

“THE MORE CONTACT WITH ENGLISH, THE BETTER”: ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THEIR EDUCATION AND TEACHING IN THE PLURES PROJECT IN THE MUNICIPAL PUBLIC EDUCATION NETWORK OF BLUMENAU

“QUANTO MAIS CONTATO COM A LÍNGUA INGLESA, MAIOR SERÁ A APRENDIZAGEM”: PERCEPÇÕES DE PROFESSORES DE LÍNGUA INGLESA ACERCA DA SUA FORMAÇÃO E DO ENSINO NO PROJETO PLURES NA REDE PÚBLICA MUNICIPAL DE ENSINO DE BLUMENAU

“CUANTO MÁS CONTACTO CON LA LENGUA INGLESA, MEJOR SERÁ EL APRENDIZAJE”: PERCEPCIONES DE LOS MAESTROS DE IDIOMA INGLÉS SOBRE SU FORMACIÓN Y ENSEÑANZA EN EL PROYECTO PLURES EN LA RED MUNICIPAL DE EDUCACIÓN PÚBLICA DE BLUMENAU

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ABSTRACT: This article aims to investigate the teacher education of English language (EL) teachers and their perceptions about the pedagogical practices developed by teachers who work in Basic Education Schools of the Municipal Public Teaching Network of Blumenau, state of Santa Catarina, Brazil, in the curriculum organization called Plures. In this organization, schools offer German and English language classes to the 4th and 5th years. This qualitative study employed an online questionnaire, answered by five teachers, and a semi-structured interview with three of these teachers. Results demonstrate that it is necessary to strengthen initial and continuing education to teach EL to children, as well as to work with the concept of English as a *língua franca* in contrast to teaching it as a foreign language. In relation to Plures, the teachers' discourses indicate that a weekly class is not enough for the necessary exposure to the language and the necessary interactions in the language for the development of children's language proficiency.

KEYWORDS: English language. English for kids. English as a *língua franca*. Teacher education. Plures.

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RESUMO: Este artigo tem por objetivo investigar a formação docente de professores de língua inglesa (LI) e suas percepções acerca das práticas pedagógicas desenvolvidas pelos docentes que atuam nas Escolas de Educação Básica da Rede Pública Municipal de Ensino de Blumenau/SC, a partir da organização curricular Plures. Nessa organização, as Instituições de Ensino ofertam as línguas alemã e inglesa para os 4º e 5º anos. Este estudo de cunho qualitativo fez uso de questionário online, respondido por cinco professores, e entrevista semiestruturada, com três desses professores. Os resultados demonstram que se faz necessário fortalecer a formação inicial e continuada para trabalhar a LI com crianças bem como o conceito de inglês como língua franca em contraponto ao seu ensino como língua estrangeira. Em relação ao Plures, os discursos dos professores apontam que uma aula semanal não é suficiente para a exposição necessária à língua e as interações necessárias na língua para o desenvolvimento da proficiência linguística das crianças.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Língua Inglesa. Inglês para anos iniciais. Inglês como língua franca. Formação Docente. Plures.

RESUMEN: Este artículo científico tiene como objetivo investigar la formación docente de los maestros de lengua inglesa (LI) y sus percepciones sobre las prácticas pedagógicas desarrolladas por docentes que ejercen en las Escuelas de Educación Básica de la Red Municipal de Enseñanza Pública de Blumenau, Santa Catarina, Brasil, en la organización curricular Plures. Las instituciones educativas que cuentan con esta organización ofrecen alemán e inglés para el 4º y 5º año. Este estudio cualitativo utilizó un cuestionario sondeo en línea, respondido por cinco maestros, y una entrevista semiestructurada con tres de ellos. Los resultados demuestran que se hace necesario fortalecer la formación inicial y continua para trabajar la LI con niños, así como el concepto del inglés como lengua franca en contraposición a la enseñanza como lengua extranjera. Con respecto a la organización Plures, los discursos de los maestros indican que una clase semanal no es suficiente para la exposición necesaria al idioma y las interacciones necesarias en el idioma para el desarrollo de la competencia lingüística de los niños.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Lengua Ingles. Inglés para los primeros años. Inglés como lengua franca. Formación de maestros. Plures.

Introduction

Bilingualism, according to Bialystok *et al.* (2009), ceased to be an exception or privilege of the few, to become a worldwide phenomenon (GROSJEAN, 2012) and can be analyzed from variables such as proficiency and use, age and form of acquisition and even motivation.

For Schwartz and Kroll (2006), in case of an individual being considered bilingual, it is necessary to make active use of two languages with some level of proficiency, which although rarely have the same level of dominance, the possibility of a balance of abilities is not excluded, depending on the use. In Europe, where the borders between countries are more

fluid, bilingualism is the rule. But, in Brazil, what does bilingualism have to do with the present day? Brazil is a continental country, living under the myth of monolingualism while it is in its multilingual essence (PISETTA, 2018), with more than 300 languages spoken, among indigenous languages, deaf language, of African origin, of refugees, border languages and immigration languages. The bilingual schools boom in Brazil (GARCÍA, 2019) reveals the desire for an education in which children can learn prestigious languages, such as English and German, in the Blumenau region, Santa Catarina.

