



Bilingual Education in Brazil: Navigating Global and Local Dynamics

Educação bilíngue no Brasil: navegando entre dinâmicas globais e locais

Antonieta Heyden Megale

Universidade Federal de São Paulo

Fernanda Liberali

Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo

Michele Salles El Kadri

Universidade Estadual De Londrina

Susan Ann Rangel Clemesha

Sphere International School

Abstract

This article explores the complex landscape of bilingual education in Brazil by examining its historical, sociolinguistic, and policy dimensions. While Brazil is home to a rich multilingual heritage, educational practices have long been shaped by monolingual ideologies. The recent expansion of English-Portuguese bilingual programs—particularly in the private sector—reflects global trends and also raises concerns about access and equity. Drawing on critical and decolonial perspectives, we analyze the tensions between global demands and local realities. We highlight how bilingual education can either reinforce social inequalities or foster transformative, intercultural, and heteroglossic learning experiences. Through an investigation of policies, practices, and professional development, we call for inclusive and context-sensitive approaches that acknowledge linguistic diversity and promote social justice in both public and private sectors.

Keywords: Bilingual education in Brazil, interculturality, multilingualism, heteroglossia, linguistic justice

Resumen

Este artigo explora o complexo cenário da educação bilíngue no Brasil, examinando suas dimensões históricas, sociolinguísticas e político-educacionais. Embora o país possua uma rica herança multilíngue, as práticas educacionais têm sido historicamente moldadas por ideologias monolíngues. A recente expansão de programas bilíngues em português e inglês — especialmente no setor privado — reflete tendências globais, mas também levanta preocupações quanto ao acesso e à equidade. Com base em perspectivas críticas e decoloniais, analisamos as tensões entre as demandas globais e as realidades locais. Destacamos como a educação bilíngue pode tanto reforçar desigualdades sociais quanto promover experiências de aprendizagem transformadoras, interculturais e heteroglóssicas. Por meio da investigação de políticas, práticas e formação docente, defendemos abordagens inclusivas e sensíveis ao contexto, que reconheçam a diversidade linguística e promovam justiça social nos setores público e privado.

Palavras-chave: Educação bilíngue no Brasil, interculturalidade, multilinguismo, heteroglossia, justiça linguística

Introduction

The historical formation of Brazil involved a devastating impact on Indigenous communities and the deliberate suppression of their languages, resulting in the gradual disappearance of rich, linguistic heritages. Paradoxically, despite forcefully establishing Portuguese as the nation's sole language, Brazil now supports bilingual schools and programs that prioritize English instruction through a content-based approach. The phenomenon raises the question, "how can we reconcile this historical contradiction?" This article seeks to provide a comprehensive examination of the current state of bilingual education in Brazil, drawing upon the works of Megale, Liberali, and El Kadri among others. The discussion will critically analyze the existing landscape, shedding light on challenges and opportunities faced by educators and students in both private and public sectors.

Delving into the intricate balance between global perspectives and local contexts within bilingual education (Guilherme & Souza, 2019), this article aims to contribute to the ongoing dialogue on preparing students for an increasingly globalized world. By exploring strategies for intercultural education (Candau, 2008; Maher, 2007; Megale, 2022; Megale & El Kadri, 2023; Walsh, 2010; 2018), it acknowledges the importance of fostering a deeper understanding of the evolving dynamics in bilingual education. It also emphasizes the need to address and rectify the amplification of social, economic, and educational disparities perpetuated by the neoliberal order,¹ creating an unequal world that disproportionately affects marginalized communities (Flores, 2013). Such academic exploration underscores the significance of research and continuous educator development in navigating and shaping the complexities of bilingual education in Brazil.

The article is organized into four sections, in addition to this introduction. First, we examine the sociolinguistic landscape of Brazil, emphasizing the country's multilingual and multicultural-historical roots, as well as the repressive language policies that have reinforced the narrative of Brazil as a monolingual nation. Next, we explore the rise of English-Portuguese bilingual schools in Brazil, detailing dynamics in both the private and public sectors. Finally, we discuss challenges and opportunities within the Brazilian context, offering insights into the future of bilingual education in the country.

