The historical development of English as a foreign language teaching in Brazilian schools: methods and legal documents

O desenvolvimento histórico do ensino de inglês como língua estrangeira nas escolas brasileiras: métodos e documentos legais

El desarrollo histórico de la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera en las escuelas brasileñas: métodos y documentos legales

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ABSTRACT
This bibliographical article delves into the historical trajectory that culminate in the contemporary challenges of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction in Brazilian schools. It elucidates the evolution of language teaching methods, from traditional approaches to modern pedagogies, such as the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach and postmethod pedagogy. Moreover, it traces the development of legal frameworks guiding EFL education in Brazilian schools, from colonial times to the present day, highlighting significant policy shifts and implementation challenges. Despite recent efforts for English as a foreign language education in Brazil, practical barriers persist, including low literacy rates, inadequate infrastructure, and limited teacher training programs. The article emphasizes the importance of acknowledging the social contexts and historical developments that shape EFL instruction in Brazil and advocates for tailored teacher development activities to address the unique needs of Brazilian EFL educators. By contextualizing the challenges and complexities of EFL teaching in Brazil, this article may offer insights for enhancing language education practices and policies in the country, with an emphasis on teacher education.

Keywords: English as a foreign language, language teaching methods, Brazilian schools, teacher development, language education practices.

RESUMO
Este artigo de caráter bibliográfico explora a trajetória histórica que culmina nos desafios contemporâneos do ensino de inglês como língua estrangeira nas escolas brasileiras. Ele esclarece a evolução dos métodos de ensino de idiomas, desde abordagens tradicionais até pedagogias modernas, como a abordagem Comunicativa de Ensino de Línguas e a pedagogia pós-método. Além disso, traz o desenvolvimento dos marcos legais que orientam o ensino de inglês nas escolas brasileiras, desde os tempos coloniais até os dias atuais, destacando mudanças
significativas de políticas e desafios de implementação. Apesar dos esforços recentes para o ensino de inglês como língua estrangeira no Brasil, barreiras de ordem prática persistem, incluindo baixas taxas de letramento na língua materna, infraestrutura inadequada e limitações nos programas de formação de professores. O artigo enfatiza a importância de reconhecer os contextos sociais e desenvolvimentos históricos que moldam o ensino de inglês no Brasil e defende atividades de desenvolvimento de professores adaptadas para atender às necessidades únicas dos professores brasileiros de inglês nas escolas. Ao contextualizar os desafios e complexidades do ensino de inglês no Brasil, espera-se que este artigo possa oferecer insights para aprimorar práticas e políticas de educação linguística no país, com foco na formação de professores.

Palavras-chave: inglês como língua estrangeira, métodos de ensino de línguas, escolas brasileiras, formação de professores, práticas de educação linguística.

RESUMEN
Este artículo de carácter bibliográfico explora la trayectoria histórica que culmina en los desafíos contemporáneos de la enseñanza de inglés como lengua extranjera en las escuelas brasileñas. Clarifica la evolución de los métodos de enseñanza de idiomas, desde enfoques tradicionales hasta pedagogías modernas, como el enfoque Comunicativo de Enseñanza de Lenguas y la pedagogía posmétodo. Además, traza el desarrollo de los marcos legales que orientan la enseñanza de inglés en las escuelas brasileñas, desde la época colonial hasta la actualidad, destacando cambios significativos en políticas y desafíos de implementación. A pesar de los esfuerzos recientes para la enseñanza de inglés como lengua extranjera en Brasil, persisten barreras de orden práctico, incluyendo bajos índices de alfabetización en la lengua materna, infraestructura inadecuada y limitaciones en los programas de formación de profesores. El artículo enfatiza la importancia de reconocer los contextos sociales y desarrollos históricos que moldean la enseñanza de inglés en Brasil y aboga por actividades de desarrollo de profesores adaptadas para satisfacer las necesidades únicas de los profesores brasileños de inglés en las escuelas. Al contextualizar los desafíos y complejidades de la enseñanza de inglés en Brasil, se espera que este artículo pueda ofrecer ideas para mejorar prácticas y políticas de educación lingüística en el país, con un enfoque en la formación de profesores.

Palabras clave: inglés como lengua extranjera, métodos de enseñanza de idiomas, escuelas brasileñas, desarrollo profesional docente, prácticas de educación lingüística.

1 INTRODUCTION

In a 2014 report, the British council states that due to lack of infrastructure, in most Brazilian schools “English teaching is reduced to the basic rules of grammar, reading short texts and learning to pass multiple choice exams for university admittance” (British Council, 2014, p. 12). In the same vein, Fragozo and Monawar (2012, p. 90), in a study about the differences between the English classes in language schools and in regular schools in Brazil, point out that
“regular school teachers [...] seem to use more explicit methods than language school ones, especially when introducing a new, more complex grammar topic”. For the authors, it is a “fact that heavier workloads, bigger groups, lack of resources and focus on reading and writing have made regular school teaching less effective than the experience students have when attending classes at language schools” (p. 82).