Given this, why not allow the learning of a second language (L2) since the early years? A study by Pliatsikas, Moschopoulou and Saddy (2015, p. 3-4, our translation) reveals that "daily handling of more than one language functions as an intense cognitive stimulation that benefits specific brain structures related to language."⁴ One of the benefits of being bilingual, regardless of age, is cognitive control, which protects against age-related cognitive decline and may even delay the onset of dementia symptoms. In addition to cognitive benefits, it is important to emphasize that children's brains are born prepared to learn the languages to which these children are exposed, which makes them more successful in acquiring an L2 than adults, for example. Adults exhibit, mainly, more difficulty in pronunciation (FROMKIN; RODMAN; HYAMS, 2011). In this way, acquiring an L2 in childhood is much timelier.

Graddol (2006) argues that the 'globalization' and 'global English' phenomena go hand in hand. In his words, "if on the one hand, the presence of English as a global language is accelerating the process of globalization, on the other hand, globalization is accelerating the use of English."⁵ (GRADDOL, 2006, p. 22). In Brazil, the official languages are the Portuguese language and the Brazilian sign language (Libras), and as a result of globalization, the National Common Curriculum Base (BNCC) itself (BRASIL, 2018) suggests that the English language should be our L2, and that, therefore, it is no longer necessary to be presented as a foreign language (LE), but as a *língua franca* (ILF). The ILF concept is based on the assumption of a deterritorialized language in which native and non-native speakers are users and owners of the language, as creators of the rules of use in the employability of their own cultures and experiences, as presented by Jordão (2014).

As a consequence of globalization and an incentive to bilingualism, a regulation on the teaching of the ILF in the early years should be discussed, because it is noticeable the need to

⁴ From the original: "everyday handling of more than one language functions as an intensive cognitive stimulation that benefits specific language-related brain structures".

⁵ From the original: "On the one hand, the availability of English as a global language is accelerating globalization. On the other hand, the globalization is accelerating the use of English".

follow the global changes, since the Law of Guidelines and Bases of Education (LDB), Law no. 9,394/1996, in its Art. 22 provides that "Basic Education aims to develop the learner, ensure that you are the common training that is indispensable for the exercise of citizenship and provide you with the means to progress at work and in further studies." (BRAZIL, 1996). BNCC (BRASIL, 2018) brings the mandatory offer of the English language (LI) from the 6th year of elementary school, leaving it up to the states and municipalities to organize the teaching of the curricular component with early beginning and the offer of other languages.

The municipality of Blumenau/SC started in 2002 the pilot project named as Plures, "Project of Linguistic Policy for the German Language in Blumenau" (PROBST; FISTAROL; POTTMEIER, 2019, p. 153), later also expanded to LI. The project aims to allow the continued learning of German and English until the end of elementary school, beginning in the first cycle, with a view to the global development of the student in a historical-cultural perspective. When the Plures Project was created in the Blumenau Municipal Education Network, the regulatory frameworks were the National Curriculum Parameters (PCN) (BRASIL, 1998) and there were no major discussions on language training and teaching, with the creation of Language Policies, at the federal level. The Plures Project is today a curricular teaching organization present in eleven Schools of the Municipal Public-School Network of Blumenau, with German and English language classes, starting in the 4th year of elementary school.

The research reported in this article focuses on the Plures project in the curricular component of LI. Thus, this research aims to investigate the teacher education of English language teachers (LI) who work in public schools of the Municipal School Network of Blumenau in the curricular organization of Plures teaching and their perceptions about pedagogical practices. As specific objectives, we have: (1) analyze from their discourses how the initial and continued formation of these teachers prepared them to work in the teaching of LI for early years; (2) to understand, from the perception of these teachers, how LI is taught in Plures. As this research was carried out in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the teachers' discourses reveal their perceptions about pedagogical practices in this period.

According to Megale (2019), there is little research on the teaching initiatives of the L1 teaching in the early years in municipal public schools. Therefore, it is necessary to know these contexts to understand them, talk to teachers to know their training, how they work the LI in their pedagogical practices and their needs, besides what bilingualism they promote in the classroom. And to know the works defended on the subject, we carried out the state of the issue, which according to Nóbrega-Therrien and Therrien (2004, p. 7), aims "[...] to lead the

researcher to record, from a rigorous bibliographic survey, how the theme or object of his research is found in the current state of science at his/her fingertips."

In this direction, initially the following keywords were selected: *English Language, Early Years, English and Beliefs* for research in the Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (BDTD)⁶. The first three keywords are directly linked to the research objectives and the fourth is justified in view of the first author's belief related to empirical observation that the earlier a child is exposed to L2, the better their learning. Thus, in October 2020, we found a total of 190 titles, which after individual analysis of titles and abstracts and elimination of repeated works and papers focused on other areas, we selected four titles, published between 2005 and 2011, that could be used as a reference for this research. The works of Santos (2005, 2009), Rocha (2010) and Andrade (2011) agree on the importance of opportunities to provide the teaching of the English language in the early years, however, point to the use of English as LE and in this item, they distance themselves from the work presented here, which presents the perspective of the ILF.

This article is organized as follows: after this introduction, a literature review section is presented, which deals with the *Offer of LI in Basic Education, teacher education and ILF*. Next, the *Methodological Procedures section details the type of research, the context investigated and the instruments and procedures for data collection and analysis*. The *Results and Discussion section* reports the results related to the training and professional experience of teachers working in Plures, the perceptions of Plures teachers, work with ILF and teaching of LI during the Covid-19 pandemic in Plures. Finally, the final considerations are presented.