Brazilian Sociolinguistic Scenario

Despite the common perception of Brazil as a monolingual nation with Portuguese as the sole language, the country has a rich history of multilingualism. Such diversity has persisted despite efforts to suppress or render it invisible. Brazil's cultural and linguistic variety is notable (Maher, 2013; Morello, 2012; Oliveira, 2009; Preuss & Álvares, 2014). According to the 2010 Census (IBGE, 2012), Brazil is home to 274 Indigenous languages. However, it is important to remember

¹ We understand the neoliberal order as one that positions education primarily as a means to serve economic development, with an emphasis on human capital formation (Andreotti, 2014) and the promotion of national competitiveness and employability (Gaudelli, 2009). Within this framework, education is often shaped by logics of standardization, competition, and academic utility (Camicia & Franklin, 2011). Students are framed as entrepreneurial, self-regulating individuals whose worth is measured by their capacity to succeed in an increasingly competitive global labor market (Schattle, 2008).

that Brazil had over 1,300 language families in the 16th century (Rodrigues, 2002). Besides Indigenous languages, immigrant languages (e.g., Italian and German) are also now considered Brazilian and are spoken by citizens in daily interactions. Moreover, recent data shows that besides our official sign language, Libras, other sign languages are used in rural and Indigenous areas (Soares & Fargetti, 2022). Additionally, Brazil's expansive border, with around 500 cities and approximately 10 million inhabitants, fosters a multilingual environment (Morello, 2018). Furthermore, some African languages are still used in religious rituals and in quilombos.

In addition, Brazil has recently experienced an influx of immigrants. According to the Observatory of International Migrations and the Ministry of Justice, the Federal Police recorded 105,094 international residence applications in 2013. By 2023, this number surged to 1.2 million (Oliveira, 2023). Approximately 1.3 million immigrants, primarily from Venezuela, Haiti, Bolivia, Colombia, and the U.S., currently reside in Brazil. The number of newly registered immigrants increased by 24.4% in 2020 compared to the previous decade. The number of refugees also grew from 86 in 2011 to 26,500 in 2020. From 2013 to 2022, the number of recognized refugees paralleled the rise in applications, with Venezuelans becoming the primary group receiving recognition (Oliveira, 2023). The influx has enriched Brazil's sociolinguistic landscape with diverse languages and cultures.

Despite this linguistic richness, Brazil grapples with the "myth of monolingualism," a deeply ingrained ideology (Cavalcanti, 1999; Oliveira, 2009). According to Cavalcanti (1999), this belief stems from the marginalization of minority languages spoken by Indigenous peoples, by deaf communities, by migrants and from the stigmatization of varieties of Portuguese. Oliveira (2009) argues that this myth is perpetuated by a discourse designed to fulfill national objectives through historical linguistic suppression policies, fostering the notion that only Portuguese is spoken in Brazil. The notion creates a consensus of the majority for the repression of other languages (Oliveira, 2009). Oliveira (2009) further explains that the myth is the result of prejudice, ignorance of Brazilian reality, and an intentional political project to build a monolingual nation. The history of language policies in Brazil has led to the extinction of many languages through linguistic displacement (Oliveira, 2009), which is marked by the extinction of minority languages in favor of Portuguese; the consensus that only Portuguese is spoken here; and ignorance of other coexisting languages. Rodrigues (1993) states that approximately 75% of languages spoken in Brazilian territory five centuries ago have vanished.

Throughout the centuries, Brazil's repressive language policies have cemented the narrative of Brazil as a monolingual nation. One of the earliest policies of the Portuguese Crown promoted the expansion of Nheengatu, an Indigenous language, as an interethnic lingua franca (Freire, 2018). The evolution led to the extinction of other Indigenous languages as speakers were pressured to use Nheengatu exclusively (Freire, 2018). The promotion of Nheengatu was facilitated by the presence of many languages within the Tupi-Guaranian family and colonialist needs for a common language to communicate with the enslaved workforce. By the mid-18th century, Nheengatu was nearly universally used in Brazil (Moore et al., 1993). However, the expulsion of Jesuits and the imposition of Portuguese as the official language led to the persecution of Nheengatu. The silencing of Indigenous languages continued with the language policy established

by Marquês de Pombal in 1758, which declared Portuguese the official language of the Colony (Oliveira, 2009). Another impactful language policy during the Estado Novo (1937–1945) under Getúlio Vargas targeted immigrant communities, and these communities faced exclusionary measures during the “nationalization of education” period. Immigrant communities (especially Germans and Japanese) were forced to use Portuguese, community schools were occupied, and publications in other languages were banned (Altenhofen, 2004). Immigrants faced violent linguistic and cultural repression, including imprisonment, for speaking other languages (Oliveira, 2009). The repression silenced many immigrant languages. Additionally, in 1991, a language policy banned the use of Libras in schools, arguing it would hinder the development of speaking and writing abilities in Portuguese (Carraro & Del Mouro, 2016).