This tendency does not seem to be either exclusive from public schools or exclusively Brazilian. According to Ellis (2005, p. 2), “traditionally, language instruction has been directed at developing rule-based competence (i.e., knowledge of specific grammatical rules) through the systematic teaching of pre-selected structures – what Long (1991) has referred to as a focus-on-forms approach”. Traditional teaching, with an emphasis on exposition, memorization, and repetition seems to be pervasive in Brazilian schools, in all school subjects, and throughout the fourteen years of mandatory education. As expected, this situation impacts EFL (English as a foreign language) teaching in schools, with the traditional teaching paradigm playing an important role in EFL teachers’ activities (Sousa; Badim; Oliveira, 2018; Menezes, 2015; Ifa, 2014).

This scenario seems to create a cycle that feeds back itself: teachers spend at least fourteen years in schools as students, attending classes. From this time as students, they create a powerful episodical memory that Lortie (1975) calls ‘apprenticeship of observation’: teachers tend to mimic practices they saw as students when entering the profession. They consider these practices as ‘safe places’ to rely on in times of difficulties, but fail to notice that these practices are limited, fragmented, and imitative since students do not analyze teachers’ actions in a scientific way (Borg, 2004). This phenomenon leads to huge challenges to teacher education programs, that struggle to educate student-teachers to overcome these practices, as explained by Dellagnelo (2009, p. 5, in print):

> It seems notorious, though, that recently graduated students of English and other Education Programs, when taking on their space in the work field, tend to incorporate stereotypical methodological procedures, which characterize, in thesis, the school reality, denying or relativizing, to a great extent, theoretical and methodological axes acquired during the undergraduate program.

In the last decades, teacher education has been reconceptualized in order to better address the variety of challenges that affect teaching. Positivist stances to teacher education, considered teacher learning something that could be generalizable in rules and patterns of ‘good teaching’
and therefore transmitted to teachers, who were supposed to be able to replicate these patterns with their students. Nowadays, more modern approaches to teacher education follow a "sociocultural turn" (Johnson, 2006) common in other areas such as social sciences, anthropology, psychology, and education. Teacher learning is now viewed as a life-long developmental process that is shaped by the social interactions that teachers engage in, the contexts where teachers are immersed and the experiences they have throughout their lives.

Examining the historical development of EFL teaching methods and the evolution of legal documents governing EFL education in Brazil could have crucial implications for EFL teacher education. By delving into the field's social history, we can shed light on the influences that have shaped teaching practices throughout the years. This, in turn, may provide valuable insights into how the cognitive frameworks of a considerable portion of English teachers in Brazil could have been formed.

To conclude, the prevailing traditional teaching paradigms, characterized by rule-based competence and emphasis on exposition, memorization, and repetition, continue to exert a strong influence on EFL instruction in Brazilian schools. This influence is perpetuated by the phenomenon of "apprenticeship of observation," wherein teachers replicate practices observed during their own schooling without critically analyzing their effectiveness. Consequently, teacher education programs face considerable challenges in preparing future educators to overcome these entrenched practices and embrace more modern, effective teaching approaches. By understanding the historical development of the field and its impact on current pedagogical practices, teacher education programs can adopt a sociocultural approach that acknowledges teaching as a lifelong developmental process shaped by social interactions and experiences (Johnson, 2006, 2009). Embracing this perspective is essential for fostering innovative and effective EFL instruction in Brazil and beyond.

2 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF METHODS FOR ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

Teaching is characterized by many factors, such as teachers’ beliefs, preferences,
personalities, and one of the factors that mostly influence teaching is the method\(^1\), which holds systematic procedures prescribed to the teacher based on linguistic theory or legal documents (Leffa, 2012). For Prabhu (1990, p. 175), “a method […] is not good or bad in any objective sense, but has more or less pedagogic power to influence teachers' subjective understanding of teaching”. This consideration is particularly significant within this article, as the aim of this section is not to debate the merits of different methods, but rather to delineate the historical evolution of these concepts and their potential impact on the instruction of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Brazil.

According to Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011, p. 38), in a class based on the Grammar-Translation method, the “fundamental purpose of learning a language is to be able to read literature written in the target language. To do this, students need to learn about the grammar rules and vocabulary of the target language”. When this method is applied, most of the class happens in the students’ native language and translation activities are widespread. Grammar is taught “deductively; that is, they are given the grammar rules and examples, are told to memorize them, and then are asked to apply the rules to other examples. They also learn grammatical paradigms such as verb conjugations” (Larsen-freeman; Anderson, 2011, p. 38). The focus is on the written form of the language (reading and writing). The spoken form (listening and speaking) is almost ignored, as this is not the focus of the method. The teacher is the authority in the classroom, and students follow his/her directions, which can be perceived as a very traditional way of teaching a foreign language since language teachers have used it for a long time. In Brazil, it is still pervasive in regular schools. (Sousa; Badim; Oliveira, 2018; Menezes, 2015; Ifa, 2014).