LI's offer in Basic Education, Teacher Training and ILF

Scientific studies on teacher education in Brazil are relatively recent, beginning in 1980 (NÓVOA, 1995). However, the offer of English language (LI) as a foreign language (LE) within the school curriculum began in the 19th century with the arrival of the Portuguese royal family and the need for communication with England and France, for commercial reasons, as Oliveira (2009) points out.

Over time, the offer of LE has undergone many changes, even being excluded from the mandatory curriculum during the decades of 1961 and 1971, because "the nationalist thinking of the military regime made the teaching of foreign languages an instrument to more of the classes favored to maintain privileges" (PARANÁ, 2008, p. 45). The LE returned to the

⁶ Available: <https://bdtd.ibict.br/vufind/>. Access: 09 Oct. 2020.

curriculum with a mandatory character only with the LDB (BRASIL, 1996) from the 5th grade, currently 6th year, with guidelines in the PCN (BRASIL, 1998), based on the principles of transversality. Although the PCN (BRASIL, 1998) indicate that the choice of LE is focused on the historical-cultural context of the school community, LI has become the choice of LE of most schools, due to its global character and implications related to the economy, culture and social development, since Brazil attracts tourists worldwide and is the destination of many immigrants, according to the Observatory of International Migrations (CAVALCANTI; OLIVEIRA; MACEDO, 2020).

However, the return of the mandatory offer of LE excluded the stage of the initial years (1st to 5th year) of elementary school. Thus, the initial teacher training offered by the undergraduate courses of Letters prepares its professionals to work with the Final Years and High School, which are mandatory segments provided for in the PCN (BRASIL, 1998), the education in Letters does not prepare the teacher to deal with teaching for children, but when understood the need to adapt to the new realities and needs in the teaching of LI, many curricula offer a related component to English language teaching for children (LIC), usually as an elective subject in one semester (CHRISTOPHER; TONELLI, 2010).

Thus, we agree with Cristovão and Tonelli (2010, p. 68) in defense by "[...] global and plural training of the LIC professional" through the "[...] insertion of programs for the formation of this teacher" (p. 68). Initial training as decisive for professional knowledge and the practice of the teaching profession and in this context, undergraduate courses of higher education institutions follow national normative documents and need to follow the demands of the labor market, keeping their curricula updated and committing themselves to dialogue closely with the regional and cultural contexts in which they are located.

As in this research the participating professors are formed in Letters by the Regional University of Blumenau (FURB), a look was launched to the Pedagogical Project of the Course (PPC) of Letters to try to understand if the LIC theme is worked on during the course. The document available on *the Institution's website* follows the 2002 normative guidelines that include the orientation of the general methodological principle, translated by action-reflection-action. Thus, the general objective of the course is "To train a critical professional, to understand the society in which he lives, to be an agent of social transformations committed to cultural and humanistic dissemination, giving him a theoretical instrument indispensable to the exercise of his professional activities" (PPC, 2005, p. 4). And to achieve this goal, the curricular matrix works interdisciplinary training, which requires an everyday construction and a deep knowledge of specific areas.

The discipline with the potential to work LIC in the PPC analyzed appears as an optional discipline in the 6th phase of the course, entitled Methodology of English Language Teaching for Initial Series, with 72 theoretical class hours. However, the English Letters course (PPC, 2019), created at the institution to meet an edict of the Secretary of State for Education presents in the 3rd phase a mandatory discipline called English for Early Childhood Education and Early Years, with 108 theoretical class hours and 36 practical class-hours with development of extension activity, which again induces the teaching professional to look for specific training that fit in continuing training.

Thus, continuing training is understood, according to France (2018, p. 1), as "[...] a permanent and constant process of improving the knowledge necessary for the activity of educators." Due to an initial training with induction to follow-up, the professional feels the need to update and improve their knowledge. Professional performance reveals a possible distance between the knowledge constructed in the initial formation and reality, materialized in the classroom daily. This distance corroborates the search for continuing education, given the speed of change in all areas of life in society.

Despite working aspects of initial training in more depth, continuing education is not an extension of initial training or even synonymous with study compensation, but rather a set of observations, analyses and practices that should be worked on, thought and reflected with actions on a daily life. Continuing training can take place, according to Nóvoa in an interview with Gentile (2001, p. 5), in "[...] seminars on mutual observation, spaces of reflexive practice, laboratories for collective analysis of practices and the devices of dialogical supervision, in which supervisors are partners and interlocutors".

Issues such as the distance between initial education and reality, the needs that are raised throughout teaching in the face of daily changes, such as considering the need in relation to the preparation and recognition that the teacher not only knows or dominates the LI, but knows how to teach it and reflect on its teaching and practice, in a continuous process of professional development of teachers, condescending to Rodrigues (2003) who perceives continued formation as a promoter of the expanded reflection on teaching practice, establishing relationships and approximations between theory and practice. Ahead of globalization, teaching LI as LE does not reflect the interculturality that surrounds us, so that the ILF is practiced in our classrooms, it is necessary that the teachers already trained have opportunities to participate in continuing education meetings that treat LI more as ILF. But what is this ILF?

English as a *língua franca* is the global communication language, with the function of favoring communication between speakers of different mother tongues (SEIDLHOFER, 2005). Not only that, *língua franca status* gives all speakers the possibility of using language for communication without so much attachment to the norms imposed by native speakers, because the focus is on communication, fluency, and not accuracy (BAILER *et al.*, 2021). Also, the focus is lost to have a pronunciation close to the native speaker, since the users of the language (JORDÃO, 2014) when appropriating the language, constitute their own variation of the ILF (JENKINS; COGO; DEWEY, 2011). Thus, "[...] the uses that speakers around the globe make of the language are welcomed and legitimized, since natives and non-natives are on the same level as creators of norms and use the language with autonomy" (KUROSKI, 2020, p. 44).