These repressive policies have left a lasting impact on Brazil’s sociolinguistic landscape and the identities of speakers of immigrant, Indigenous, and sign languages. However, the 1988 Constitution, known as the “Citizen’s Constitution,” marked the beginning of a democratic era that promoted inclusivity for diverse cultural and linguistic groups. Despite this progress, only Indigenous peoples were specifically granted the right to use their languages in education through bilingual and intercultural schools, and Libras was officially recognized.

Recently, there has been a rapid increase in English-Portuguese bilingual schools, particularly in the private sector. These schools aim to attract families who can afford them, offering enhanced educational opportunities (Megale, 2019; 2020; 2021; 2022; Liberali et al., 2022; Megale & El Kadri, 2023). The commodification of elective bilingual education is also making its way into the public sector, with regions like Santa Catarina, Alagoas, Maranhão, Paraná, and Rio de Janeiro implementing public bilingual school initiatives (El Kadri et al., 2024). Such movements will be explored in the following sections.

The Growth of English-Portuguese Bilingual Schools

The movement of English-Portuguese bilingual schools in Brazil has gained such momentum that in June 2020, a long-anticipated Proposal for National Curriculum Guidelines was introduced. The document entered a period of public consultation, inviting contributions from educators, researchers, and the wider community. During this period, collaborative efforts from various bilingual education research groups led to significant revisions of the initial proposal. Subsequently, on July 9, 2020, the *National Curriculum Guidelines for the Provision of Plurilingual Education* were approved but (by the time of this writing) have not yet been ratified.

These guidelines have done little to acknowledge a pluralistic perspective that addresses the needs of additional language education for a population as diverse and deeply affected by cultural and economic inequality. In its attempt to define and regulate bilingual education in Brazil, the text outlines several key areas, including the characteristics and distinctions among bilingual education models, teacher training, curriculum organization, and assessment practices. In regard to the nature of bilingual schools, the guidelines specify that these “are characterized by promoting a single, integrated curriculum delivered in two languages of instruction, aiming at the development of students’ linguistic and academic skills in these languages” (Brasil, 2020, p. 24).

The policy states that bilingual schools are those that offer an integrated curriculum that aims for the development of language and academic knowledge and skills. It also states that these schools must adopt a bilingual model for all learners and comply with the legislation and norms applicable to Brazilian education, such as the *Base Nacional Comum Curricular* (BNCC) or *Common Core Curriculum*. Furthermore, bilingual schools must offer at least 50% of instruction time in the students' home language, and at least one of the core disciplines must be exclusively conducted in the additional language.

Head and single-subject teachers, according to the particular school year, must have proof of linguistic proficiency at a minimum B2 level on the Common European Framework for Languages (CEFR), in addition to an undergraduate degree in their subject area. Early years and elementary teachers are expected to have an undergraduate degree in Education or Modern Languages as well as an extension, specialization, or postgraduate coursework focusing on bilingual education.

Also following the CEFR and regarding expected outcomes for students, the policy specifies language proficiency levels at the completion of elementary and high school. It is expected that 80% of students achieve:

Year/Age	CEFR Level	Level Descriptors ²
Year 6 (Age 11)	A2	"Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g., very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment, and matters in areas of immediate need."
Year 9 (Age 14)	B1	"Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes/ambitions, and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans."
Year 12 (Age 17)	B2	"Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity

² <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/table-1-cefr-3.3-common-reference-levels-global-scale>

that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed texts on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.”

