

ARTICLES

Organization models for schools of Bilingual Education for the Deaf: experiences in three institutions of the state of São Paulo

Modelos de organização de escolas de Educação Bilíngue de Surdos: experiências em três instituições do estado de São Paulo

Modelos de organización de escuelas de Educación Bilingüe para Sordos: experiencias en tres instituciones del estado de São Paulo

Rocha, Luiz Renato Martins da ⁽ⁱ⁾

Romano, Soraia ⁽ⁱⁱ⁾

Camarneiro, Talita Lacerda ⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾

Miguel, Rafael de Arruda Bueno José ^(iv)

Lucarini, Liliane Rodrigues ^(v)

⁽ⁱ⁾ Universidade de São Paulo (USP), Faculdade de Educação (FE), Departamento de Administração Escolar e Economia da Educação (EDA), São Paulo, SP, Brasil. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2884-4956>, luizrenato@usp.br

⁽ⁱⁱ⁾ Centro de Educação para Surdos Rio Branco (CES), Cotia, SP, Brasil. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5436-9490>, soraia.romano@ces.org.br

⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾ Secretaria Municipal de Educação de São Paulo, CEU Emef Candida Dora Pino Pretini, São Paulo, SP, Brasil. <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-6758-5897>, talita.lacerda.cp@gmail.com

^(iv) Secretaria Municipal de Educação de Guarulhos, Guarulhos, SP, Brasil. <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7782-8744>, rafaelmiguelsurdos@gmail.com

^(v) Secretaria Municipal de Educação de São Paulo, CEU Emef Candida Dora Pino Pretini, São Paulo, SP, Brasil. <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-4324-5911>, liliane.lucarini@uol.com.br

Abstract

Although Brazil has over forty schools of Bilingual Education for the Deaf (BED), the literature on how these institutions organize their practice is limited. The purpose of this article is to present the BED models of organization located in major cities of the State of São Paulo based on data produced during the mini-course “Organization Models for BED Schools: Three Different Experiences,” which was held during the Week of Education of the University of São Paulo (USP). It was possible to identify the main characteristics of each model, the methodologies used, the strategies of support to the families, and the challenges to assure the linguistic right of deaf students. Despite the differences in the scenario (private institutions and municipal public schools), the three models converge in the defense of the Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) as first language (L1) and written Portuguese as second language (L2), in the priority to the early language acquisition and articulation with the deaf community. The experiences analyzed show that schools of Bilingual Education for the Deaf are not spaces of segregation, but linguistic territories that assure equity and identity.

Keywords: linguistic rights, pedagogical practices, hub schools, bilingual schools for the deaf, Libras.

Resumo

Embora o Brasil tenha mais de quarenta escolas de Educação Bilingue de Surdos (EBS), a literatura sobre como essas instituições organizam a sua prática é escassa. Este artigo objetiva apresentar três modelos de organização de EBS localizados em cidades de grande porte do estado de São Paulo, com base em dados produzidos durante o minicurso “Modelos de organização de escolas de EBS: três experiências distintas”, realizado na Semana de Educação da Universidade de São Paulo (USP). Foi possível identificar as principais características de cada modelo, as metodologias utilizadas, as estratégias de apoio às famílias e os desafios para garantir o direito linguístico dos estudantes surdos. Apesar das diferenças de contexto (instituição privada e escolas públicas municipais), os três modelos convergem na defesa da Língua Brasileira de Sinais (Libras) como primeira língua (L1) e do português escrito como segunda língua (L2), na prioridade à aquisição precoce da linguagem e na articulação com a comunidade surda. As experiências analisadas demonstram que escolas bilíngues de surdos não são espaços de segregação, mas territórios linguísticos que asseguram equidade e identidade.

Palavras-chave: direitos linguísticos, práticas pedagógicas bilíngues, escolas-polo, escolas bilíngues de surdos, Libras.

Resumen

Aunque Brasil cuenta con más de cuarenta escuelas de Educación Bilingüe para Sordos (EBS), la literatura sobre cómo estas instituciones organizan sus prácticas aún es limitada. El objetivo de este artículo es presentar los modelos de organización de la EBS ubicados en grandes ciudades del estado de São Paulo, a partir de datos producidos durante el minicurso “Modelos de organización de escuelas de EBS: tres experiencias diferentes”, realizado durante la Semana de la Educación de la Universidad de São Paulo (USP). Fue posible identificar las principales características de cada modelo, las metodologías utilizadas, las estrategias de apoyo a las familias y los desafíos para garantizar el derecho lingüístico de los estudiantes sordos. A pesar de las diferencias de contexto —instituciones privadas y escuelas públicas municipales—, los tres modelos convergen en la defensa de la Lengua Brasileira de Señas (Libras) como primera lengua (L1) y del portugués escrito como segunda lengua (L2), así como en la prioridad otorgada a la adquisición temprana del lenguaje y a la articulación con la comunidad sorda. Las experiencias analizadas muestran que las escuelas de Educación Bilingüe para Sordos no son espacios de segregación, sino territorios lingüísticos que garantizan equidad e identidad.

Palabras clave: derechos lingüísticos; prácticas pedagógicas; escuelas polo; escuelas bilingües para sordos; Libras.