Friedrich and Matsuda (2010) recommend, in a translation by Kuroski (2020, p. 43), that the ILF should be understood as "[...] a term that describes a function that English plays in multilingual contexts", that is, it should be understood as a function of communication between speakers of different languages, with its own variations, based on cultural baggage, traditions and needs *in* and *of* their different contexts.

Corroborating the actuality of the term, BNCC (BRASIL, 2018) recommends the use of the term to the detriment of the English term as LE, as clarified in the following citation:

Learning the English language provides the creation of *new forms of engagement and participation of students in an increasingly globalized and plural social world*, in which the boundaries between countries and personal, local, regional, national and transnational interests are increasingly diffuse and contradictory. [...] In this proposal, *the English language is no longer that of the "foreigner", originating from hegemonic countries, whose speakers serve as a model to be followed*, nor is it a variant of the English language. In this perspective, *the uses that make it widely accepted and legitimized, with different linguistic and cultural repertoires*, which makes it possible, for example, to question the view that the only "correct" English – and to be taught – is that spoken by Americans or British (BRASIL, 2018, p. 241, our translation).

The BNCC (BRASIL, 2018) clearly presents the implications of the use of the term. According to Rajagopalan (2010), the ILF is a form of variation of English as LE that entered the stage of nactivation, from the use and contact with the language, becoming from its evolution and use, the doable option to the concept of a common basis, as proposed to bring the BNCC. Since the use of language is a social practice, the language depends on its speakers to exist and is appropriate to the uses of its users (PARK; WEE, 2011).

Like the BNCC (BRASIL, 2018), the Curriculum Guidelines of the Municipality of Blumenau (BLUMENAU, 2012) reiterate the perspective of teaching English as a *língua franca*. This change of view on the English language, from foreign language to global communication *língua franca*, also impacts initial teacher training, and therefore continuing education.

With these concepts and discussions in mind, about initial training and continuing education for the teaching of English for children, the offer of English language for Basic Education and the implications of teaching English as a *língua franca* as opposed to the foreign language, we can go to the methodological detailing of the research presented here.

Methodological procedures

The research reported here is classified concerning the objective as *descriptive*, which, according to Vergara (2000, p. 47), "[...] exposes the characteristics of a given population or phenomenon, establishes correlations between variables and defines their nature." This type of research is not committed to explaining the phenomena it describes, although it serves as the basis for such an explanation. Regarding the nature of the data, this research is *qualitative*. In the words of Silva e Menezes (2000, p. 20, our translation)

Qualitative research considers that *there is a dynamic relationship between the real world and the subject*, that is, an inseparable link between the objective world and the subjectivity of the subject that cannot be translated into numbers. The *interpretation of phenomena and attribution of meanings* are basic in the qualitative process. It does not require the use of statistical methods and techniques. The natural environment is the direct source for data collection and the researcher is the key instrument. The process and its meaning are the main focuses of approach.

In this perspective, when investigating the teacher education of LI teachers and their perceptions about pedagogical practices in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, we present qualitative interpretations for the data. Furthermore, this research is classified as field research, which according to Gonsalves (2001, p. 67, our translation)

[...] seeks information directly from the population surveyed. It requires a more direct encounter from the researcher. In this case, the researcher needs to go to the space where the phenomenon occurs, or occurred and gather a set of information to be documented.

From the characterization of the research, we turn to its context. Because it is a research that aims to investigate the training and offer of LIC, this work has as participants LI teachers who work with the 4th and 5th years in the municipal school network of Blumenau / SC in schools with the Plures Project. On *the* Blumenau City Hall website⁷ are listed 46 elementary schools. Of these, twenty schools are included in the Plures project, which involves the teaching of the German language and English language, and only eleven are part of the project aimed at LI. We mapped the schools according to the four administrative divisions of the city, Right margin of Itajaí-Açu River, District of Garcia, Left margin of Itajaí-Açu River and the District of Vila Itoupava. From the mapping, it was possible to notice that only three of the administrative divisions are contemplated with the Plures LI project. The fourth division refers to the district of Vila Itoupava, which carries a strong influence of German culture, and therefore, in this district is present only the Project Plures focused on the German language.

To carry out this research, we contacted the Municipal Department of Education (SEMED) seeking authorization for the application of an *online questionnaire* via *Microsoft Forms* to the LI teachers of the eleven schools participating in the Plures LI project. According to Gil (1999, p. 128), the questionnaire can be defined "[...] as the research technique composed of a more or less high number of questions presented in writing to people, aiming at the knowledge of opinions, beliefs, feelings, interests, expectations, situations experienced, etc.". Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the questionnaire, provided in Appendix A, was organized into four sections, including: (1) presentation of the Free and Informed Consent Form and collection of personal information from the participants; (2) professional characterization with questions relating to training and experience; (3) teaching organization Plures in order to identify the comprehension of the participants; and (4) classroom routine, with questions related to the work in the classroom, the materials used and how is the response of students to classes with the pandemic of Covid-19. We insert the context of the pandemic in the questionnaire, because it is the current, atypical moment, which imposed a new organization both in relation to the systematization and planning of classes, as well as in relation to the teaching configuration, dividing into remote formats, in which the student receives all the material in a printed form or via virtual platform, and hybrid, in which the student has weeks of alternate and remote face-to-face classes. The questionnaire consists of 28 open and closed questions. It is believed that the organization of

⁷ Available: <https://www.blumenau.sc.gov.br/governo/secretaria-de-educacao/pagina/enderecos-unidades-semmed/escolas-semmed>. Access: April 2, 2021.

the questionnaire in sections facilitated the response process of the participants and assisted the researchers in identifying regularities, divergences and similarities in the teachers' answers.