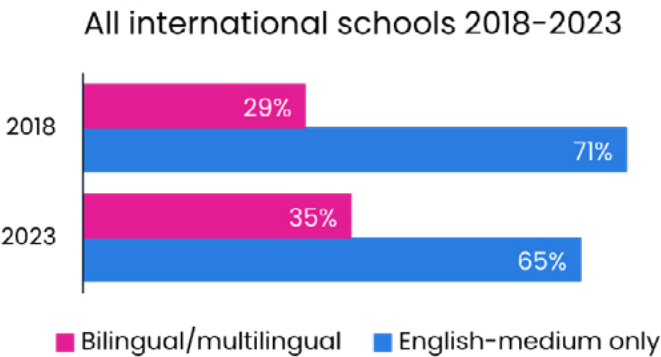
These guidelines appear to align with neoliberal agendas and have thus been heavily criticized, particularly for mandating that both teachers and students demonstrate language proficiency according to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR), as verified through standardized testing. Furthermore, it is our understanding that these parameters are not only unrealistic at a national level, but more importantly, they do not offer guidance for the application of bilingual education models in diverse settings and do not align with the principles of an intercultural bi/multilingual education for mobility in a globalized world.

In the following subsections, we explore the growth of English-Portuguese bilingual schools in both the private and public sectors in Brazil and describe the current scenario along with some challenges and opportunities.

Private Sector

Following global market trends, private bilingual education continues to grow in the Brazilian scenario. While bilingual schools offering prestigious languages, such as institutions providing instruction in Portuguese and English, predominate nationally, there is a parallel accelerated increase in international bi/multilingual education in countries like the United Arab Emirates, Vietnam, India, and China (ISC Research, 2023).

According to the 2023 school census, private schools represented approximately 20.6% of all educational institutions in Brazil. Empirical studies indicate that in the same year, 20% of the total number of private schools offered bilingual education. Due to the lack of more recent and reliable quantitative data in Brazil, we based our analysis on some indicators of trends in the international bi/multilingual education scenario. According to data from ISC Research (2023), over a period of five years (from 2018 to 2023), there was a 12% increase in the number of international schools. Interestingly, in these schools, the bi/multilingual model has stood out (ISC, 2023, p. 81):



In 2018, 71% of international schools offered instruction primarily in English, with only 29% adopting a bi/multilingual approach. Five years later, 35% had adopted a bi/multilingual curriculum. These percentages reveal that the monolingual English-only model has proven insufficient to meet the needs of today's world. Despite the relevance of the English language as a *lingua franca*, multilingualism is increasingly projected as a social and educational norm.

Currently, though, it is clear that the “multilingual turn”—the growing importance of leveraging the positive advantages of multilingual classrooms within a pedagogical framework—is being recognized as increasingly significant and worthy of more attention (British Council, 2023). A report produced by the British Council (2023) projects trends for the future of English as a global language, three of which we highlight here:

- The paradigm shift away from English as a foreign language will continue, with pedagogies that emphasize global Englishes and multilingual realities gaining more ground.
- More emphasis will be given to equality, diversity, and inclusion in teaching, learning, and assessment.
- In post-colonial contexts, and in line with the broad movement to decolonize education and society, English will be repositioned in educational models where Indigenous languages are increasingly valued. (pp. 56–57)

Regarding bilingual education in the private sector in Brazil, one cannot assess the growing number of schools and students served by this educational model without considering the equally increasing gap between those who can afford the high costs of private education and those who cannot. The issue of access to quality public bilingual/multilingual education, therefore, belongs not only to public administration but to all those who are involved and committed to improving education in Brazil.

Representing a significant presence in the landscape of bilingual schools in Brazil, internal data from the Maple Bear franchise network reveals a growth of 94.5%, with the number of schools increasing from 110 to 214 between 2019 and 2024. During the same period, Brazil also witnessed the entry of major international investors, such as the Inspired Education Group (founder of Grupo Inspira) which operates around 100 bilingual schools in the country.

Alongside the rise of bilingual education in Brazil, there is also an increasing demand for teachers who are prepared to work with bilingual learners across different subjects and areas of knowledge. In this scenario, driven by the requirements set by national and local policies for bilingual schools and the limited presence of bilingual education components in higher education courses, there is a noticeable increase in extension and specialization courses in bilingual education (Pretini Junior et al., 2022). Nevertheless, essential issues for the professional development of critical, collaborative, and reflective educators are still underexplored. Due to a long tradition of direct instruction in our country, few teachers carry intercultural or multilingual conceptions.

Amid challenges of designing bilingual education curricula committed to inter/multicultural-ity, different ways of organizing subjects and languages in schools are observed. Megale (2019) states, “For multicultural education to occur, it must necessarily be systematically planned, so as to be included in the schools’ curricular guidelines and intentionally inserted in the scope and sequence established for each year and, consequently, in the teachers’ planning” (p. 76).

