

RELATO DE EXPERIENCIA INICIAL SOBRE O ENSINO DE LÍNGUA INGLESA PARA UMA ALUNA CEGA*

INITIAL EXPERIENCE REPORT ABOUT THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TO A BLIND STUDENT

Márcia Suel Pereira da Silva Schneider 1

Resumo: O projeto de pesquisa e extensão "Ampliando Horizontes; Diminuindo Barreiras: English as Foreign Language (EFL) para Deficientes Visuais" foi planejado para atender a demanda apresentada por uma aluna do Curso de Jornalismo da Universidade Federal do Tocantins, que solicitou ajuda em relação a material para aprendizado da língua inglesa em Braille. Durante conversa inicial, a aluna relatou que procurava aprender o idioma em cursos de inglês e autodidaticamente, porém, percebeu que o estudo, por meio de atividades de audição e fala, não contemplava uma aprendizagem integral da língua, como acontece com alunos sem deficiência. A partir da demanda apresentada, surgiram grandes inquietações e questionamentos, como, por exemplo, o processo de ensino de inglês, principalmente a escrita em Braille, ao considerar muitas peculiaridades da língua, principalmente em relação à pronúncia das palavras cuja escrita difere da sua dicção. Além disso, destaca-se a falta de conhecimento específico para trabalhar com alunos com deficiência em sala de aula, principalmente, no que se refere à aprendizagem de L2. Assim, considerando a necessidade de fomentar a inclusão social, assunto amplamente discutido nos meios acadêmicos e compreendendo que o ensino-aprendizagem de uma língua estrangeira propicia melhores oportunidades de inserção dos estudantes no mercado de trabalho, bem como a maneira como o indivíduo se coloca no mundo, este trabalho tem como objetivo apresentar o relato de experiência sobre o trabalho inicial desenvolvido com a aluna e uma reflexão sobre a ação do professor sobre como ensinar inglês a alunos como deficiência visual.

Palavras-chave: Ensino-Aprendizagem. Língua Inglesa. Braille. Deficiência Visual. Experiência.

Abstract: The research and extension project "Expanding Horizons; Decreasing Barriers: English as Foreign Language for Visually Impaired" was designed to cater to a demand presented by a student of the journalism course of the Federal University of Tocantins who requested help in relation to material for English language learning in Braille. During an initial conversation, the student reported that she sought to learn the language in English Courses and autodidactically, however, she realized that the study through listening and speaking activities did not consider an integral learning of the language, as it happens to students without disabilities. From the demand presented, great uneasiness and questioning emerged, such as, the process of teaching English, principally in Braille written, considering many peculiarities of the language, especially in relation to the pronunciation of words which writing differs from its diction. In addition, it is highlighted the lack of specific training to work with students with disabilities in the classroom, particularly with regard to L2 learning. Thus, considering the need to foster social inclusion, a subject widely discussed in academic circles and understanding the teaching-learning of a foreign language as conducive to better opportunities for students to be put in the labor market, as well as a way of the individual to be placed in the world, this work aims to present the experience report about the initial work developed with the student and a reflection about the teacher's action on how to teach English to students with visual impairment.

Keywords: Teaching- learning. English Language. Braille. Visual Impairment. Experience.

Doutorado em Lingüística Aplicada ao Ensino de Línguas pela Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo. Professora da Universidade Federal do Tocantins (UFT).
Lattes: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/8413757964483641>.
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7323-8667>.
E-mail: marciasschneiderfacebook@gmail.com

* Este trabalho foi apresentado no IV International Linguistics and Language Studies Conference - LILA 17, Istambul, Turquia.

Introduction

Although the accessibility issues presented by the Inclusion Brazilian Law of Disability People (nº 13.146/2015) that is intended for assuring and promoting, in equality conditions, the rights and the fundamental liberty to the disability people focusing the citizenship and the social inclusion, we can observe as pointed by Sá (2014) that the Brazilian legislation still lacks ranks of assistance, since the fundamental rights have not yet been properly ensured for people who are at risk or at social vulnerability aggravated by disability. The author states that it is necessary to create favorable environments that work positively in the formation of mentalities, values and principles that incorporate differences as a natural condition of the human being, affirming that if the laws were fulfilled, the access to and the permanence in school and in the world of work, as in other sectors of society, would certainly be more satisfactory.

From this point of view, in the case of English that becomes more widespread in the world and has become the international lingua franca (Modiano, 1999), as pointed out by researchers such as Araluc (2005) and Doley (2002), the foreign language needs of visually impaired students have been ignored and they have been marginalized and isolated from the foreign language classroom atmosphere.