Introduction

The Bilingual Education for the Deaf (BED) was officially recognized as educational modality in Brazil on 2021, established by Law no. 14.191 (2021) that modified legal provisions of the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDB) (Law no. 9.394, 1996) to insert this modality in Brazil. This inclusion represented a historical milestone in the educational policies for the deaf population by consolidating the right to an education that recognizes the Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) as an instructional, communication, and mediation language, and written Portuguese as a second language in the written modality.

The BED, therefore, proposes an educational model that values Libras in all levels and stages of education, in addition to ensure access to the curriculum by pedagogical practices and appropriate resources to the linguistic singularities of the students. Before the promulgation of Law no. 14.191 (2021), the assistance to deaf students was under the competence of the Special Education, treated as a range of services of support offered preferably in the regular education network. With the formal separation of the Special Education from the BED, a new educational paradigm is established, based on the acknowledgment of both the right to bilingual scholarization in proper environments and linguistic rights.

In this context, the right to attending BED is given to all students who are deaf, sign-language user, deaf-mutes, deaf with high abilities or giftedness, and those with other associated disabilities, provided that they opt for this modality. The Brazilian legislation assures to deaf people the right to Libras as first language (L1) and Portuguese language, in the written modality as second language (L2), ensuring linguist, pedagogical, and cultural conditions for the complete development and significant learning, as provided for in the Decree no. 5.626 (2005) and reaffirmed in several subsequent ordinances, including the Law no. 14.191 (2021). Also noteworthy are complementary initiatives of implementation, such as the Technical Booklet of compliance with the National Program of Bilingual Education for the Deaf (PNEBS), which contributed for the institutional expansion and strengthening of this educational modality (Ministry of Education, 2022). The consolidation of BED as an independent modality expand the scope of public policies, contributing, therefore, to strengthen the deaf identities and to construct more equitable educational practices and in line with the principles of linguistic and cultural diversity of the country.

According to Rocha et al. (2024):

From 2016 to 2020, the enrollments in the Basic Education in Brazil decreased around 3.1%, from 48.817.479 to 47.295.294, an effect felt year after year of this five-year period. In relation to Special Education students, the increase was about 35%, except for students who are deaf, deaf-mute, or hearing impaired, in which a decrease of 0.79% was verified in the same period, but not approximating of the fall in the order of total enrollments (p. 14).

Although there is still a lack of detailed data in Brazil's education census in relation to this public of BED, it represents a significant portion of basic education. In 2020, 63.106 deaf students enrolled in the education network in the country were accounted, according to estimates of the Anísio Teixeira National Institute for Educational Studies and Researches (INEP) (Rocha et al., 2024). Even so, the right of a great part of these students to attend bilingual schools is still not ensured, as such institutions are concentrated mostly in big urban centers, making the access to students from medium and large municipalities difficult (Rocha et al., 2026).

The absence of interiorization policies for BED and the lack of instructors fluent in Libras contribute for keeping an excluding model that often places the deaf student in non-bilingual educational environments, where the communication is limited and the learning

process is impaired. Thus, the territorial and linguistic inequality ends up reproducing structural barriers to establish the right to education in the natural language of these subjects.

In 2012, seven deaf PhDs¹ wrote a public letter defending bilingual schools, in the context in which such institutions were under risk to be closed by the federal government. The document represented a political and epistemological milestone in the fight for a specific linguistic education, claiming that to consider bilingual schools as “segregationists” reverses the sense of debate. As pointed out by deaf people, “segregationist schools mean segregators that impose deaf and hearing students to be in the same space without them to have the same opportunities of access to knowledge” (Storto et al., 2019).

In this view, separating classes by language is not characterized as segregation, but an affirmation of the linguistic and cultural right of the deaf, ensuring them to fully acquire Libras as L1 and to interact with their peers, aspects that are essential in the first years of scholarization and throughout life.

Therefore, the structuring and expansion of bilingual schools for the deaf should not be seen as exception to the principle of inclusion, but as an integral part of the policies of linguistic and cultural equity. They represent a differentiated model of inclusion that respects the linguistic singularity of the deaf and ensure real conditions of school access, permanence and success, in line with what is provided for in the Law no. 14.191 (2021), the Decree no. 5.626 (2005), and the principles of the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (United Nations Children’s Fund [UNICEF], 2006).

The Decree no. 6.949 (2009), which promulgated in Brazil the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol, and that has a status of constitutional amendment, reaffirms in its article 24 the guarantee that the education of people with disabilities — especially of blind, deaf-mute, and deaf people — must guarantee “. . . in the languages, ways and means of communication more appropriate to the individual, and in environments that favor the most of their social academic development”. This provision reinforces the responsibility of the State in assure effective conditions of access, participation and learning, acknowledging the right to BED as expression of the linguistic and cultural accessibility.

¹ Ana Regina e Souza Campello, PhD Gladis Teresinha Taschetto Perlin, PhD Karin Lilian Strobel, PhD Marianne Rossi Stumpf, PhD Patrícia Luiza Ferreira Rezende, PhD Rodrigo Rosso Marques, PhD, and Wilson de Oliveira Miranda, PhD.