As a reaction to the grammar-translation method, the Direct Method has its first pieces of evidence of use dating from the 16th century (Leffa, 2016). The main difference between these two methods is that while learners who were taught using the grammar-translation method often could not use the target language communicatively, in the Direct Method the focus is on the use of the target language. Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011, p. 46) explain that, in this method, “no translation is allowed. In fact, the Direct Method receives its name from the fact that meaning is to be conveyed directly in the target language through the use of demonstration and visual aids.

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\(^1\) Another common distinction in applied linguistics is the difference between “method” and “approach” for foreign language teaching. The author is aware of this theoretical elaboration, but in this text, both terms are used interchangeably. The criteria for using “method” or “approach” is merely how the idea in question was more commonly called in the history of foreign language teaching.
with no recourse to the students’ native language”. The syllabus is organized in situations (e.g.,
go shopping) or topics (e.g., history) and not in grammar topics anymore, as perceived in the
grammar-translation method (e.g., Simple past). Grammar is taught “inductively; that is, the
students are presented with examples and they figure out the rule or generalization from the
examples. An explicit grammar rule may never be given” (Larsen-Freeman; Anderson, 2011, p.
46). The use of students’ native language is forbidden. The focus is on the oral components of
language, but written language is also used, especially in dialogues that prompt oral activities.
Repetition is widely used as a means of having students master the language (Jalil; Procailo,
2009; Gomes, 2016).

The Direct Method “was introduced in Brazil in 1932 at Pedro II School, through a
‘radical reform of the teaching method’ (classes of 15 to 20 students, strict selection of teachers,
selection of adequate teaching materials, etc.)” (Leffa, 2016, p. 7, my translation)². However, the
author points out that most teachers returned to teach using the Grammar-Translation method
after an initial enthusiasm with the Direct Method. The reasons for that are mostly lack of
linguistic proficiency (proper pronunciation and speaking abilities) of teachers or lack of physical
capacity to keep standing and speaking for several hours.

According to Leffa (2016), the United States was the only country where the Direct
Method was not officially adopted as a standard for language teaching in the final decades of the
nineteenth century. The American educational community thought then that the development of
students’ oral abilities should not be the focus of foreign language teaching in regular schools.
The objective should be reading in the foreign language and being able to enjoy other cultures.
This should be done by mixing principles of the grammar-translation method and the direct
method into what became known as the ‘Reading approach’³. From the former, the reading
approach took the focus on written abilities. From the latter, it took the direct exposure of students
to written texts. American education specialists defended that it was impossible to fully develop
a language’s four abilities (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) in regular schools and that
most students needed only reading abilities. The reading approach was adopted in American
regular schools until the end of the Second World War when it started to receive heavy criticism
(Leffa, 2016; Celce-Murcia, 2014).

² In Portuguese: “foi introduzida no Brasil em 1932 no Colégio Pedro II, através de uma “reforma radical no método
de ensino” (turmas de 15 a 20 alunos, seleção rigorosa de professores, escolha de material adequado etc.).”
³ Abordagem para a leitura
In Brazil, this approach to language teaching was influential - many years later than in the US - in the construction of National Curricular Parameters for Foreign Language (1998)\(^4\), a legal document that guided schools in constructing their curriculum. Let us see the excerpt below:

To consider the development of oral skills as central to foreign language teaching in Brazil means not to take into account the social relevance for its learning. With the exception of specific situations of some tourist regions or some multilingual communities, the use of a foreign language seems, in general, to be more linked to the reading of technical or leisure literature. It should also be noted that the only formal exams in a foreign language (graduate and undergraduate admission exams in universities) require mastery of reading skills. Therefore, reading fulfills, on the one hand, the needs of formal education, and, on the other, it is the skill that the student can use in his/her immediate social context. In addition, learning to read in a foreign language can help the integral development of student literacy. Reading plays an essential role in school and learning to read in another language can contribute to the student’s performance as a reader in his/her mother tongue (Brasil, 1998, p. 20)\(^5\).