This way, considering the need to foster social inclusion, this paper aims to present the initial experience report about the teaching of English to a blind student and a reflection the teacher's action about the work developed. The interest for the thematic came out of the demand presented by a student of the Federal University of Tocantins (UFT) that in an informal conversation reported she wanted to keep on studying English, however, this time learning the four skills of the language – listening, speaking, reading and writing - as happens to students without disabilities.

The visual impairment and the teacher formation

The visual impairment encompasses the universe of blindness and low vision people and it is due to problems of different orders such as congenital, acquired, genetic and degenerative.

According to the World Health Organization (2012), the number of visually impaired people in the world is known to be 285 million, that's it, 39 million are blind and 246 present low vision.

In Brazil, as reported by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2010), there are 6,5 million a visually impaired people, being 52.000 blind and 6.000.000 with low vision.

In Tocantins state, specifically, as stated in the report of the school census (SEDUC, 2015), there are 1.599 students presenting low vision and 111 are blind. In Palmas, the capital of the state, according to the census, there are 170 low vision students and 8 blind students enrolled at schools.

At the Federal University of Tocantins, there are 04 blind and 43 low vision students.

Despite of the high numbers presented above, the number of visually impaired people in the field of ELT is still unknown and as pointed out by Arluc (2005) the blindness can not hinder foreign language learning, recommending that teachers ought to accept their visually impaired students in their classes the way they are, realizing their potential, personality and interests.

The point presented by Arluc is crucial, however, although the Law of Directives and Basis for National Education (BRASIL, LDB, 1996) nº 9.394/94, in chapter V that deals with the Special Education, in the article 59, item III asserts that people with disability should have specialized attendig, as well as, trained teachers to integrate them to regular classes, but as pointed by Leffa (2008) the universities, so far, have not been able to train competent and sufficient professionals to meet the needs of the labor market.

I agree with Leffa's thought and add that neither have universities trained teachers to teach foreign languages to those students, causing a lack in their formation, nor are schools prepared or equipped to receive them.

The project Expanding Horizons; Decreasing Barriers: English as Foreign Language for Visually Impaired

The project was designed to cater to a demand presented by a student of the Journalism course of the Federal University of Tocantins who requested help in relation to material for English language learning written in Braille. During an initial conversation, the student reported that she sought to learn the language in English Courses and autodidactically, however, she realized that the study through listening and speaking activities did not consider an integral learning of the language, as it happens to students without disabilities and that she wanted to know how to write and read English in Braille.

From the demand presented, I started questioning myself about the process of teaching English, principally in Braille written, considering many peculiarities of the language, specially in relation to the pronunciation of words which writing differs from its diction, even because, as several professionals, I was not trained to work with such public.

Toward from these uneasiness, I proposed her to develop a project where we could work and learn together the Braille in English language. The project was designed and was submitted to the Ethics Committee to be authorized.

Being conscious of the need to promote social inclusion and understanding that the teaching-learning of a foreign language is something that provides better opportunities for students to enter the labor market and as a way of the individuals stand in the world, and knowing that lack of teacher's formation, the project aims to know how the professor learns to teach English to a impaired student and how the Braille literacy process in English takes place to both.

The Participants

The Student

Caroline¹ (Carol) is a student of the seven term of the Journalism Course at UFT. She is blind in consequence of problems when she was born. She was literate in Portuguese Braille. She studied English in regular schools and in English Courses, however, the skills worked were only listening and speaking.