Revisiting and expanding the classification of schools that identify themselves as bilingual (Megale, 2019), new trends can be highlighted:

Bilingual Schools with a Portuguese-English Integrated Curriculum

According to the guiding pedagogical perspectives, there is a greater or lesser integration between different languages and areas of knowledge. Schools with a disciplinary perspective tend to separate subjects, choosing the curricular components that will be taught in Portuguese or English. Schools governed by a project-based perspective tend to achieve greater linguistic integration, offering subjects in both languages in a more dynamic way.

Bilingual Schools with an Additional Curriculum

In the past five years, there has been a significant increase in the development of additional bilingual programs provided by publishers, institutions, or educational systems originally focused on language teaching or regular education in Portuguese. Both language institutes and school systems have been responding to the increased demand for bilingual education in the private sector and have been developing new solutions, integrated with the *Base Nacional Comum Curricular* (BNCC) or *Common Core Curriculum*. The materials supporting the programs are still largely characterized by the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach; however, challenges arise concerning how schools organize collaborative planning between teachers in the different languages of instruction and consequently, the connections between subject areas, resulting in integrated access, exploration, and assessment processes across different subjects.

Bilingual Schools with an Optional Curriculum

Also governed by bilingual materials and solutions identified as bilingual programs, the optional curriculum generally takes place during the after-school hours, where families can choose to keep their children in school for an extended period, focusing on the development of the additional language, either through projects, multidisciplinary activities, or disciplinary language study.

Based on fundamental questions posed in this article, combined with the data presented above, we question the current state of bilingual education in Brazil and its strong connections with a monolingual and structuralist vision. In the context of Brazilian bilingual schools, the projected trends seem distant from a curricular organization and more inclusive and intercultural multilingual practices. How can we better prepare young people for a globalized world? How can we reduce the gap between those who can afford the high costs of private education and those who cannot? Despite global trends toward multilingualism and interculturality, in Brazil, we still witness strong ties to the notion of linguistic separation and a focus on proficiency levels. Shedding light on this issue, Liberali et al. (2022) advocate for bi/multilingual education aimed at “developing mobility for living in multiple territories with a transformative intention” (p. 22). These authors emphasize the importance of “discussing language based on concepts of multimodality, repertoire, and translanguaging” (Liberali et al., 2022) concepts that will be explored further in this article. Specifically, we examine ways in which bilingual education is evolving in Brazil’s public sector and address the challenges contributing to its slow growth in the next section.

Public Sector

While there has been a noticeable rise in bilingual schools within the private sector, the public sector is only beginning to see its first initiatives. Similarly, the literature on public bilingual schools remains in its infancy, and the limited access to information about these schools further complicates efforts to understand their current state.

Regarding bilingual schools that offer instruction in socially prestigious languages (i.e., German, English, French, and Spanish), there is a growing movement among researchers and educators to gather and understand the perspectives of these institutions. El Kadri, Passoni and colleagues, and Megale (2024), for example, compiled chapters in a book that highlights ten bilingual public school initiatives across Brazil. They also created a public website to increase the visibility of these schools and foster a sense of community among those that participated in the project. This research, funded by CNPq^[1] and registered at the Universidade Estadual de Londrina, is part of the project “Ensino bilíngue na rede pública: Currículo, materiais, práticas, desafios, formação de professores e aprendizes” (UEL—Chamada CNPq[1]/MCTI / FNDCT No. 18/2021). The project aims to explore curricula, materials, practices, challenges, teacher training, and learning in public bilingual education.

The data gathered and presented in *Building Horizons in “Public Bilingual Education: Reflections and Utopias for Equity”* (El Kadri et al., 2024) offer valuable insights into bilingual schools in the public sector. El Kadri et al. (2024) point out that the data collected reveals that the predominant choice of municipalities generally falls on the implementation of a pilot school that usually evolves, and with the analysis of the results obtained, they expanded their presence throughout the municipal network, as evidenced in the cases of schools in Rio de Janeiro and Blumenau. The authors also highlight that the difficulties pointed out by the educators involved in each initiative seem to be shared challenges: aspects such as the continuous teacher education, the process of literacy in two languages, the lack of investment after implementation, the lack of teachers with the necessary knowledge for the bilingual context, the feeling of isolation, and the lack of didactic resources emerge as recurring obstacles faced in various contexts, which emphasizes the need for public policies that reveal integrated approaches and collective solutions to overcome these common challenges in the context of bilingual schools.