Criticism to the reading approach led to what became known as the ‘audio-lingual method’. Initially developed by the American Army, which needed fluent speakers of foreign languages and could not find them, the audio-lingual method is based on the direct method, with more stable principles. As linguists and psychologists designed such principles, the method acquired a ‘scientific status’. Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011, p. 59) compare both methods, stating that the audio-lingual method “is also an oral-based approach. However, it is very different in that rather than emphasizing vocabulary acquisition through exposure to its use in situations, the Audio-Lingual Method drills students in the use of grammatical sentence patterns”. With a strong behaviorist base, in this method, learning a foreign language and using it communicatively is a matter of “conditioning—helping learners to respond correctly to stimuli through shaping and reinforcement, so that the learners could overcome the habits of their native language and form the new habits required to be target language speakers” (Larsen-Freeman; 4 Parâmetros curriculares nacionais: Língua Estrangeira
5 In Portuguese: “Deste modo, considerar o desenvolvimento de habilidades orais como central no ensino de Língua Estrangeira no Brasil não leva em conta o critério de relevância social para a sua aprendizagem. Com exceção da situação específica de algumas regiões turísticas ou de algumas comunidades plurilingués, o uso de uma língua estrangeira parece estar, em geral, mais vinculado à leitura de literatura técnica ou de lazer. Note-se também que os únicos exames formais em Língua Estrangeira (vestibular e admissão a cursos de pós-graduação) requerem o domínio da habilidade de leitura. Portanto, a leitura atende, por um lado, às necessidades da educação formal, e, por outro, é a habilidade que o aluno pode usar em seu contexto social imediato. Além disso, a aprendizagem de leitura em Língua Estrangeira pode ajudar o desenvolvimento integral do letramento do aluno. A leitura tem função primordial na escola e aprender a ler em outra língua pode colaborar no desempenho do aluno como leitor em sua língua materna.”
New grammar and vocabulary are presented through dialogues provided by the teacher, which are imitated and repeated by students several times (Celce-Murcia, 2014; Jalil, Procailo, 2009).

The audio-lingual method began to be more emphatically criticized in the 1970s. On the theoretical aspect, generative linguists attacked the idea that language is a set of habits based on the fact that humans can create and understand sentences never heard before. Therefore, for them, learning a language should be a matter of learning the underlying rules that allow us to create infinite sentences. In the perspective of these linguists, linguistic competence is more important than linguistic performance (the immediate use of language). Moreover, written and oral forms are now considered equally important. On the practical aspect, they pointed out that people who learned languages using the audio-lingual method seemed unable to communicate in real situations and could only repeat sentences they had memorized (and sometimes did not even know the meaning). This rejection of the audio-lingual method led foreign language teaching to a crisis: no better method existed to replace the one that was being rejected. Then a transition phase in foreign language teaching started, and very unusual methods appeared (Leffa, 2016; Uphoff, 2008).

Some of these unusual methods are (Leffa, 2016; Larsen-Freeman; Anderson, 2011):

a) suggestopedia: the main idea is to focus on creating a positive environment that could overcome psychological barriers that hinder language learning;

b) community language learning: in this method, the classroom becomes a sort of therapy session, and students sit in circles and confront each other, with the teacher counseling and also helping students to translate their sentences into the target language;

c) total physical response: teaching the language by using commands, from the simplest ‘sit down’ to more complex ones, such as ‘Pedro, get up, go to Luiza’s table, open her pencil case and find one blue pen’;

d) Gattegno’s silent way: the teacher is silent most of the time, and students learn the foreign language by manipulating colorful sticks and by reading colorful graphs.

According to Leffa (2016), while in the United States generative linguists were more interested in the language itself than in the social contexts where it circulated, in the 70s Europe, linguists had a more substantial interest in discourse studies, analyzing written and oral texts and their social contexts. The author explains that language was not seen as a set of sentences
anymore but as a set of communicative events. Moreover, these European linguists showed a significantly greater interest in language teaching, an area largely overlooked by generative linguists. This emphasis laid the groundwork for the emergence of the Communicative Approach for Language Teaching.

The fundamental idea behind Communicative Language Teaching (henceforth CLT) is that “students may know the rules of linguistic usage, but be unable to use the language (Widdowson, 1978). In short, being able to communicate required more than linguistic competence; it required communicative competence (Hymes, 1971)—knowing when and how to say what to whom” (Larsen-Freeman; Anderson, 2011, p. 152). Furthermore, Canale and Swain (1980) propose that the concept of communicative competence encompasses four dimensions: linguistic competence (being able to create grammatically correct utterances), sociolinguistic competence (knowledge for making the right choices concerning language varieties), discourse competence (ability of being cohesive and coherent using the language), and strategic competence (being able to use strategies to solve communication problems). Thus, teaching a foreign language then became not a matter of teaching only linguistic forms, but teaching how to use the language to communicate in different situations effectively.

Instead of organizing the syllabus based on grammar topics (simple past, simple present, if clauses, etc.), the organization was focused on developing students’ communicative competence. Many approaches within CLT try to do so in different ways: the notional-functional approach, for instance, focuses on language functions such as ‘presenting yourself’, ‘buying food’, ‘talking about price’, etc. CLT has had a tremendous impact on foreign language teaching around the world.

In terms of classroom changes, classes that are based on CLT tend to be more student-centered, with a greater emphasis on student-student interactions and situations where the language must be used by students for communicative purposes. Errors are viewed as part of development, and most of the time are not corrected immediately. The role of the teacher in CLT is to promote situations where students need to communicate in the target language. Another essential characteristic of this approach is that students must be exposed to authentic materials, that is, language as it is actually used for daily routines in the real world (Leffa, 2016; Larsen-Freeman; Anderson, 2011, p. 192; Jalil; Procailo, 2009; Uphoff, 2008).