The Professor

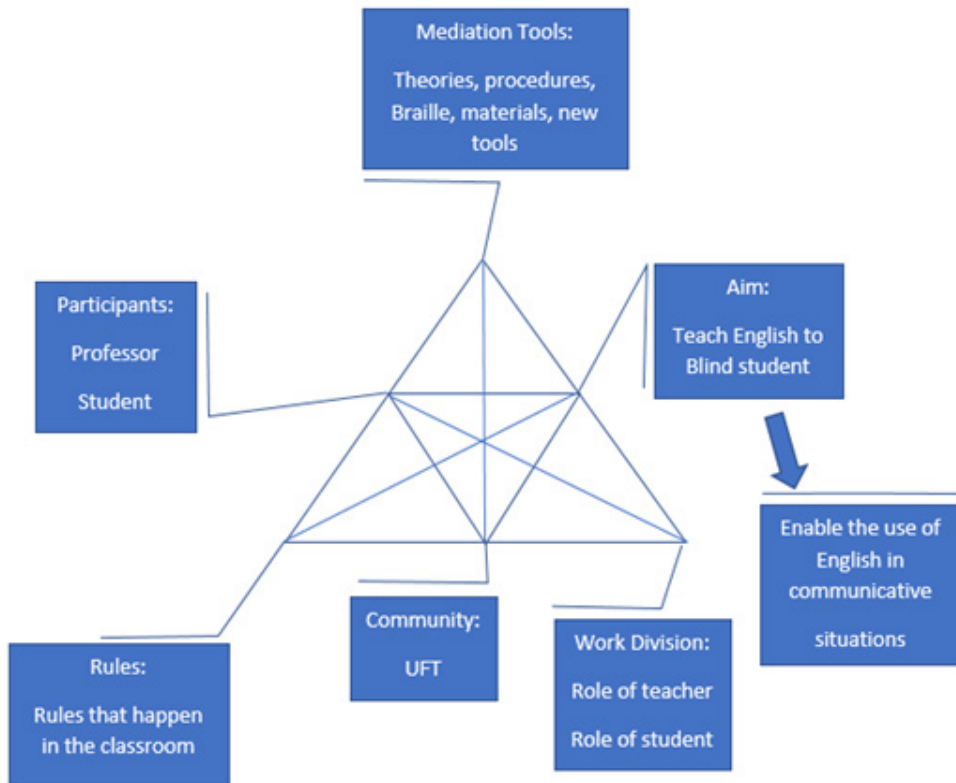
I am undergraduated in Portuguese-English Languages and graduated in Applied Linguistics and Language Teaching. During my Mastering and PhD Courses I worked with the continuing teachers' formation. I have been teaching English since 1996, however, as pointed before, during my formation, I wasn't trained, as still happening nowadays, to work in regular classes with people with disabilities and I had never had contact with Braille before the project.

The report of the work

After having the project approved by the Ethics Committee, we had a meeting to talk about the project and it was that moment I could already have my first and wonderful experience of being in touch with a blind student. While I was trying to describe the triangle of activity (as showed below), I observed that she was trying to rebuilt it in the palm of her hand. When I noticed that, I asked if I could reproduce the figure, which she readily accepted. To me, it was a unique experience, although I wasn't sure if what I was doing would be correct. As I was describing the figure, I was observing her facial reactions, the broad smile demonstrated that I was in the right way and that she was following the description. This security came at the end with her speech "I could get all the picture".

1 The student's name was not omitted since she gave authorization to use it.

Figure 1. Activity Triangle

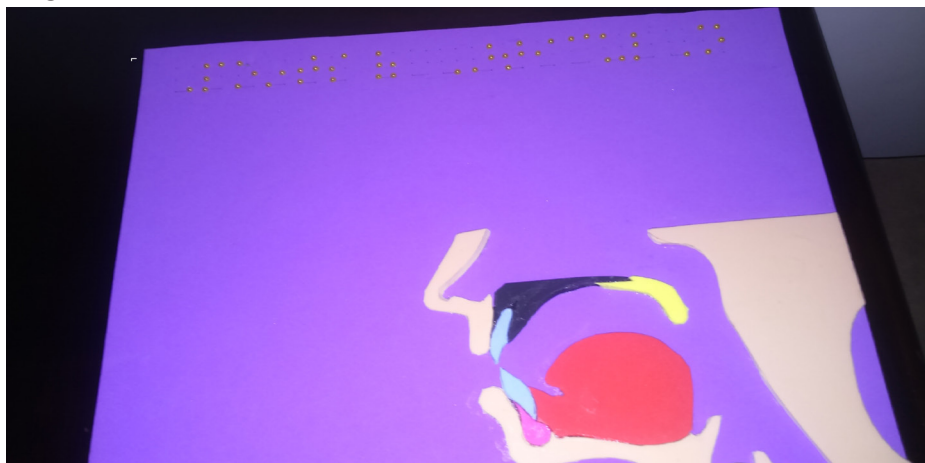


Source: author (2021)

My next question was “Where to begin with?”. I wasn’t sure about the way I should follow, since I wasn’t able to print materials in braille because the only braille printer at the university wasn’t working. So, I decided to start the classes working about “Points of Articulation of vowel and consonants sounds”.

The material was prepared manually, using EVA, a rubbery material to draw the face and inner part of the mouth, and jewelry gemstones used to write the phonetic symbols in Braille.