El Kadri et al. (2024) also point out ways and scenarios with transformative potential for all actors involved in these proposals, highlighting the collaboration between universities and schools as a central element of this process, as exemplified in the reports of schools in partnership with the State University of Londrina (UEL), Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ), Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), Regional University of Blumenau (FURB), Federal Institute of Santa Catarina (IFSC), and Federal University of Pernambuco (UFPE), for example. In this regard, the authors state the following:

Although this collaboration is not something new and our literature has long pointed out the need for collaborative partnerships to transform educational spaces, the reports present promising scenarios for several reasons. First, because when it comes to training teachers for bilingual contexts, we are observing the first specific movements to think about the

training of these teachers. We know that until now, the training of teachers for bi/multilingual contexts has been the responsibility of private institutions where these teachers work or individual initiatives by the teachers themselves. Second, because through these collaborations in the public education network, the teacher education courses themselves have been moving and trying to reframe themselves to provide a training path also aimed at this context. Third, because through this collaboration, we forge spaces that can further collaborate in the training of teachers by allowing them to experience the realities of bi/multilingual contexts during their initial training internships. (El Kadri et al., 2024, p. 237)

These kinds of collaborations are important because they can reframe schools as spaces of mutual transformation and as loci of learning and construction of the public bilingual schools. Through the triad of teaching, research, and extension organized by perspectives of critical collaborative practices, schools have the potential to become communities of practice and loci of transformation for all involved.

As discussed in the previous section, we know that bilingual education in Brazil has historically been a privilege experienced by a small portion of the population and that the modality, especially the prestigious one related to the English language, has rapidly proliferated due to the commodification of the English language and the permeation by discourses based on opportunities for global integration, prestige, or access to the labor market (El Kadri et al., 2024). In many cases, it ends up being an education guided by market logic and accessible only to those who can afford it. Bilingual education, therefore, in Brazil, emerges as a supposed advantage that “exacerbate inequalities in relation to the public sector where the offer of additional languages is only mandatory as a school subject from the 6th grade of Elementary School” (El Kadri et al., 2024, p. 13). Initially motivated by the same reasons, we have witnessed initiatives to implement bilingual schools also in the public sector.

The motivations behind such implementations are framed through a variety of discourses. On one hand, managers, usually mayors and secretaries of education, are guided by discourses closely linked to the private sector, justifying public bilingual schools as “opportunities for global integration, prestige, or access to the labor market” (El Kadri et al., 2024, p. 13). The data shows that these motivations are primarily driven by political leaders concerned with the social impact that languages—and, in many cases, the English language—can have on societies. These motivations are generally tied to an instrumental view of English which focuses on labor market opportunities. In some cases, however, this initial interest is redefined to focus more on the holistic development of students and on a vision of bilingual education that goes beyond simply learning an additional language—often in initiatives developed with the direct involvement of researchers and universities.

On the other hand, in the narratives of educators, the associated discourse is that of democratizing access to bi/multilingual education, social inclusion, and possibilities for access to the globalized world. For many educators, the proposal to tackle inequalities is a shared object to refer to public bilingual schools. In the work of El Kadri and colleagues (2024), representations of the educators involved in the project are marked by proposals that emphasize inclusive education with great potential to promote social inclusion, to broaden the horizons of students who would

not have access to this type of education if it were not through public sector actions, and to thus seek to minimize the impacts of the exclusionary logic that so evidently marks and hierarchies our society (El Kadri et al., 2024). The media, in turn, has naturalized the discourses of English as a commodity and the advantage of bilingual education for the labor market (El Kadri, 2022).

Researchers, while often citing the discourse on democratizing education, have been actively reflecting on the true nature of such educational approaches. El Kadri et al. (2024), for example, question whether we are really facilitating access and promoting new forms of integration into the world or whether we are inadvertently strengthening uncritical and colonial perspectives. Megale & El Kadri (2023) question whether it is possible to conceive bilingual education aligned with the demands of our contemporary society and that challenges the neoliberal view of education. For the authors, these questions are relevant because public bilingual schools can both reinforce neoliberalism through the development of a universalizing plurilingual subject that is produced as part of the erasure of global inequalities or can be used to resist the universalizing narrative of neoliberalism through the development of a plurilingual subject that engages with subaltern/southern perspectives (Flores, 2013).