In Brazil, CLT has been very popular in language institutes, but in EFL classes in regular
schools, it has not been nearly as pervasive. The possible reasons for that are the lack of infrastructure in schools (British Council, 2014), the lack of proper teacher education on CLT (Aleixo, 2003), and the fact that the legal documents that guide Brazilian education do not preconize a communicative teaching. A more in-depth review of legal documents that guide Brazilian education will be made in the following section.

Some criticisms of the CLT approach to teaching are: i) the difficulties in defining which functions of language (or which tasks) should be presented to students (and in which sequence); ii) these divisions, in turn, bring the negative argument of teaching atomization, i.e., of breaking the language in small pieces that do not form a coherent whole (Leffa, 2016); iii) the debate if it is possible to have “real-life communication” in a classroom setting; iv) the inability of CLT of adapting to the various contexts of language teaching, such as cultural contexts that posit a hierarchy between students and teachers (Didenko, Pichugova, 2016).

To date, after so many attempts to find the best method, some linguists argue in favor of what is called the postmethod pedagogy. Kumaravadivelu (2001) proposes the reconceptualization of L2 language teaching as a postmethod pedagogy based on three parameters: particularity (teaching should be specific to each context), practicality (teachers should not be passive consumers of theories. Instead, they should theorize upon their practice), and possibility (teachers should acknowledge and problematize relations of power and dominance in students’ social context). Simply put, the postmethod pedagogy points out to teachers’ autonomy to choose the best methods for teaching based on the social context, the sociopolitical relations, and the power issues in which teachers and students are immersed.

All in all, this seems the most coherent stance when it comes to methods for language teaching, since teaching (viewed in a sociocultural perspective) is “local and dependent on particular circumstances in particular classrooms with particular students” (Johnson, 1999). Thus, the assumption that one method will be able to account for all the complexities of teaching that come with each teaching context sounds problematic. In this vein, a post-method stance on EFL teaching appears to solve this problem since it empowers teachers to choose the best approaches to each classroom situation.

Having presented the historical development of foreign language teaching methods, I will now review the historical development of legal documents regarding English teaching in Brazil.
3 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF LEGAL DOCUMENTS REGARDING ENGLISH TEACHING IN BRAZIL

Since 2017, English has been a mandatory subject in all Brazilian schools for students aged 11 to 17. Although it was not mandatory before the Act nº 13.415/2017, Brazil has a historical tradition of teaching this subject in regular schools. As commented by Chagas (1979, p. 103, my translation), which is the author of a seminal book on the history of English teaching in Brazil called Special Didactic of Modern Languages, “the evolution of language teaching matches with the history of secondary education in Brazil”. Understanding the historical development of legal documents that concern English teaching in Brazil is the objective of this session.

According to Leffa (1999, p. 3), during Colonial Brazil (1534-1808), the main languages taught were Greek and Latin. Only in 1837, with the foundation of the Pedro II school, modern languages started to gain some status. As put by Nogueira (2007, p. 21, my translation), “since its foundation, Pedro II school taught English, French, Latin, and Greek. However, at that time, the French language’s importance was notably greater than that given to English”. Despite the tradition previously mentioned, foreign language teaching during the Brazilian Empire was fragmented (each school would define its policy) and often discredited (Leffa, 1999).

In the first years of the Brazilian Republic (1889 – 1930), foreign language classes were mostly elective (Nogueira, 2007). Attendance to secondary education (and, therefore, foreign language classes) was optional and could be replaced by a “summary, superficial and incomplete exam, as a mere formality for the beginning of higher education” (Chagas, 1979, p. 89, my translation).

In 1931, Education and Health minister Francisco de Campos introduced what came to be known as ‘Francisco de Campos reforms’. These measures structured Brazilian secondary and higher education. Optional attendance was abolished. Regarding language teaching, the reforms reduced the course load of Latin classes and increased the course load of modern foreign languages.

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6 In Portuguese: Didática Especial das Línguas Modernas
7 In Portuguese: “a evolução do ensino de línguas se confunde com a história da educação secundária no Brasil”
8 In Portuguese: “este colégio teve, desde a sua fundação, o ensino da língua inglesa em seu currículo, juntamente com o francês, o latim e o grego. No entanto, naquela época, a importância atribuída à língua francesa era notavelmente maior do que à dada ao inglês.”
9 In Portuguese: “um exame sumário, superficial e incompleto, como simples formalidade para o início do curso superior”
languages (such as English and French). The most significant change of these reforms to English classes was introducing the direct method, teaching the language using the target language, avoiding the native language, and focusing on developing oral skills. (Leffa, 1999; Nogueira, 2007; Quevedo-Camargo; Silva, 2017). Although it represented a significant advance in legal terms, when it comes to language teaching in practical terms, Francisco de Campos reforms were not able to change the state of English teaching in Brazil due to lack of structure in schools and lack of teacher education programs to inform teachers’ practices. Moreover, few teachers could express themselves using the target language in the levels that are necessary for direct method classes (Machado, 2014).