Figure 2. Points of Articulation Material



Source: author (2021)

During the work, the surprise was that Carol was interested about the colors used in the material and even how the sounds of “th”, “sh”, between others, were represented pho-

netically to me.

Figure 3. Glyph X Braille Glyph



Source: author (2021)

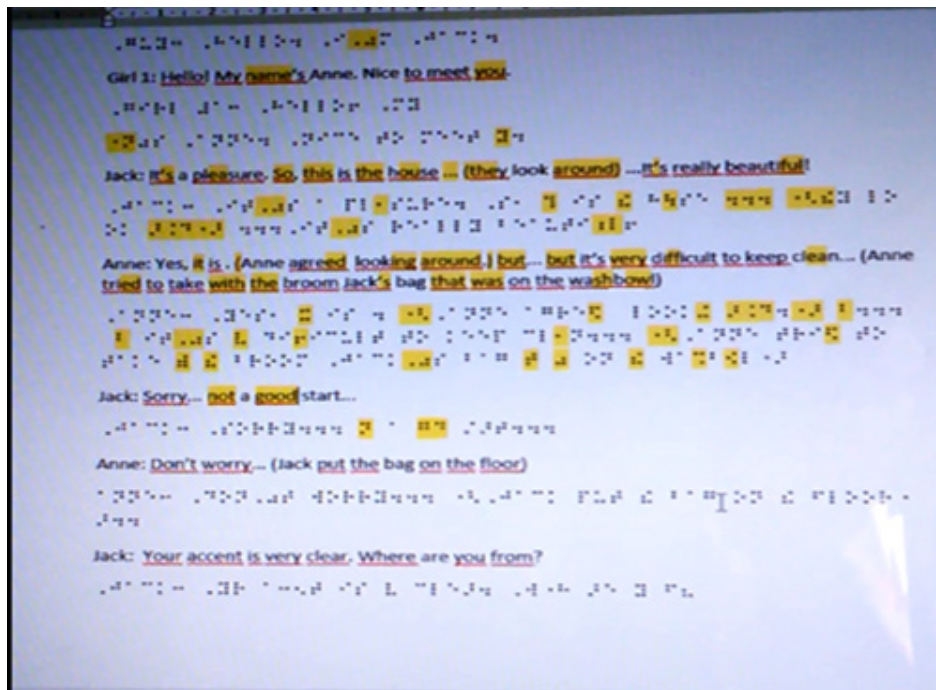
The next step was to prepare the material for the classes. As I knew Carol had studied English for some time before, I asked her how she would like to start the work. She answered me to start from the beginning, that is, from the verb To Be.

From this point, I started searching on internet for materials that we could use in the classroom. The first difficulty found was to get the authorization from the author. Although I had explained about the project and that I would only use part of the lesson, the author didn't give the authorization to translate the lesson to Braille. Towards this, I searched for some videos on You Tube and after having chosen some I started to translate the speech of the characters.

Carol lent me her Braille machine, this way, I could type the material. As it would be my first time working with written Braille, I worked with an online Braille Translator and with the Unified English Braille (UEB) manual.

Considering that Carol was literated in Portuguese Braille and that she has proficiency on it, I chose to work with Grade 2². The work started very slowly, since, while translating I was learning the system and highlighting the cells that were contracted, for instance, to explain to her during class.

Figure 4. Material Translated

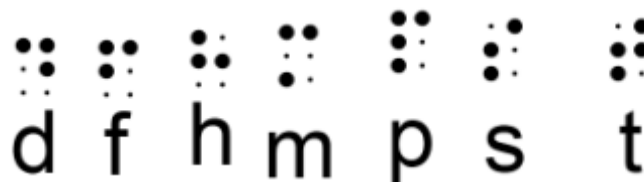


Source: author (2021)

² Grade 2 braille was introduced as a space-saving alternative to grade 1 Braille. In this grade, a cell can represent a shortened form of a word. Many cell combinations have also been created to represent common words, part or whole word contractions, entire words and so on.

While I was preparing the materials and during my process of literacy, I realized, at some point, that was making some mistakes, that is, I was bandying some representations, such as, “d”, “f”, “h”, “m”, “p”, “s” and “t”. Maybe these errors happened because of the proximity of the dots combination.

Figure 5. Glyphs Bandyng



Source: author (2021)

In order to understand the errors during my process of learning, I found Soares (2004) who states that the insertion in the world of writing is through the acquisition of a technology, and through the development of competences (skills, knowledge, attitudes) of the effective use of this technology in social practices involving written language (literacy). As pointed by Tfouni (2010), literacy should be understood as a social-historical process, and that it would be, therefore, the cause and consequence of the development.