Therefore, the primary challenge identified in the work of El Kadri et al. (2024) concerning Brazilian public bilingual schools is the need to redefine the purpose of schools. It is crucial to critically examine the underlying reasons. We have argued that the function of a bi/multilingual school, especially in the public education context, is to promote learning that provides new forms of engagement and participation of students in an increasingly plural and unequal world: promoting integration and active participation in a global society (El Kadri, 2022; Megale, 2022; Megale & El Kadri, 2023), incorporating other narratives, allowing the emergence of new ways of understanding the world, and forming new subjectivities endowed with transformative agency (Liberali, 2020) and with confident participation in the world (Megale & Liberali, 2020). We argue that public bilingual education should aim to foster diverse subjectivities, encouraging alternative ways of engaging with the world. Doing so includes enhancing access to cultural assets, artistic works, and varied perspectives and viewpoints (Megale, 2019).

Conclusion: Challenges and Possibilities in Brazil's Current Scenario

The exploration of bilingual education in Brazil reveals a landscape filled with significant challenges and promising possibilities. Brazil's historical context, marked by the suppression of Indigenous languages and the imposition of Portuguese, creates a paradoxical foundation for contemporary bilingual education. Lingering effects of this history present challenges in embracing and integrating Indigenous, sign, and migrant languages within modern educational frameworks. Additionally, the neoliberal order has amplified social, economic, and educational disparities, disproportionately affecting marginalized communities. Bilingual education, particularly English-Portuguese programs, often flourishes in private institutions, leaving public sector initiatives underfunded and less effective. Such inequalities perpetuate a cycle of limited access for those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, thereby undermining the potential for widespread bilingual development.

Despite the increasing presence of bilingual education, many programs continue to operate under a monolingual mindset that emphasizes strict separation between languages (i.e., by allocating them to different spaces, teachers, and time blocks) and prioritizes linguistic accuracy over communicative practices. This perspective limits students' opportunities to engage dynamically with multiple languages and hinders their development of linguistic mobility. To move beyond these limitations, it is crucial to foster intercultural competence—an ongoing and complex process that requires educators to navigate the tensions between global perspectives and local realities. In such contexts, creating spaces where students can appreciate and interact with cultural and linguistic diversity becomes essential. Achieving this goal also depends on robust and sustained professional development. Educators must be equipped with pedagogical tools to manage bilingual classrooms, implement intercultural approaches, and address the multifaceted needs of diverse student populations.

Central to this discussion are the concepts of “funds of *perezhivanie*” (Megale & Liberali, 2020) and “engaged multiliteracy” (Liberali, 2022). These frameworks provide valuable lenses through which to examine the complexities of bilingual education. “Funds of *perezhivanie*” integrates various theoretical and practical elements, encompassing experiences, knowledge, potentials, values, and emotions of individuals or groups accumulated throughout their lives. By recognizing these diverse experiences, educators can create a more inclusive and responsive educational environment that values the cultural and experiential diversity of students (Moll et al., 1992; Moll & Cammarota, 2010). Applying “funds of *perezhivanie*” in bilingual education implies creating learning spaces that recognize and value students' experiences and knowledge as essential resources in the educational process. The approach fosters deeper engagement and productive learning while creating a responsive learning environment that respects the complexity of students' lived experiences (Busch, 2012; García, 2009).

Engaged multiliteracy, on the other hand, responds to contemporary demands for educational practices that promote “Good Living” (Krenak, 2020) and address the challenges of oppression and social exclusion in the era of globalization and necropolitics (Mbembe, 2016). The concept emphasizes active engagement in understanding and transforming oppressive conditions which fosters a collective awareness and action to create a more just and equal society. It evolved from the Pedagogy of Multiliteracies, inspired by Freire (1970) and Vygotsky (1934/2001), to include deeper social and political engagement, aiming for an educational practice that is emancipatory and engaged with student and community realities. In bilingual education, engaged multiliteracy promotes educational practices that equip students with essential language skills while engaging them in diverse forms of literacy, including digital, visual, and media literacy. This approach enhances language proficiency and prepares students to navigate the complexities of a globalized world. Key actions and topics include “Immersion in Reality,” “Critical Construction of Generalizations,” and “Production of Social Change,” which all involve engaging students with their immediate environment, analyzing experiences to develop broader understandings, and then mobilizing this knowledge to implement actions that transform social realities.