In 1942, education minister Gustavo Capanema introduced what became known as ‘Capanema reforms’. With a strong nationalist inspiration, the main idea behind his proposals for national education was “to form in teenagers a solid general culture, marked by the cultivation of ancient and modern humanities at the same time, as well as to accentuate and elevate patriotic and humanistic consciousness” (Chagas, 1979, p. 94, my translation). Regarding the teaching of foreign languages, the reform included Latin, French, and English as mandatory courses in middle school. Secondary school had two possible curricula: scientific (with a sharper focus on natural sciences with English, French, and Spanish as mandatory foreign languages) and classic (with Latin and Greek as mandatory foreign languages). These reforms destined 35 hours per week for foreign language courses, representing 19.6% of the whole curriculum (Quevedo-Camargo; Silva, 2017, p. 261).

Capanema reforms also covered the methodology for language teaching. Leffa (1999, p. 10, my translation) explains that

The use of the direct method was recommended, with an emphasis on "highly practical teaching", while making it clear that language teaching should be oriented not only towards instrumental objectives (listening comprehension, speaking, reading, and writing) but also towards educational objectives ("to contribute to the formation of the mentality, developing habits of observation and reflection") and cultural objectives.

10 In Portuguese: “formar nos adolescentes uma sólida cultura geral, marcada pelo cultivo a um tempo das humanidades antigas e das humanidades modernas e, bem assim, de neles acentuar e elevar a consciência patriótica e a consciência humanística”

11 In Portuguese: “Recomendava-se o uso do método direto, com ênfase em "um ensino pronunciadamente prático", embora deixando claro que o ensino de línguas deve ser orientado não só para objetivos instrumentais (compreender, falar, ler e escrever) mas também para objetivos educativos ("contribuir para a formação da mentalidade, desenvolvendo hábitos de observação e reflexão") e culturais ("conhecimento da civilização estrangeira" e "capacidade de compreender tradições e ideais de outros povos, inculcando [no aluno] noções da própria unidade do espírito humano")".
However, in practical terms, the direct method was gradually substituted for a version of the American reading approach. This may have happened due to the difficulties in applying the direct method in schools, such as the lack of teachers’ adequate linguistic abilities and the lack of pedagogical resources. Nevertheless, Leffa (1999) points out that the 40s and 50s can be considered the ‘golden years’ of foreign language teaching in Brazil.

All the progress made with Francisco de Campos and Capanema reforms concerning foreign language teaching disappears with the promulgation of the Guidelines and Bases for National Education act in 1961. The teaching of modern foreign languages, up until now mandatory, became optional. Each Brazilian state could decide if it would offer foreign languages courses, and which language would be offered (Machado; Campos; Saunders, 2007).

In these lines, in 1971, a new Guidelines and Bases for National Education act was promulgated during Brazilian military dictatorship. Foreign languages remained optional and mandatory schooling was reduced from 12 to 11 years. Furthermore, regular schools now placed a stronger emphasis on vocational education, aimed at preparing students for entry-level, low-paying positions in various fields of work. Therefore, foreign language teaching became even more scarce in Brazilian public schools. In fact, several students in the 70s and 80s ended middle and secondary school without having contact with a foreign language (Leffa, 1999).

Things started to change with the end of the Brazilian military dictatorship in 1985, which led to a new constitution in 1988, which, in turn, led to a new Guidelines and Bases for National Education act in 1996. This is the law that structured the Brazilian educational system as we know it today. Schools now had to offer at least one foreign language in middle school and secondary school, and the school community would choose which one. The idea of a ‘right method’ was abandoned since teaching should have as a principle the plurality of ideas and pedagogical theories (Leffa, 1999).

Another important moment of Brazilian’s history concerning foreign language education happened in 1998, when aiming to create standard national references for the curriculum of schools, the Brazilian education ministry released the National Curricular Parameters (PCNs) for middle school. According to Leffa (1999, p. 16, my translation), “the parameters do not go so far

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as to propose a specific methodology for teaching foreign languages, but suggest a socio-interactional approach, with an emphasis on the development of reading, justified, according to its authors, by the student needs and learning conditions”\textsuperscript{13}.

In 2017, the 1996 law was changed, and English was defined as the mandatory foreign language in both middle school and secondary school (students from ages 11 to 17). If the school had the necessary conditions, it could offer a second foreign language in secondary education, preferably Spanish (Brasil, 2017).

Across Brazil’s 27 states, there is a multiplicity of different local legal documents guiding English teaching in regular schools. In Santa Catarina state, for example, two documents stood out as essential guides for teaching a foreign language in regular schools: Santa Catarina’s curricular proposal (1998) and its newest version, from 2014. The 1998 version of the document, as the PCNs, argues that “it is necessary to prioritize work with reading and writing in the foreign language” (Santa Catarina, 1998, p. 101, my translation)\textsuperscript{14}. The document justifies this choice by pointing out the limited time and conditions in schools for foreign language teaching. Moreover, it emphasizes that the work in classrooms must be focused on the text in its social context, adopting a Bakhtinian stance to language teaching. Simply put, language must be taught through speech genres.