We received answers from five professionals to the questionnaire in April 2021, which are identified as Eliane, Tata, Leandra, Isabella and Ana, pseudonyms chosen by the participants themselves. These teachers are between 25 and 53 years old. Three teachers have been working for 11 years or more as English teachers in the municipal network, one between six and ten years and one for two years, and coincidentally, they work this time at Plures. Of the five teachers, two had not taught LI for early years before working at Plures. In order to deepen the answers/themes with the participants, we asked the questionnaire to indicate their mobile numbers for contact via the messaging application if they were available to the researchers. Of the five respondents, three allowed contacts for semi-structured interviews.

Finally, we interviewed three teachers individually. According to Bauer and Gaskel (2002, p. 65), qualitative interviews can play a vital role in understanding contexts, combined with other methods, since it seeks "[...] a detailed understanding of beliefs, attitudes, values and motivations in relation to people's behaviors in specific social contexts." We chose the semi-structured interview, because it gives flexibility and allows rich interactions between participant and researcher, from the points that are raised by the participant.

With the description of methodological procedures, we can leave for the presentation of the results and our analysis in the light of the literature.

Results and discussion

This section is subdivided into four to facilitate the presentation and discussion of the results and respond to the general objective of investigating the teacher education of LI teachers working in the public schools of the Municipal School Network of Blumenau within the Plures organization and their perceptions about pedagogical practices in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. In a specific way, the first and second sections, entitled *Training and professional experience* and *The Plures project seek to* respond to the specific objective of knowing to what extent the initial and continuing training of these teachers prepared them to work in the teaching of LI for early years. The third and fourth sections, entitled *English as a lingua franca* and *English language teaching in Plures during the Covid-19 pandemic*, seek to respond to the specific objective of analyzing, from the perception of these teachers, how the English language is taught in Plures during the pandemic.

Training and professional experience

Of the five respondents, all have a degree in Letters Portuguese/English, graduated between 4 and 20 years ago by FURB, a municipal public university located in Blumenau, the city in which the professionals work. Concerning graduate studies, three participants have specialization in some area of education not focused on their current teaching practice, one participant holds a Master's degree in Linguistics and is currently a PhD student in a Graduate Program in Linguistics and a teacher has no certificate of specialization, post or other common titles of academic training, but has extensive experience with the teaching and learning process of LI, obtained in their exchanges of studies after graduating in Europe.

When questioned during the interview about their initial training concerning the preparation to work in the teaching of LIC, two of the participants who studied Letters before 2011 answered that there was no discipline in the curriculum matrix of the course or approach during classes to teach them to work with the child's public – early childhood education and early years. In Ana's words, *"I would say I had no preparation. My training was directed to final series and high school. Until I left college, I didn't really imagine teaching regular school for minors"* (Excerpt 1, Ana, interview). And Tata reveals that *"There was nothing back in the early years. The training was only the final elementary school"* (Excerpt 2, Tata, interview).

Only one of the professionals, who graduated in 2017, reported attending during her initial training an optional discipline that dealt exclusively with the teaching of LIC. When asked about this opportunity, she reported *"[...] as I started working last year in this context, I can say that I felt prepared yes, because in graduation I studied the discipline of English teaching methodology for the early years"* (Excerpt 3, Isabella, interview).

However, the two teachers who expressed the lack of initial training that presented them for the teaching context of the early years reported having researched the subject to feel better able to work with this audience. *"I remember I've done a lot of research on this. To understand how children learn, adapt my language and didactics in the classroom"* (Excerpt 4, Ana, interview). In this excerpt, the participant Ana, for example, sought information that would help her to understand the English language learning of children, in order to adapt her practice to her new context of action, taking into account the fact that in her initial education she had no theoretical or practical support on the context of teaching to children.

In this context, we rescued Cristovão and Tonelli (2010), regarding the importance of official documents (curricular guidelines for undergraduate courses, guidelines and curricular

guidelines for Basic Education) that specifically address the perspective of LIC teaching for the courses of Letters, which are absent, which prevent a solid formation in these courses. From the perception of this scenario, it is urgent to (re)think the documents that support the training of LIC professionals, since, as Graddol (2006) points out, children globally begin to learn English earlier and earlier, thus characterizing a worldwide trend, which should be observed for the teaching of LIC and also for the formulation of adequate curricula that enrich the training of professionals who will work in this segment.

Regarding the continuing training opportunities after having agreed to work on the Project Plures that LIC offer, two participants, formed in Letters before 2011, revealed that in addition to not having received instruction on how to work with this public in their initial training, they were also not prepared later. In Tata's words, *"We had no training. We just received what content should work and nothing else."* (Excerpt 5, Tata, interview). Participant Ana explains that *"The formations of the municipality are not aimed at specifically the minors... When it comes to the 4th and 5th year, more should be offered."* (Excerpt 6, Ana, interview).