The structuring of BED, as well as hub schools or bilingual classes for the deaf, still constitutes a complex and multifactorial challenge. The difficulties go from the shortage of qualified professionals — deaf, translators, and interpreters of Libras/Portuguese language — to the lack of financing, infrastructure, and interiorization policies of these institutions. In addition, the need of consolidating specific curricula, accessible didactic materials and pedagogical practices based on Libras as L1 persists, which requires intersectoral planning and continued investment in development of teachers.

These challenges are aggravated by the geographic concentration of successful experiences in large urban centers, where human and institutional resources are more available. On the other hand, medium and large municipalities remain with insufficient or inexistent offers of BED, which compromises the right to scholarization of millions of deaf students in the country.

Thus, this study aims to present and analyze three models of organization of BED located in big cities of the State of São Paulo, with the purpose of understanding how these experiences are structured in terms of management, pedagogical practices, and linguistic policies. This will identify common elements and specific challenges that may subsidize the formulation of more equitable and replicable public policies to expand and consolidate the BED as an effective educational modality in Brazil.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative, exploratory, and descriptive approach, guided by the principles of research in education that aims to understand meanings, practices, and social contexts from the perspective of the own subjects involved (Lüdke & André, 2013; Minayo, 2014). The option for this approach is grounded on the interpretative nature of the investigated objective — the forms of organization of the BED —, understood as historical and sociocultural constructions produced in specific institutional contexts.

The study focuses in analyze three models of BED located in major cities of the State of São Paulo from the narratives produced during the mini-course “Organization Models for BED Schools: Three Different Experiences,” held on October 2025, during the Week of Education of the University of São Paulo (USP).

Therefore, the investigation is based on an empirical discursive material, constituted by full transcriptions of the mini-course and complemented by reflexive analyzes of the professional practices of their authors who work in schools represented in the experiences reported. This characteristic brings a collaborative and self-reflective bias to the study, where the voices of participants and researches interweave to build a situated and critical understanding of the institutional practices.

Context and field of research

The mini-course took a total duration of 2 hours and gathered professionals of different educational networks and contexts from the State of São Paulo. Each participant presented institutional and pedagogical reports about the organization of bilingual schools for the deaf, covering themes such as:

- history of the institution;
- pedagogical and administrative structure;
- enrollment and assistance policies;
- development of teachers;
- inclusion- and BED-specific programs and projects.

The three experiences analyzed represent distinct BED models of organization, with different forms of management and articulation between municipal and state education networks.

Research subjects

The following participated in the mini-course and, as a consequence, the research:

- Luiz Renato Martins da Rocha (mediator of the activity);
- Soraia Romano (CES-RB – coordinator);
- Liliane Rodrigues Lucarini and Talita Lacerda Camarneiro (CEU São Rafael – school principal and coordinator, respectively);

- Rafael de Arruda Bueno José Miguel (Municipal Government of Guarulhos – co-representative).

All the participants are professionals with direct experience in the management and implementation of bilingual practices in public educational institutions, which grants empirical validity and practical relevance to the research.

Data collection procedures

Data collection was based in two main sources:

1. Full transcriptions of the mini-course, recorded with authorization of the participants, who are also authors of this article;
2. The reports of experience and professional reflections of the authors, who work at the institutions presented and complemented the analysis with records of practices and field observations.

The text corpus (over 20 pages of registrations) was organized and segmented by institution and topic in order to compare the three models.

Data analysis procedures

The data analysis followed the assumptions of content analysis (Bardin, 2011), combined with the thematic analysis (Minayo, 2014), with the aim of identifying emerging categories related to the structural, pedagogical, and political dimensions of BED.

Initially, a floating reading of the transcriptions and reflexive registrations were conducted, followed by encoding of most significant excerpts. Then, the data were organized by schools participating in the workshop.

The final interpretation considered the socio-political context of BED and the contribution of the subjects as protagonists and analysts of their own practices, in a dialogical and emancipatory perspective.

Ethical aspects

This research is grounded in ethical principles from the collaborative and participative researches, in which the subjects are not conceived as “objects” of study, but as co-authors and co-builders of knowledge (Desgagné, 2007; Ibiapina, 2008). Therefore, the investigation is not characterized as a research “about” the educators, but as a work performed with the educators, in a dialogical and horizontal movement of reflection on the practices and contexts of BED.

For this reason, a submission to the Research Ethics Committee (REC) was not necessary, as the study did not involve personal data collection or sensitive information or analyzed educator’s work individually. All the participants are education professionals and co-authors of this paper, who work directly at the represented schools and voluntarily opted for sharing their experiences and reflections in a collective process of analysis and systematization.

The empirical material corresponds to transcription of the mini-course “Organization Models for BED Schools: Three Different Experiences,” held during the Week of Education of USP, in 2025, with registration and authorization of the participants themselves. The statements were used in anonymous and respectful ways, with the single purpose of illustrating and deepening the understanding of the institutional practices presented.

Therefore, the ethical care adopted focused in the transparency of the collaborative process, the shared authorship, the valuation of teaching experience, and the preservation of integrity of the subjects and institutions involved, in line with the principles of ethics in research on human and social sciences, as defined by the Resolution no. 510 (2016).