To enlarge the understanding, I found in Corder (1967) and Brown (2007) who approached errors as a natural process of learning and state that they provide an insight about the process of de acquisition, what strategies or procedures the learner is employing, that is, erros must be considered as part of cognition.

On March 15, I met Carol for the class. That moment, I explained about my choice to work with Grade 2, so, I prepared a chart of the UEB with the words that appeared in the lesson. The aim was to put her in touch with the grade before starting effectively the lesson.

This strategy was positive because during the work Carol showed the strategies she was employing to learn English Braille. Firstly, she compared English and Portuguese representation, pointing differences and similarities.

Figure 6. Differences and Similarities between English and Portuguese Braille

Indicators	UEB	Portuguese Braille
Capital Word		
Numeric		
Comma		
Letter		
Semicolon		
Opening inner quotation mark		
Closing inner quotation mark		

Source: author (2021)

During the work with the lower groupsigns, she showed the way she “got how the system was built” by saying:

Ah! I sussed what they do! Like that, the letters are the reverse way. For example, in “f” the representation is 124, right? The representation here is 235. It is the “f” in reverse way. (Carol’s reflection)

Figure 7. Carol’s Reflection of Representation

Alphabet



Lower Groupsign



Source: author (2021)

It’s important to clarify that, although she used the work “reverse” work to show how she was understanding the system of combination, and that could takes us to think that the representation was on the other side (145), the reflection was in the use of upper (124) and down (235) dots to represent the letters.

After class, I asked Carol to evaluate the process. During her reflection she states that she misses to work with Braille because the professors at university ask her to send the homeworks by email, and this way, she does not write in Braille so much anymore, and that she was very happy with my effort and happy with the opportunity.

I am thrilled with your initial effort (...) Despite the mistakes (...), I consider it a huge achievement for both of us. First because I’m learning here, now, and secondly, because we’re learning together, so this has no return to me. More rewarding than that? I am very happy! (Carol’s reflection)

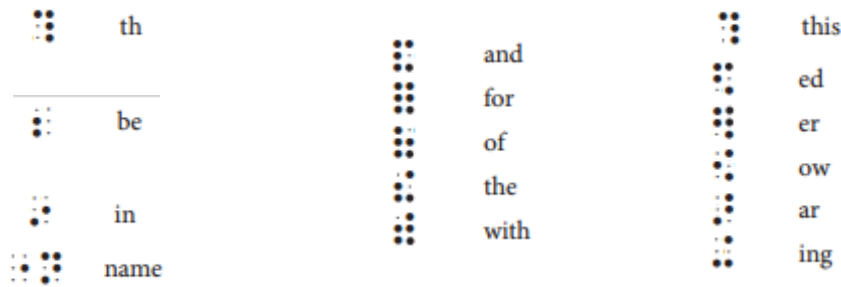
On March 22, we started working with the video – The American Guy. I explained to her the context of the vídeo and played it to her. As I could realized, she did not show trouble with listening but she showed interest to know the colours of an object (mask) that appeared on video.

Only when she asked me about it, I realized that I haven’t stopped the video to describe the objects. My reflection on that moment was that I needed to pay more attention on what could be important for the description of the events. So, I started to describe the Mexican hat, however, she was interested about the mask. I started describe it was a mask of a monkey face and the color was brown and beige. While I was describing the mask, I was drawing on her face where each color was. Her facial expression showed me that she could understand the description.

When we started working with writing, I realized that the process was slow and hard. Although Carol knows the alphabet and can identify them easily, the reading was too slow because of the representations of the contracted words such as “that” “for”, “of” “from”, and soon.

It is important to say that she could easily identify the new representations were a contracted form of a word, although she could not tell them at the beginning, but during the reading she recognized them faster.

Figure 8. Unified English Braille



After class, I asked Carol to reflect and evaluate the work. Her answer confirmed my impressions during the class, that is, that it was not also easy to her either.

Teacher, how hard! I'm thinking it's hard! That is, it's new! It is novelty, it is a matter of adaptation, but in the beginning it's even difficult. (...) It's a challenge because I have to keep these things a lot. (Carol's reflection)

After her speech, I emphasized that if it was too difficult we could change to grade 1, but I stressed that grade 1 she would not have problem and would not be so difficult because she knows the alphabet. She agreed with me, telling that we could do a test using grade 1 next lesson, although she has consciousness of the need to know grade 2 also.