The participant Isabella, who revealed to have attended a discipline on LIC in undergraduate studies, explained that, in relation to the opportunities for continuing education, *"The secretariat made guidance on the curriculum of Blumenau and on the theoretical methodological perspective for the teaching of English in the [...] In these formations, theoretical and practical explanation occurred with examples of experiences experienced in the network. These examples involved mainly the final years, but also the early years."* (Excerpt 7, Isabella, interview).

The participants' reports highlight the need for initial and continued training to work with LIC. Therefore, it is essential to have an official document that supports the teaching of LIC and the teacher training of professionals focused on this context. The excerpts show that the training opportunities offered by the municipal school system are directed to the compulsory curricular disciplines, which in the case of LI, is configured from the 6th year of elementary school.

Concerning pedagogical training, offered *online and /or face-to-face*, four teachers reported having participated in the training offered by the municipal network, but do not recall the titles. Only one of them reported having participated in training activities outside the network. Regarding the formations offered by the network, Leandra revealed that *"The most relevant are the ones that have an exchange of experience, or possible activities to use in the classroom"* (Excerpt 8, Leandra, questionnaire) and Ana explained that *"[...] we had some*

meetings in the previous year with the purpose of discussing the new curriculum and this year we have frequent meetings with the aim of discussing the curriculum continuum. The meetings are extremely important for network professionals to align their activities, talk about their difficulties, expectations, about what is working properly and what needs to be reevaluated" (Excerpt 9, Ana, questionnaire).

Nóvoa argues that "continuous learning is essential in our profession" (GENTILE, 2001, p. 2) and that the completion of teaching or graduation is not enough. Keeping up to date with teaching methods and improving pedagogical practices is part of the challenges of being a teacher, which arise from the reflection of these professionals about themselves. In the words of Nóvoa (GENTILE, 2001, p. 2, our translation)

Training is a cycle that covers the experience of the teacher as a student (basic education), as a master student (undergraduate), as an intern (supervision practices), as a beginner (in the first years of the profession) and as a holder (continuing education). These moments will only be formators if they are the subject of a permanent reflection effort.

Thus, initial and continued training is essential to make it teaching and indispensable for LIC professionals. We now leave for the analysis related to the perception of teachers about Plures.

The Plures Project

In the questionnaire, the question "Based on the official municipal documents that guide the Plures and its experience, describe, in your own words, what the project is" revealed the following:

"Providing two foreign languages is the goal" (Excerpt 10, Eliane, questionnaire, our highlights)

*"The Plures project aims to **interact with the child in the world of the English language**, relating to their experiences of their daily life and interacting to know and expand their knowledge more"* (Excerpt 11, Tata, questionnaire, our highlights)

*"Teaching **two foreign languages from the 4th year.**"* (Excerpt 12, Leandra, questionnaire, our highlights)

*"The Plures project introduces **in school since the 4th year of elementary school the learning of the English language and the German language**"* (Excerpt 13, Isabella, questionnaire, highlights our)

*"The project aims to offer the teaching of two foreign languages from the 4th year of elementary school, the German language as a way of appropriating culture and the English language as a *língua franca*" (Excerpt 14, Ana, questionnaire, our highlights)*

Four excerpts reveal the multilingual character of the project, three mention the 4th year as its starting point and two were more comprehensive relating culture and experiences in languages. The researchers already imagined that the question would generate specific answers and questioned the participants about what the project provides to the students. The participants related the learning of languages in Plures with the expansion of the students' vocabulary to *"better understand the various words that are inserted daily in their practical life"* (Excerpt 15, Tata, questionnaire). Thus, *"it provides a greater opportunity to work in a playful way"* (Excerpt 16, Leandra, questionnaire). Isabella, on the other hand, highlights the expansion of the students' cultural repertoire, *"by introducing literacy practices in other languages"* (Excerpt 17, Isabella, questionnaire).

Professor Eliane used the space to express her opinion when writing *"I find few classes. In my opinion I think i should take either two English classes or two German classes. One of each is very little"* (Excerpt 18, Eliane, questionnaire). This teacher highlighted in excerpt 10 the multilingual nature of the project and in this answer seems to prefer that the student choose or the school offer more classes in one of the languages. If the objective of Plures is related to an earlier initiation of students to exposure to the English language, as a global communication language, and to the German language, as an immigration language, it seems necessary to continue offering the two, but with a larger workload, to ensure longer exposure time and contact with languages, to *"broaden the horizon, leading them to think of different cultures and how each language is linked to it"* (Excerpt 19, Ana, questionnaire).

In this wake, when asked during the interview about the number of weekly classes, Professor Ana mentioned: *"In my opinion, the number of classes is low... It greatly impairs the continuity of the contents"* (Excerpt 20, Ana, questionnaire). Professor Isabella pointed out that

"[...] should have more classes, the more contact with the English language the greater the learning. Often to do a production activity a class is little. Not to mention that often the class falls on holidays, students would certainly benefit if there were more English classes" (Excerpt 21, Isabella, interview).

Professor Tata also revealed discontent with the number of classes:

"Too bad the system of a class is only little. Not to mention that they mix English with German. Children trade a lot. The worst is that those who

organize school schedules do not have this vision and end up putting German and English classes on the same day for children. [...] one class a week is very little. The secretary should rethink the number of classes given. Come up with another form of class quantities. One of German and one of English per week is very little" (Excerpt 22, Tata, interview).

Reflecting on the teaching of the ILF, through practices of orality, reading and writing in LI, it can be affirmed that a weekly class is unfeasible, since it is aimed at students learning along their formative path, developing knowledge and skills for the use of language in their various contexts in an autonomous and confident way (FROMKIN; RODMAN; HYAMS; 2011; HARMER, 2001), as classes in this language may be the only opportunity for students to be exhibited. And so, we start for the analysis related to the ILF in the perception of the teachers.