Rio Branco Center of Education for the Deaf (CES-RB)

History and structure

The Rio Branco Center of Education for the Deaf (Centro de Educação para Surdos Rio Branco - CES-RB), located at Granja Viana (Cotia/SP), works in a proper building and is part of the Rio Branco School Complex. Inaugurated in 1977, it started to work with an oralist approach, focused on speech training and phonoaudiology strategies, which they advocate as essential for language acquisition by oral means and the development of speech acquisition (Lacerda, 1998). From 1980 and 1990, the school migrated to total communication, influenced

by works conducted in the USA that aimed to use any and all forms of communication showing to be effective for the development of a child, as speech, lip reading, hearing, sign language, manual Portuguese, signed Portuguese, digital alphabet, gestures, mimics, drawing, figures, writing, in order to supply unsuccessful oralism (Starosky et. al, 2025).

In 1999, the hiring of the first deaf teacher user of Libras leveraged the transition for BED. The institution is private and supported by the Foundation of Rotarians of São Paulo, but all the 69 deaf students currently enrolled (2025) are scholarship holders, being the vacancies funded by the same Foundation.

The school has 32 professionals, including 21 teachers (8 deaf and 13 hearing signers), 10 administrative technicians with different positions (4 deaf and 6 hearing signers) and 1 bilingual educational speech-language pathologist. This organizational chart emphasizes the formation of a deaf community: former students act as monitors, assistants, and photographers. The CES-RB campus is located in one of the 8 buildings of Granja Vianna complex. The deaf students attend this linguistic environment until completing the 5th grade, when they are admitted in regular classes at the buildings of hearing students, supported by a team of translators and interpreters of Libras/Portuguese Language, two teachers of Portuguese language in writing modality (L2) and one teacher of Libras, which replaces the English classes in the curriculum. This educator also teaches Libras classes for the hearing community outside regular school hours.

Development Stimulation Program and family support

The CES-RB invests in the early sign language acquisition. The Development Stimulation Program (PED) provides assistance to deaf babies aged 0-3 years in an adapted house, with a deaf instructor, a deaf teacher of Arts, and a bilingual educational speech-language pathologist². In addition to stimulate the child – which shows to be essential to mitigate the language delay and speech acquisition (Barros et al., 2020; Britto, 2024; Cruz & Quadros, 2025) –, the program instructs mothers (usually hearing) to introduce Libras in the everyday life – for instance, to take a proper position while signing and performing domestic chores. The space

² Also coordinator of the program. The work of this professional occurs in an educational and not clinical perspective, in collaboration with the school staff. Her work is focused in promoting communication accessibility in Libras, following up the linguistic, cognitive, and social development of the students and coordinating institutional programs of development stimulation, in line with the bilingual pedagogical proposal of the school.

includes groups of mothers, assistance in groups, and workshops. An initiative called “Bem-me-quero” helps families to resignify “grief” and learn a new language “for love”.

The commitment with the family participation is formal: by joining, the family signs an agreement of mandatory participation of all members in weekly classes of Libras, a requirement to keep the scholarship. There is also help sessions with a deaf teacher for the parents can discuss vocabulary, school contents or daily questions. This model shows that the formation of a support network around the deaf student is key for the BED to be successful.

Methodologies and learning workbooks

Based on the National Common Curricular Basis (BNCC) (Ministry of Education, 2017), the CES-RB developed 24 learning workbooks appropriate to the visual reality of the deaf and with the construction in instructional Portuguese, once several researches dialog on the importance of this methodological and didactic strategy (Diniz, 2021; Raphael, 2002; Souza, 2018). These materials use QR codes with signed videos, glossary of Libras, sections named “Não Confunda [Do not confuse]” (to distinguish words with similar spelling) and “Para Saber Mais [To learn more]” spaces.

The school also offer in the after-school hours the “L1/L2 Program”: a deaf teacher works with linguistic games to help the students to understand the relation between Libras (L1) and written Portuguese Language (L2). Another after-school programs include tailored groups to deep essential learnings of logical reasoning such as: the decimal number system in Potencializando Program; the space for interdisciplinary projects in the proposal “Project-Based Learning”, conducted by a deaf teacher with the aim of stimulate criticism, promote dramatization and, therefore, to enable the children’s active participation; the “NAP” (Pedagogical Support Nucleus), to support students with comorbidities such as Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), autism, etc.; the “Reading Club”, with shared reading of juvenile and children’s literature book collections that include flipped classroom and debate on books as methodology. The “Monitoring Project” with the older students supporting the younger ones, in addition to being responsible for introducing the school to the visitors. Finally, the “Narratura” Project, with the collective production of books, proposed in writing didactic sequences to develop writing of Portuguese in L2.

Discussion

The model of CES-RB shows that an effective BED structure requires mixed teams of deaf and sign hearing, with support for the families and specific didactic materials. The commitment of families with the learning of Libras and the offer of diversified programs enhance a *linguistic territory* that strengthens deaf identity and active participation. The visual focus and constant circulation of the sign language prevent that Libras is treated only as a translation of the Portuguese, as it allows to respect its status of language, empower deaf identity (Cromack, 2004), meet the requirements of appropriate scholarization and enable the students to enter higher education duly qualified for the world of employment.