The newest form of Santa Catarina curricular proposal, from 2014, reinforces the teaching of languages through speech genres. According to this document

\[\ldots\text{the work with speech genres in Foreign/Additional language teaching considers the historicity and cultural insertion of students. During the formative course, this work is oriented so that there is an actual experience of using the foreign/additional language under study through activities with speech genres that develop oral, written, or signed textual comprehension and production. In this perspective, activities with texts cannot be seen as a mere expansion of vocabulary in the language that is being studied or as mere work of translation. The language must be seen in the context of experiences that give rise to other geographical spaces, cultures, representations of the world, ways in which languages mediate human interactions. Studying a foreign/additional language is an opportunity to get to know another culture through the language, in order to expand the repertoire of knowledge that involves not only the language but broader aspects, ways of life of the speakers of the language under study (Santa Catarina, 2014, p. 124, my translation)\textsuperscript{15}.}\]

\textsuperscript{13} In Portuguese: “Os Parâmetros não chegam a propor uma metodologia específica de ensino de línguas, mas sugerem uma abordagem sociointeracional, com ênfase no desenvolvimento da leitura, justificada, segundo seus autores, pelas necessidades do aluno e as condições de aprendizagem”

\textsuperscript{14} In Portuguese: “é necessário priorizar o trabalho com a produção da leitura e escritura em LE”

\textsuperscript{15} In Portuguese: “[\ldots] o trabalho com tais gêneros do discurso nas Línguas Estrangeiras/Adicionais considera a historicidade e a inserção cultural dos estudantes. Durante o percurso formativo, esse trabalho orienta-se para que
In this proposal, work with the grammar of the foreign language can never be done isolatedly. Grammar and vocabulary only exist due to socio interaction and should always be studied within the text. The document explains this kind of work “needs to be done in a way that students understand the implications of managing certain vocabulary and grammatical resources in their ways of saying/signaling/writing” (Santa Catarina, 2014, p. 132, my translation).

Even though the 1996 version of Guidelines and Bases for National Education act established that “elementary, middle and high school curricula must have a common national base, to be complemented, in each educational system and each school, by a diversified part, required by the regional and local characteristics of the society, culture, economy, and students” (Brasil, 1996, my translation), this common curricular national base (BNCC) was released only in 2017, after two years of stormy discussions amid a very turbulent Brazilian political scenario. This document establishes the common contents every student must study in Brazilian schools.

For English teaching, which is the mandatory foreign language in Brazilian schools since 2017, BNCC establishes five axes of knowledge: orality, reading, writing, linguistic knowledge, and intercultural dimension. The pieces of knowledge in each of these axes must be taught aiming at developing ‘competences’ in students. The idea that teaching must be focused on reading is abandoned in favor of a proposal that seeks to develop multiliteracies in students. Moreover, BNCC introduces the concept of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), pointing to a more non-normative view of language teaching. English is not seen as the mother tongue of some countries (such as the U.S, United Kingdom, Australia, etc.) anymore. It is now seen as a common means of communication for different people around the world.
All these documents, with several different theoretical orientations, have impacted teaching in varied ways across the years, creating beliefs that sometimes are not mutually coherent. For example, the idea that EFL teaching must focus on reading (as recommended by the PCNs) is still prevalent in some EFL teachers in Brazil, even though more recent legal documents reject this idea in favour of sociointeracional approaches that integrate language abilities. Moreover, as Batista (2020) points out, these documents provide a theoretical framework on foreign language teaching, but most of the time do not provide methodological instructions for teaching the language abilities, limiting to “provide suggestions for teachers on how to adapt to the status quo”, such as a large number of students per class and the lack of pedagogical resources.

Finally, it is paramount to discuss the role of a Brazilian public policy that has been shaping EFL teaching in Brazilian public schools since 2011: the distribution of EFL and Spanish as a foreign language textbooks free of charge to public school students. The distribution of textbooks of several school subjects is a well-established policy in the country, dating back to 1937. Since 1985, this program is officially called National Textbook Program19 (PNLD), but it took some time to the program encompass the diversity of school subjects and modalities in Brazilian public education. Only in 2010 the school subjects of Art, English, Philosophy, Sociology, and Spanish started to be part of the program, after years of protests of teachers (Sarmento, 2016).

According to its official website20, the foundations of this program, that is currently ubiquitous in Brazilian public schools, are: i) the gratuity to students; ii) the books must be evaluated by a commission composed of academics, professors, schoolteachers and government officials to ensure the quality of the books according to preestablished criteria, such as adequation of the books to students; iii) among the approved textbooks, the choice of which of them is going to be used in each course must be done by the schoolteacher; iv) the books must be renewed every three years.

