!”: There were proposals whose intervention directly affected basic education.

But it didn't work. I even attended some meetings, but the problem was also internal. The people who were proposing did not remain and if the proposal is being born, it is not very well structured, the manager changes, then it gets shelved and everything begins (ABREU-E-LIMA, 2017, interview, our translation).

In fact, one can assume several contexts tangent to the choice. After all, the actors involved are diverse, and each had intentions and priorities underlying their decisions. For example, a context associated with the choice of this measure - palliative in nature, would be that of macropolitics, formed to expand and internationalize higher education. In addition,

government management is marked by the transience of those who assume it: the end of a political mandate in the government can put an end to work, to efforts in favor of a given policy. Given these premises, it makes sense to choose an alternative with a more immediate effect, rather than one that could take longer to produce results (positive or flawed). Results that could be political-electoral.

Aside from the reasons for choosing a given alternative, it is important to consider the IsF implementation phase as public policy. Implementing the Program required actions of even more operational levels, such as choosing and purchasing proficiency tests, as well as the My English Online platform, notices to accredit participating universities, the creation of NuLi, the selection of professors, etc. The IsF creation decree prescribed the implementation and formation of virtual students, as well as the application of tests in charge of the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel. In fact, it was up to this agency - and only it - to choose a course - My English Online - and to buy passwords to access the tests and the tests themselves (the TOEFL ITP). On the other hand, ordinance 30/2016 - for the expansion of the Program - made the Department of Higher Education responsible - and only this one - for the application of the tests, as can be seen in the interviewee's speech when asked about the purchase of new tests: *"I can't tell you. I don't participate in this part"* (ABREU-E-LIMA, 2017, interview, our translation).

Although IsF's initial actions were targeted at priority groups - students eligible to be candidates for Science Without Borders scholarships - IsF gradually expanded to include more participants and pay more attention to teacher formation, both initial and continuing. From that point on, came the last stage of the public policy cycle: its extinction; more precisely, its reformulation. In fact, after being implemented, there were successive expansions of IsF: the target audience, the accredited network and the languages offered, for example. It should be stressed: the reformulation did not replace actions or the public; it enlarged them.

Final considerations

This work sought to build a theoretical and conceptual understanding of the IsF Program as a public policy for education. Such construction includes the understanding of two contexts underlying a public policy: in part, its theoretical-conceptual conception; in part, the motives and needs that lead to its proposition and creation. In this sense, IsF presents itself as an action program of a macro-policy: the expansion of higher education due to the development of the academy and its internationalization. Once created and implemented, the Program expanded,

evolved from the initial focus on the English language, in 2012, to a focus that encompassed other languages as of 2014.

In view of the stages of the IsF cycle as a public policy, this Program went through almost all; and this even without systematic studies or previous assessment of the feasibility and needs or operations required by the creation and implementation. There was also no focus on the root of the problem that IsF has helped to overcome. After all, language teaching was not considered at the level of basic education, from which students leave to reach higher education with little or no knowledge of languages, especially English, whose teaching is mandatory in basic education. Even though there were proposals for actions at such a level, higher education was the context for the implementation of actions, which added to the macro-political network for the expansion of higher education.

As a public policy, that is, as something that brings together diverse interests, IsF had mistakes, problems and flaws, in the elaboration, implementation and conduction; and even though it was an auxiliary program for Science without Borders - suspended - IsF remains active. Such a condition leads to think of a central point of public policy: investments. Continuing the policy of expansion and internationalization of higher education tends to be an useless action without investment in the quality of education offered, without support for the development of sciences and without technology to produce with innovation.

In effect, budget cuts in education affect sectors that are strategic to Brazil's development, which tends to lag behind other nations. After all, there may be a “brain exodus” for countries where the development of research and living conditions are the object of investments and opportunities. Thus, the action of placing the Brazilian university and research on an international level may be flawed, if internal (national) pending issues are not canceled. More than internationalization, it is advisable to think about cooperation not only with *foreign institutions*, but also - and above all - *between Brazilian institutions*, in order to create a network that allows overcoming limitations on the location of groups.

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