Hub School of BED - CEU São Rafael (DRE São Mateus)

Context and motivations

The second experience refers to the Municipal Elementary School of São Paulo Emef Prof.^a Candida Dora Pino Pretini, a Bilingual Hub School of the Regional Education Office (DRE) São Mateus, in the east side of São Paulo. The hub is located an Educational Unified Center (CEU) that integrates a daycare center (Early Childhood Education Center – CEI), childhood education (Municipal School of Early Childhood Education – EMEI) and elementary education (Municipal Elementary Education School – Emef), where there is a continued assistance for the deaf from childhood to adolescence. However, unlike Rio Branco, deaf babies only entered EMEI as of 2020; until then, the diagnostic of deafness took a long time, and the students were admitted only in the 1st grade.

Class organization and curriculum

With the Municipal Decree no. 52.785 (2011), the Municipal Bilingual Schools for the Deaf (EMEBS) within the Municipal Education System were created, which was regulated only by the Ordinance no. 5.707 (2011) and that was revoked by Decree no. 57.379 (2016), its Ordinance no. 8.764 (2016), and recently by the SME Normative Instruction no. 14 (2025).

The hub assists about 750 students, of which approximately 10% are deaf. From the 1st to 5th grade, deaf students remain in exclusive classrooms, with a bilingual permanent public-school teacher and a deaf instructor. In the bilingual classes of elementary education, we have the 1st grade with 10 students, the 2nd grade with 6, the 3rd grade with 4, the 4th grade with 9 and the 5th grade with 10 students, totaling 39 students in the early years. In the final years, there is 10 students in the 6th grade, 6 in the 7th grade, 11 in the 8th grade, and 5 in the 9th grade, summing up 32 students. Thus, the school unit currently assists 71 deaf students.

The instruction language is Libras; the Portuguese is taught as L2 by a specialist teacher. From the 6th grade onwards, the deaf students start to attend regular classes. In this phase, they remain grouped (from four to eight deaf student in each classroom) and receive five classes of Portuguese per week with teachers specializing in L2 (separated from hearing students); in addition, there is a translator and interpreter of Libras/Portuguese Language in all classes and weekly classes of Libras in the school program for all students (deaf and hearing).

It must be observed that, in the city of São Paulo, there is specific programs for the teaching of Libras and Portuguese Language. Most difficulties are concentrated in the final stage of elementary education (6th to 9th grades), when the deaf students leave the exclusive classes and enter classes with 35 students. In this transition, the school keeps learning support and recovery groups.

Extracurricular projects and culture

The hub develops several arts and culture projects that values the deaf identity. There are partnerships with the “Guri Project” (musicalization), visual arts projects “Surdos Fazem Cinema [The Deaf Make Movies]”, in addition to the pedagogical work through interdisciplinary projects, with reinterpretations of works of deaf artists and the creation of a collection of portraits of prominent deaf figures exposed to the community. During the after-school hours, there are also the projects of chess, dance, sports initiation, volleyball, bilingual youth press, and student council. In these projects, deaf and hearing students participate together, reinforcing the ideas that culture is constructed with collaboration and that the BED benefits the whole school community.

Discussion

The model of CEU São Rafael shows how the public education system can develop an equity politics without correlating deafness to pathology. The emphasis is not in the disability, but in belonging to a linguistic community that needs equity to exercise its citizenship. The defense of municipal legislation and the creation of exclusive classes in the early years (Grades 1-5 of elementary education) ensure the acquisition of L1.

To ensure an education of quality for all, it is essential to adopt integral and inclusive pedagogical practices. Learning became significant when the student is capable of relating new knowledge to their previous experiences. In the context of BED, the appropriate combination of pedagogical methodologies, in line with respect for the deaf language and culture, promotes equitable education by including both deaf and hearing students.

Teaching in the bilingual perspective has become a successful alternative for language learning and development of deaf children, due to the fact that the sign language, once acquired as first language, will have a critical role in the acquisition of the written Portuguese as second language. Moreover, the educational strategies and practices for the teaching of Libras should be planned taking into consideration its own characteristics, which defines it as a visual and spatial language, with a proper grammar structure and part of a deaf culture. Libras is recognized as a true and natural linguistic system, originating from the deaf culture and visual experience. Therefore, learning it happens through several different ways from learning Portuguese language, which is auditory-oral; the learning of Libras happens by visual, spatial, and manual ways (Lacerda & Zerbato, 2015, p. 428).

The bilingual teaching in hub schools also includes the learning of Libras by hearing students. Teaching Libras to hearing learners is a matter of communicational accessibility, as well as a powerful way of promoting inclusion, cultural understanding, and effective communication. When hearing individuals learn Libras, they become more capable of communicating with deaf people, which creates a more inclusive environment in all aspects of life, from education to labor market. Thus, “bilingualism is not only a right of the deaf, but also a proposal of coexistence, in which the hearing individual has to learn the language of the other” (Skliar, 1998, p. 54).

The more people learn Libras, the more the deaf community is strengthened. The effective communication between deaf and hearing people favors more significant interactions, in addition to strengthen the sense of belonging and mutual understanding.

Learning Libras can also cultivate empathy. By understanding the struggles and triumphs of the deaf community, hearing individuals may develop a deeper understanding of the experiences of others and promote a more empathic world.

Program of BED from Guarulhos

Context and trajectory

Bilingual classes of deaf students in the municipality of Guarulhos exist since 2005, but the first legislation that assured its continuation was promulgated only in 2019 (Law no. 7.795, 2019).