Moreover, there are extra criteria in each discipline that each book must meet in order to be approved. For foreign language textbooks they are, briefly speaking, related to ethical and intercultural issues in the studies of language, such as respect for Brazilian culture and promotion

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19 In Portuguese: Programa Nacional do Livro Didático (PNLD)
20 http://portal.mec.gov.br/pnld/apresentacao
of diversity, seeking to deconstructed stereotipes for long present in EFL textbooks. PNLD for foreign language also preconizes the integration of language four abilities and the use of multiple genres, with authentical texts immersed in a proposal that explicits language’s social uses. To conclude, it is important to note that even though these textbooks are widespread, their effects in EFL teaching-learning vary intensely according to the interaction teachers and students have with these pedagogical tools, which certainly have been helping to shape Brazilian education (Sarmento; Silva, 2012; 2013; Silva; Sarmento, 2015).

In this section, I have presented the historical development of English teaching in Brazilian schools, from the situation in the Brazilian empire, going over the Francisco de Campos and Capanema reforms, the 1961 and 1971 Guidelines and Bases for National Education acts along with its present version from 1996. Considering the presented in this section, it is possible to point out that the structuring of the teaching of English as a foreign language in public schools has been a very troubled path, from the Brazilian colonial era until the present.

4 FINAL REMARKS

Modern approaches to teacher education recognize that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' recipe for teaching; instead, effective teaching strategies depend on the social contexts in which teachers operate. Learning to teach effectively involves developing a reflective mindset to overcome what Lortie (1975) termed the 'apprenticeship of observation'—the tendency for teachers to replicate practices they observed as students when beginning their careers. Fostering this reflective ability in teachers requires a deep understanding of the social practices and contexts that may have shaped their cognitive frameworks for teaching.

In this vein, this article explored the evolution of language teaching methods, focusing on their impact on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction in Brazil. It discussed the shift from traditional methods like Grammar-Translation to more modern approaches like the Direct Method and the Audio-Lingual Method. The emergence of the Communicative Approach, which prioritized communicative competence over mere linguistic proficiency, was also examined. This approach emphasized real-life language use and student-centered learning, advocating for exposure to authentic materials and promoting student interaction. Despite its popularity in language institutes, the CLT approach was not widely adopted in Brazilian EFL classes due to
various reasons such as lack of infrastructure, insufficient teacher training, and absence of support in educational policies. Criticisms of CLT included challenges in task sequencing and concerns about its adaptability to diverse cultural contexts. Some linguists advocated for a postmethod pedagogy, which emphasized teachers' autonomy in selecting methods based on contextual factors. This perspective acknowledged the complexity of teaching and the need for flexible approaches tailored to specific classroom situations.

Moving on from the methods to the historical development of the legal documents that guided EFL teaching in Brazilian schools, this article pointed out that English has been compulsory in all Brazilian schools for students aged 11 to 17 since 2017, marking a significant shift in educational policy. However, this mandate is the culmination of a historical trajectory dating back to colonial times. The evolution of language teaching in Brazil closely mirrors the development of its secondary education system, as noted by Chagas (1979), whose seminal work traces the history of English teaching in the country. During Colonial Brazil (1534-1808), Greek and Latin dominated the curriculum until the establishment of the Pedro II school in 1837, which introduced modern languages, albeit with a greater emphasis on French. The Brazilian Republic (1889 – 1930) saw foreign language classes become elective, with secondary education attendance being optional. It wasn't until 1931, with Francisco de Campos reforms, that mandatory attendance was enforced, alongside a focus on modern foreign languages. However, despite legal reforms, practical challenges persisted, hindering effective language teaching. In 1942, Gustavo Capanema introduced reforms aimed at creating a sense of national identity through education, including mandatory language courses. While these reforms represented progress on paper, they faced implementation obstacles. Subsequent legislation in 1961 and 1971 saw foreign language teaching become optional, further diminishing its presence in public schools. The transition to democracy in 1985 led to the enactment of new education laws, culminating in the 1996 Guidelines and Bases for National Education act, which mandated foreign language education. However, it wasn't until 2017 that English became the mandatory foreign language, as specified in the BNCC. Despite these legal frameworks, challenges persist in translating policy into practice, with variations across different states and regions. Additionally, the distribution of textbooks through programs like the PNLD has aimed to support language education, albeit with varying degrees of success. Thus, the journey of English teaching
in Brazilian public schools reflects a complex interplay of historical, legal, and pedagogical factors, shaping the landscape of language education in the country.

Although Brazilian educational system has mandatory English classes for seven years in basic education, “only three percent of Brazilians are estimated to speak English” (Batista, 2020). Several factors contribute to this scenario: low literacy in Portuguese, classes with a large number of students, lack of infrastructure in schools, teachers' precarious working conditions, emphasis on simplified reading skills to achieve success in college-admission tests, lack of teacher education programs aiming at EFL teachers, among many others. EFL teacher education programs in Brazil must acknowledge the social contexts teachers face in their actual practices and propose teacher development activities tailored to their needs. Understanding the current scenario of the profession in our country and the historical development that led to it is a crucial first step. This may ensure that EFL teacher education focuses on the real needs of Brazilian EFL teachers, rather than relying on models imported from other countries with different realities.
REFERENCES