English as a Língua Franca (ILF)

As we have seen, Plures is perceived by teachers as a space to expand the cultural and linguistic repertoire of students, enriching the knowledge built in Basic Education. Professor Ana made clear in excerpt 14 the term English "as a *língua franca*" and therefore we questioned all participants in the interview about what they understand by ILF.

Professor Tata revealed that "*It is the most spoken language among many people in a simpler and more agile way of understanding. More informal*" (Excerpt 23, Tata, interview), highlighting the practicality and scope of LI. Ana explained that

*"Língua franca is when all individuals, different groups (countries) use the same language to communicate. I use the term with my students. I say that **through the English language they can know the world besides being the language in business, varied job opportunities**" (Excerpt 24, Ana, interview, our highlights).*

Professor Ana puts into practice, in her perception, the concept as described in BNCC (BRASIL, 2018) and the opportunities that her knowledge presents to students.

Isabella mentioned the ILF as "*A language spoken by people all over the world... In several countries. That's why I always tell my **students that there's not just American and British English, there's varieties. As Indian English, Australian, etc. And that all are legitimate and are forms of communication**" (Excerpt 25, Isabela, interview, our highlights). She highlighted the scope of LI and its work with varieties, which is in accordance with what the BNCC (BRASIL, 2018) and what the authors Bailer *et al* bring (2021).*

Thus, the participants demonstrate, in their perception, an understanding about the concept of ILF and it would be interesting, in this context, to follow their classes to observe the concept being worked on in pedagogical practice. Given the urgency of implementing the BNCC (BRASIL, 2018), the teachers are aligned with the document in their discourses. In this context, it is expected that students develop knowledge beyond the grammatical structure throughout Basic Education, and be able to understand and be understood in English, expanding the opportunities for action in society.

Although there is no world census that can correctly measure the number of English speakers as a first language (many countries) and as a second language (worldwide), there are currently more non-native English speakers than native speakers (HARMER, 2001). Therefore, speaking English as a non-native would be the norm, not the exception. Therefore, we asked the following questions to the teachers during the interview: "Does the way the English language manifests itself in the world influence your method/way of teaching?". The three confirm, highlighting that it is "[...] extremely important to use the language in the way it is manifested in the world. In a contextualized way" (Excerpt 26, Ana, interview) and that is "[...] I must always be attentive to the uses of the English language, to how it is used in everyday life" (Excerpt 27, Isabella, interview). Tata adds that "[...] students today, due to the internet and applications often know better than I do" (Excerpt 28, Tata, interview), which reveals an open posture of exchange with students, continuous learning and also reveals the teacher's vision as a facilitator of learning and not as holder of all knowledge (HARMER, 2001). Thus, we started to analyze the perception of the participants about the teaching of LI in the Plures during the pandemic period in which we live.

English language teaching at Plures during the Covid-19 pandemic

In March 2020, we entered a national state of emergency due to the global pandemic of Sars-Cov-2, popularly known as Covid-19, and at that atypical time schools were closed. Later, the schools reorganized their activities to take place in a totally remote way. And as soon as education was considered an essential service, a new hybrid organization was adopted in the Municipal Education System of Blumenau⁸ and in it, in many institutions, to comply with biosecurity protocols, classes are interspersed in weeks, being named as home time and school time. Despite the availability of the hybrid system, there is the possibility of the

⁸ Supported by the guidelines of the National Council of Education, Chamber of Basic Education and regulated by resolution CME /Blumenau No. 004/2020 (BLUMENAU, 2020).

student's family opting for totally remote teaching. Students who choose hybrid teaching during school time meet in person with teachers to take classes and at home time, receive printed material and posted on the virtual platform Google Classroom to continue their studies. On the other hand, students who chooses for the totally remote format have their activities launched on the virtual platform, and can also choose to search the school for the printed material, returning the materials answered one week after the withdrawal.

In this context, we consider it pertinent to question the participants, teachers of LI of the 4th and 5th years, whether the Plures project really achieves the desired objective, differentiating the students from those who have contact with the LI only from the 6th year, and how it happens. Teacher Ana revealed that *"Once the students are engaged in the classroom, they will take it home. [...] For some it is really noticeable the difference and becomes significant"* (Excerpt 29, Ana, interview). And Professor Isabella explained that

"[...] I realized is that Plures students have a lot of basic vocabulary like that. I'm sure you do! The students and I as a teacher put a lot of effort into it. I to enable activities that would help them develop communicative competence in the language and they performing the activities and producing. The project makes a difference because it already encourages a look at multiculturalism from a young age" (Excerpt 30, Isabella, interview).

The answers aroused our curiosity about the planning of classes and pedagogical proposals to maintain, in such an atypical moment with students in the totally remote format and others in the hybrid, the enthusiasm of the students in relation to the learning of LI. We found that the planning of classes in the municipal network are developed weekly, collaboratively between teachers and SEMED, which makes it possible to organize the objectives, skills and activities collectively, supported by the experience of teachers and official documents. Isabella revealed that *"The work is collaborative during these plannings, we write down the ideas, we make decisions together about the learning objectives"* (Excerpt 31, Isabella, interview). Ana pointed out that

"[...] I have a great working group (4th and 5th Years), teachers are engaged and committed, always bring ideas, discuss what worked or not, we try new solutions. It is a small group, but very productive and collaborative, everyone has suggestions to offer and qualify the work" (Excerpt 32, Ana, interview).