It is appropriate to remark that the curricular proposal of the municipality was regulated in the same year, in order to include the BED with texts, frameworks, and specific guidance for Libras and Portuguese language. Therefore, all pedagogical proposals to be developed must follow and be grounded in the curricular proposal Quadro de Saberes Necessários [Necessary Knowledges Framework] – QSN (Guarulhos, 2019), according to the Knowledges and Learnings and in compliance with each stage and modality.

In 2023, the BED of the city expands its presence, by being established and referenced in the guidelines of a new municipal ordinance: the creation of a Special Education Politics in the Perspective of Inclusive Education of the Municipality System of Guarulhos (Decree no. 40.782, 2023).

In 2024, the Bilingual Educational Program for the Deaf (Ordinance no. 296/2024-SE, 2024), to regulate and consolidate the projects already in place.

Components of the program and development of teachers

Intended to assist deaf learners (babies, children, youth, and adults) enrolled in the schools of the municipal education system, the Bilingual Educational Program for the Deaf of Guarulhos encompasses the following initiatives:

1. Bilingual Educational Project with Deaf Babies, which is undertaken in the daycare centers and intended to assist in Libras deaf babies aged 0-3 years by a bilingual itinerant

teacher. In addition, the project involves systematic communication with families, provision of Libras workshops to them, as well as continuing professional development of teachers and administrators of the school. Currently, five deaf children from five different daycare centers - according to data of November (Guarulhos, 2025);

2. Hub schools with bilingual multigrade classes (in which Libras is the instructional language) of deaf students, in the stages of Childhood Education (aged 4-5) and Elementary Education (Grades 1-5). Currently, the service is provided in three hub schools, with a total of 7 classes and 61 deaf students - according to data of November (Guarulhos, 2025). The classes are taught by two teachers who are jointly responsible for the class. Both have specific education, different trajectories and, mostly, proficiency in Libras;
3. Assistance to deaf learners of the Youth and Adult Education (EJA) program by hub schools with bilingual classes of deaf and/or in regular class, necessarily with the presence of a bilingual teacher of the deaf, working in a co-teaching regimen. Currently, five deaf students from five different school units are assisted - according to data of November (Guarulhos, 2025);
4. The teaching and dissemination of Libras are developed by non-degree courses and workshops provided in different spaces, formats, and duration, contemplating different groups of learners. Such actions are undertaken by public servants and teachers proficient in Libras, as there are no deaf professionals in the teaching workforce until now.
5. Continuing, systematic, and specific development of bilingual teachers of the deaf for many years, bilingual teachers participated only in general developments for hearing students. The change began in 2022, when the Department of Education, through the Technical Section in charge of the Bilingual Education for the Deaf, started to provide specific development for this group of learners.

In addition, it is valid to point out that the city government offers, since 2022, bi-monthly and free of charges, a course of Portuguese as L2 for deaf children, youth, and adults by the Municipal Center for Education and Arts (Cemear).

Pedagogical practices and language circulation

The teachers of Guarulhos use different didactic and methodological propositions, such as lecture- and discussion-based classes, discussion circles, systematic work with theatrical language, field trips, scientific experiments, argumentative language development in Science classes (Cunha et al., 2022), mind mapping, weekend reports, child literature, and a number of other text genres in Libras and Portuguese Language, based on different topics (sports, mental and physical health, environment preservation, among others), using different multisemiotic resources (Nogueira, 2023) to produce senses and related to the different fields of experiences or knowledge. The work is marked by the intentionality with the development of language and communication (by Libras and in Libras). There is a conscious and provocative movement of teachers to put the sign language in circulation and working, with the aim of avoiding practices and methods based in teaching “sign-word” (literal translation) and defending real talks as strategy for the acquisition of Libras – in this context, understood as matrix language in the same understanding defended by Soler e Martins (2024).

Discussion

The model of Guarulhos proves how important is public politics to sustain BED actions. The recent approval of the program shows that continuity of projects depends on legislation, funding, and an attentive glance of the Municipal Department of Education for the linguistic and educational singularities of its deaf learners to guarantee their learning rights.

Additionally, the need of specific development of teachers – supplied since 2022 – supports the argument that the BED requires knowledges involving didactic-methodological, evaluative, linguistic, cultural aspects different from the general education. The use of visual resources and contemporary topics shows that the sign language must circulate in a live manner, connecting to the student’s universe.

Comparative analysis

The three models show differences in terms of maintaining entity, scale, and organization. The Chart 1 summarizes a few key characteristics.