We could do a test later. We finish this lesson and do a lesson with grade 1, just to see how it will be, right? (...) But...if I run into it and just have it ... But it's difficult, very difficult! But it's not impossible ... it's a matter of keeping. (Carol's reflection)

Concluding Comments

Reflecting on the work realized in a vygotskian view, although it is in an initial process, it is possible to understand that the blindness represent only the lack of one of the possible ways of connecting the individual with the environment, and that the eye can be replaced by another instrument, such as another person through speech that can play the role of an instrument (Vygotsky, 1995).

Analysing Carol's reaction during classes, it was important to make me understand how she compensates her lack of vision and the interrelationship between the developmental processes of language and cognition. It was also possible to notice how blind students are better equipped (aural sensitivity and memory) for learning a language than sighted students.

Regarding to teaching-learning, this work has afforded me a self-confront of my practice, providing an understading and transformation of my action, as well as allowing a reflection on the English teaching for visual impairment in regular schools.

Concerning the rights of disability people and the social inclusion, we can check up on Brazil advanced in the elaboration of legal documents and in the implementation of public policies in attempt to offer better conditions of social insertion of these people in our society, however, we can observe that it still having ranks of assitance (Sá, 2014) and that the acessibility is happening in an arduous and slow process.

To sum up, it is important to realize that as pointend by Arluc(2005), blindness is not a barrier to full cognitive development and that the learning of a foreign language – all skills, should be relevant for the blind students, as it could widen their future professional opportunities.

References

ARALUC, H. A. **Teaching English to Blind and Visually Impaired Young Learners: the Affective Factor**. Doctoral dissertation. Spain. Available at: <https://ruidera.uclm.es/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10578/922/189%20Teaching%20English.pdf?sequence=1>, 2005.

BRANAH. Braille Translator. Available at: <https://www.branah.com/braille-translator>.

BROWN, H.D.. **Principles of Language Learning and Teaching**. New York: Pearson Education, Inc. 2007.

CORDER, S.P. **The significance of learner's errors**. *International Review of Applied Linguistics*, 1967, 5 v, (1967). 16, 161_170.

BRASIL IBGE: **Braille increases inclusion of blind in society**. Available at: <http://www.brasil.gov.br/cidadania-e-justica/2015/01/braille-aumenta-inclusao-de-cegos-na-sociedade>, 2010.

BRASIL. Inclusion **Brazilian Law of Disability People nº 13.146/2015**. Available at: http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2015-2018/2015/Lei/L13146.htm, . 2015.

BRASIL. Law of Directives and Basis for National Education nº 9.394/94.

DONLEY, P. R. (2002) **Teaching Languages to the Blind and Visually Impaired: Some Suggestions**. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 1996, 59(2), 302-305.

ENGLISH TODAY. **E-ducation.it: American Guy**. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7oOX48NOyTQ&t=1598s>, (2009)

LEFFA, V.J. **Political Aspects of teacher training in foreign languages**. In *The foreign language teacher: building the profession*, 2008, 2.ed. Pelotas: Educat.

MODIANO, M. **International English in the global village**. *English Today*, 1999, 15(2), 22-27.

SÁ, E.D. **Brazil Accessibility: Inclusion of the visually impaired is still a challenge**. Available at: <http://www.acesibilidadedebrasil.org.br/joomla/noticias/382-inclusao-dos-deficientes-visuais-ainda-e-desafio>, 2014.

SECRETARIA DE EDUCAÇÃO. **Censo Escolar**. Available at: <http://seduc.to.gov.br/estatisticas/censo-escolar/>
https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1fZVT46AqYGM4yfAWzwFzTmGYguihDyw2ctoUZq_c2f0/edit#gid=0, 2015.

SIMPSON, C. (org.) **The rules of unified English Braille**, 2013 2 ed. San Francisco, California: International Council on English Braille,

SOARES, M. Literacy and Schooling. In Ribeiro, V. M. (org). **Literacy in Brasil**. São Paulo: Gopal, 2004).

TFOUNI, L.V. **Literacy and Education**, 2010, 9 ed. São Paulo: Cortez.

VYGOTSKY, L.S. **Problems of Defectology**. In Remedial and Special Education. Volume 20, December 1999

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION. **Visual impairment and blindness**. Available at: http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs282/en/,_2012.

Recebido em 05 de agosto de 2020

Aceito em 17 de março de 2021