Thus, it seems to us that the collective planning process functions as an opportunity for continuing education (FRANÇA, 2018; GENTILI, 2001).

When questioned in the interview about the classroom proposals, it is interesting to point out that, for the most part, the participants have the perception that to work as a *língua franca*, going beyond the audiolingual method, based on repetition, focusing on accuracy (HARMER, 2001). In the words of Professor Ana,

"I always try to mean what I teach with reality and use as much as possible what is being taught. I encourage you to ask to go to the bathroom, have water, leave, help, please call... in English, greet the teacher, respond. I always ask how they are and they should respond as much as possible in English... They can mix too... what they know in English and do not know in Portuguese. I contextualize through text, dialogues, dramatizations... I think it's easier for them to learn" (Excerpt 33, Ana, interview).

Professor Isabella adds:

"In the early years the most direct explanations involve the mother tongue as well, but I always incorporate English words as much as possible. I try to do code switching and meaningful negotiation. For example, I speak paused in English and then ask what I said in Portuguese" (Excerpt 34, Isabella, interview).

The two teachers reveal a careful work of exposing students to the language and encouraging its use in everyday life, in the school context, allowing a bilingual mode, which makes *use of the code switching* and the negotiation of meanings mentioned by Professor Isabella.

We also seek to know the difficulties that teachers faced and face during the pandemic. Professor Ana revealed that

*"Students who have access only to printed material... **the biggest obstacle is the distance between them - school/teacher.** Speaking of the English language point of view, unfortunately they are **losing a lot**... They are not having the opportunity to learn pronunciation, a more appropriate explanation... As much as we try our best to get closer through explanations and more practical activities... There is still a great distance and I am sure, difficulty on the part of parents and students" (Excerpt 35, Ana, interview, our highlights).*

Professor Isabella pointed out that the biggest obstacle is **"Reaching students who are only in the printed mode, that is, who take the printed activities at school, especially since while I was in the classroom I provided my WhatsApp, many did not contact when they had doubts"** (Excerpt 36, Isabella, interview, our highlights). And Professor Tata explained that the biggest obstacle is **"The fear of reading. Because they're ashamed to say it wrong. Many are afraid to go to the board to answer something, afraid of making mistakes. Another**

obstacle is to carry out the printed activities alone. Parents do not help and do not give importance to the discipline of English" (Excerpt 37, Tata, interview, our highlights).

The three teachers cite, with their words, the difficulty of reaching students who are only at home, performing printed activities, how much these students are losing, since often parents do not have the possibility and/or knowledge to help/encourage. Segaty and Bailer (2021), in their report of experience of teaching LI in the pandemic, highlight the need for family and community involvement, in addition to school, in student learning. And Professor Tata stresses the fear and shame of speaking wrong, which have haunted Brazilian students for a long time before the pandemic. Beliefs related to the English language and the need to know everything to speak or feel able to speak need to be resignified (STARKE; BAILER, 2019). Thus, all those involved in education must always be in constant training, since "[...] the pandemic has made the difficulties of those involved in adapting to the remote model more evident, making serious challenges of Brazilian basic education more evident" (SEGATY; BAILER, 2021, p. 270).

Final considerations

This article reported research whose general objective was to investigate the teacher education of LI teachers working in public schools of the Blumenau Municipal Education Network within the Plures organization and their perceptions about pedagogical practices in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. From the literature, we analyzed data that allowed us to know to what extent the initial and continued training of these teachers prepared them to act in the teaching of LI for early years and understand, from the perception of these teachers, how the English language is taught in The Plures during the Covid-19 pandemic. We emphasize that the research was carried out at an atypical moment (2020/2021) that favored previously unimagined changes in the educational system, such as the remote and hybrid offer of classes and the development of class plans collectively among teachers of the municipal network of Blumenau.

Among the results, we highlight the need to (re)think about the initial and continuing teacher training of teachers in the area of Letters who are working with LIC. Not only in the LIC item, the initial and continuous formation also needs to account for clarifying what the ILF is in counterpoint to the concept of LI as LE and its implications. In relation to Plures, a laudable initiative to offer LI to 4th and 5th grade children, before compulsory LI education from the 6th grade, we emphasize the commitment of teachers to expose students to LI from

the perspective of the ILF. However, we agree with the participants that a weekly class is not enough for there to be sufficient exposure to the language as well as the development of children's language proficiency, not only during the Covid-19 pandemic period (MEGALE, 2019).

In addition to Plures, it is perceived that, with the BNCC (BRASIL, 2018), the movements of the initial and continuous formations are undergoing revitalization in the light of the public policy perspective established by the Ministry of Education (MEC), the National Council of Education (CNE) and the Chamber of Basic Education (CEB), from discussions and proposals of new educational organizations in a more multicultural and multilingual perspective, bilingual education (MEGALE, 2019), both in Blumenau's municipal public school system and in other networks.

Finally, we highlight the relevance of this research to the context in which it is included, especially for the reflection on the initial and continuing training of teachers as well as the offer of LIC. And given new resolutions and the creation of a linguistic policy at the national level and therefore, state and municipal, there is already a teaching organization in the municipality of Blumenau, which offers greater workload and allows greater interaction. Possibly, curricular organizations, the components of second languages and the initial and continuing training of professionals in the Municipal Education System will be rethought and appropriate.

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