Chart 1

Comparative characterization of experiences of Bilingual Education for the Deaf

Institution	Rio Branco Center of Education for the Deaf	CEU São Rafael DRE São Mateus	Program of Guarulhos
Nature and funding	Private school maintained by a foundation, with all students receiving full scholarships.	Public school (municipal hub).	Municipal program in public schools.
Stages served	• Babies (aged 0-3 years); • Childhood Education; • Elementary School (Grades 1-5); • Elementary (Grades 6-9) and Upper Secondary Education (inclusion in hearing classes with an interpreter of Libras).	• Elementary Education; • (articulation with CEI and EMEI of CEU).	• Childhood Education (aged 0-3 years): daycare centers • Childhood Education (aged 4-5 years); • Elementary School (Grades 1-5): Bilingual classes for deaf students in hub schools; • EJA: Bilingual classes for deaf students (exclusive) or regular class followed by bilingual teacher.
Organization of classes	• Exclusive classes for 12 deaf students up to around 10 years-old; • Inclusion: from 6th grade participate in regular classes and communicational accessibility by translators and interpreters.	• Exclusive classes in 1st to 5th grade (4 to 12 students per class) with bilingual teacher and deaf instructor; • Inclusion: from 6th to 9th grade with groups of deaf students and communicational accessibility by translators and interpreters.	• Deaf babies enrolled in different daycare centers and followed by a bilingual itinerant teacher; • Seven bilingual classes in three hub schools; • Youth and Adult Education with deaf students enrolled in different schools.
Programs and projects	• PED (stimulation of babies); • Learning workbooks organized according to BNCC (24 units); • L1/L2 programs; • <i>Potencializando</i> program; • Interdisciplinary projects (project-based learning); • Pedagogical Support Nucleus; • Reading Club; • Libras course for families and hearing students; • Monitoring; • <i>Narratura</i> – book creation	• Bilingual curriculum • Portuguese classes as L2 with a specialist teacher; • Weekly Libras classes for all groups of people; • Cultural projects (Guri, cinema, arts, <i>slam</i>, sports, and learning recovery)	• Project with Deaf Babies; • Continuing and systematic teachers' development; • Courses and workshops of Libras (in different formats); • <i>Libras em Casa</i> (YouTube shows); • Creativity Exhibition; • Portuguese course as second language.
Number of deaf students and professionals	• 69 deaf students in Childhood and Elementary Education (exclusive); • 30 professionals: (18 teachers, being 8 deaf); • Inclusion: 30 deaf students; • 9 interpreters, 1 deaf teacher and 2 LP-L2 specialist teachers.	• Approximately 10% of the 750 students are deaf; • 117 professionals in the EMEF (2 deaf instructors, 1 deaf mediator instructor, 1 guide-interpreter, 10 interpreters, 6 bilingual teachers.	• 71 deaf learners (babies, children, youth and adults) currently served by the educational network; • 16 bilingual teachers.

In spite of these differences, the institutions point a few common principles:

1. Libras as L1 and written Portuguese and L2: all of the models affirm that the instructional language is Libras and the teaching of Portuguese must occur as L2, with specialist teachers.
2. Support to families: the three models provide stimulation programs for babies and require participation of the families in Libras classes.
3. Mixed teams and active participation of the deaf: CES-RB and CEU São Rafael have the presence of deaf teachers with reference role.
4. School transition: CES-RB and CEU São Rafael, at the end phase of the early years of elementary school conduct follow-up with the support of translators and interpreters of Libras/Portuguese Language. In Guarulhos, they progress to EMEBS with bilingual teachers.

Final considerations

The three experiences analyzed proves that, although there is not a single model of bilingual school for deaf students, there are shared fundamental principles that may guidance public policies and accessible pedagogical practices and recognize the linguistic right of the deaf person. In common, these initiatives assume Libras as L1 and written Portuguese and L2 of the deaf students, invest in early linguistic acquisition through visually accessible environments, involve the families actively in the educational process, and count on mixed school teams, integrating deaf and sign-hearing professionals. Such pillars configure linguistic territories that value the deaf identity and assure equity in the access to the curriculum, in line with the legal acknowledgment of BED as teaching modality since Law no. 14.191 (2021).

Each one of these experiences bring specific lessons on feasibility and challenges of BED in different institutional scenarios. The history of CES-RB shows the transforming potential when a traditionally oral school redirect to bilingualism: over decades, the institution built a strong bilingual community, proving that with time, investment in the formation of fluently bilingual teams, and integration with the deaf community it is possible to revert paradigms and promote educational excellence.

In the case of CEU São Rafael, the experience proves that the public system can develop a solid and sustainable bilingual curriculum, provided that there are legislative support and a conception of deafness based on the cultural difference and not in the disability. This municipal hub school from the east side of São Paulo also demonstrate that the BED can benefit the entire school community: in addition to ensure the access to sign language to deaf students during the early years and the appropriate support in the transition to regular classes, it involves the hearing students in Libras classes and inclusive cultural projects, promoting empathy and intercultural coexistence.

The reality of Guarulhos highlights the importance of formalize and expand programs that were previously isolated: by transforming former classes in an official Bilingual Educational Program for the Deaf, safeguarded by the municipal legislation (Law no. 7.795, 2019) and consolidated guidelines in 2024, the municipality took a crucial step to guarantee continuity and quality in the service. This trajectory shows that solid public policies – including the offer of specific continuing development to bilingual teachers and opening of new classes – are essential to the BED ceases to be an occasional project to become an integral part of the educational system. It should be noted that, even in Guarulhos, the challenges persist, such as the concentration of classes in few schools and the need of students to move from other regions of the city, indicating the urgency of internalize and expand the offer of this educational model.

From the perspective of linguistic rights, the three models reaffirm that bilingual schools and classes for the deaf are not segregationist spaces; on the contrary, they consist of environments of linguist inclusion that are essential for the complete development of deaf students. In these schools, by assuring deaf children the possibility of acquiring Libras as L1 and interact with their deaf peers, a solid base is created for building identity and learning of school contents in equality of conditions. Therefore, the idea of segregation is dislocated: as highlighted by deaf leaderships in open letter of 2012, the true segregation occurs when deaf and hearing students are in the same space without sharing the same opportunities of access to communication and knowledge. Following this perspective, the existence of bilingual classes and schools does not violate the principle of inclusion, but accomplishes it in a differentiated way – ensuring the linguistic accessibility where it would not be present in exclusive oral scenarios. Moreover, the initiatives described show that the approximation between deaf and hearing people can and should occur in a collaborative and respectful way, with the hearing

learning Libras and participating in the deaf culture, while the deaf conquer their space of voice (visual) in school.

In regard to the curricular organization, it was noted that the models analyzed also have important distinctions. In the municipality of Guarulhos, the BED is integrated to the official curricular proposal, expressed in the QSN document, which include specific guidance for Libras and written Portuguese language. In CEU São Rafael, it is identified dedicated curricula for the teaching of Libras and Portuguese language in the context of bilingual education. Colégio Rio Branco, on the other hand, is guided by national curricular references, specially the BNCC. Although the institution does not have a specific bilingual curriculum formalized, all the students count on Educational Individualized Plan (PEI), by which pedagogical adequacies are made. These findings proves that the consolidation of BED also depends on the curricular explicitness, a central element for systematization, institutional continuity, and potential replication of good practices.

Thus, far from promoting isolations, the bilingual schools serve as cultural bridges, promoting interchange and mutual enrichment between the deaf and hearing communities.

In summary, to ensure the right to education of the deaf in Brazil, it is necessary to strengthen and expand experiences such as those reported here. This implies, firstly, expanding the network of bilingual schools and classes for deaf students beyond the large urban centers, in order to correct territorial inequalities and bring the BED to medium and small municipalities. In parallel, it is essential to invest in the initial and continuing development of teachers – both deaf and hearing – with proficiency in Libras and qualification to bilingual approaches, ensuring that the sign language permeate effectively the pedagogical practices in classroom. The participation of the families is also emphasized: the studied cases prove that the family engagement, through the course of Libras, supporting groups, and continued guidance, contribute significantly for school success of deaf students, reinforcing at home the development of L1 and valuation of deaf identity.

Finally, it is imperative to keep and further the legislative and institutional commitment with this modality of education – from implementing the provisions of LDB (amended by Law 14.191/2021) and the Decree no. 5.626 (2005) to formulating local policies that enable funding, appropriate infrastructure, and curricular guidelines suitable to the bilingual pedagogy. Only these joint efforts will allow that the BED ceases to be an exception and is converted into a

broad and assured reality, in which all deaf children have the right to learn in their own language, with full accessibility. Ultimately, the strengthening of these bilingual schools – true linguistic and cultural affirmation territories – represents a decisive step towards the Brazilian educational system to become truly inclusive, complying with both national legislation and international commitments of ensuring an education of quality for all, without communication barriers.

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Corresponding author:

Luiz Renato Martins da Rocha - Av. da Universidade, 308 - Butantã, São Paulo, SP, Brazil, 05508-040. luizrenato@usp.br

Authorship contributions:

Luiz Renato Martins da Rocha - Conceptualization: Leadership; Data Curation: Leadership; Formal Analysis: Equal; Funding Acquisition: Leadership; Investigation: Equal; Methodology: Leadership; Project Administration: Leadership; Resources: Leadership; Software: Equal; Supervision: Leadership; Validation: Equal; Visualization: Equal; Writing – original draft: Leadership; Writing – analysis and editing: Leadership.

Soraia Romano - Conceptualization: Leadership; Data Curation: Leadership; Formal Analysis: Equal; Funding Acquisition: Support; Investigation: Equal; Methodology: Support; Project Administration: Support; Resources: Support; Software: Equal; Supervision: Support; Validation: Equal; Visualization: Equal; Writing – original draft: Support; Writing – analysis and editing: Equal.

Talita Lacerda Camarheiro - Conceptualization: Leadership; Data Curation: Leadership; Formal Analysis: Equal; Funding Acquisition: Support; Investigation: Equal; Methodology: Support; Project Administration: Support; Resources: Support; Software: Equal; Supervision: Support; Validation: Equal; Visualization: Equal; Writing – original draft: Support; Writing – analysis and editing: Equal.

Rafael de Arruda Bueno José Miguel - Conceptualization: Leadership; Data Curation: Leadership; Formal Analysis: Equal; Funding Acquisition: Support; Investigation: Equal; Methodology: Support; Project Administration: Support; Resources: Support; Software: Equal; Supervision: Support; Validation: Equal; Visualization: Equal; Writing – original draft: Support; Writing – analysis and editing: Equal.

Liliane Rodrigues Lucarini - Conceptualization: Leadership; Data Curation: Leadership; Formal Analysis: Equal; Funding Acquisition: Support; Investigation: Equal; Methodology: Support; Project Administration: Support; Resources: Support; Software: Equal; Supervision: Support; Validation: Equal; Visualization: Equal; Writing – original draft: Support; Writing – analysis and editing: Equal.

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Editors in charge:

Associated Editor: Eduardo José Manzini <<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7420-6146>>

Editor-in-chief: Helena Sampaio <<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1759-4875>>