The concept of “interculturality” is also significant for our context. By exploring strategies for intercultural education (Candau, 2008; Maher, 2007; Megale & El Kadri, 2023; Walsh, 2009),

we acknowledge the importance of fostering a deeper understanding of the evolving dynamics in bilingual education. From this perspective, we conceive bilingual education as a possibility for the formation of subjects with an intercultural stance and with greater willingness and knowledge to face the inequalities imposed by our society. Crafting bilingual identities, in this sense, means forging spaces for the construction of intercultural and critical curricula. Interculturality, from the perspective we adopt, is not a theoretical position or a dialogue between cultures or philosophical traditions but a “position” or “disposition,” a “way of life” (Fornet-Betancourt, 2001; 2004). An attitude of willingness to live “our” identity references in relation to “others.” It is an attitude that opens the human experience toward a process of relearning and of cultural and contextual relocation, which, by taking us out of our theoretical and practical certainties, allows us to perceive cultural illiteracies. Thus, we advocate decoloniality and critical interculturality (Moreira & Candau, 2008; Schnorr, 2015; Walsh, 2015) as tools of deconstruction and methodological possibilities to think about bilingual education through heteroglossic lenses.

This leads us to the second challenge faced by public bilingual schools that can contribute to the formation of empowered and agentive global citizens: the need to move toward heteroglossic perspectives. The movement is important for the subject we want to form: “A heteroglossic ideology implies not only recognizing the presence of different languages as a resource for constructing meanings but also a commitment to multidiscursivity and the multiplicity of voices in the school community” (Megale & El Kadri, 2023, p. 32).

Heteroglossia is here understood in a broad sense, drawing on Bakhtin’s view of language as inherently plural, layered, and dynamic (Busch, 2014). According to Busch (2014), this concept encompasses three interrelated dimensions:

- Multidiscursivity (*raznorečie*) refers to the coexistence of distinct speech types or discourses associated with particular social spheres, time periods, professions, or communities. These discourses carry their own ideological and cultural weight and shape how knowledge is constructed and communicated.
- Multivoicedness (*raznogolosie*) highlights the presence of diverse individual voices within these discursive spaces. Every utterance is situated on the boundary between self and other and becomes meaningful only when appropriated and reaccentuated by the speaker.
- Linguistic diversity (*raznojazyčie*) points to the multiplicity of languages and language varieties shaped by social differentiation. For Bakhtin, this diversity does not simply result in fragmentation but constitutes a “dialogue of languages,” whether within a so-called national language or among distinct linguistic systems in contact.

Framing bilingual education through heteroglossic lenses challenges dominant monolingual and homogenizing ideologies. It invites schools to cultivate spaces where varied discourses, voices, and languages can coexist, interact, and contribute to the construction of knowledge. It also compels us to rethink the notion of linguistic competence not as mastery over a standardized form but as the ability to navigate and participate in this complex dialogic landscape.

An illustrative example of the integration of heteroglossic and intercultural perspectives in Brazilian bilingual education is presented by Megale et al. (2023). The authors emphasize

the importance of incorporating a multiplicity of voices and worldviews into educational materials—particularly those voices that are frequently marginalized or entirely absent from traditional textbooks. This approach actively challenges colonial norms by offering alternative ways of being and acting in the world. It includes the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives, the empowerment of women, the disruption of traditional gender roles (e.g., the notion that “men don’t cry”), the understanding of culture as a set of identity discourses, and the critical engagement with themes such as diversity and racism (Megale et al., 2023). Megale et al. (2023) argue that the intentional selection of children’s stories aimed at overcoming hegemonic discourses, often reinforced by the monocultural character of our schools, holds the potential to promote access to non-hegemonic narratives—thus contributing to the formation of agentive, responsive, and more compassionate subjects.

Addressing such challenges and harnessing possibilities of bilingual education in Brazil requires a multifaceted approach that considers historical, sociocultural, and economic factors. By leveraging the concepts of funds of *perezhivanie* and engaged multiliteracy and by implementing robust intercultural education strategies, educators can navigate the complexities of bilingual education. This will contribute to creating a more inclusive and effective educational landscape that prepares students for the globalized world while honoring their local and cultural identities.

References

- Altenhofen, C. V. (2004). Política linguística, mitos e concepções linguísticas em áreas bilíngues de imigrantes (alemães) no Brasil. *Revista Internacional de Linguística Iberoamericana*, 1(3), 83–93. <https://doi.org/10.15210/rle.v23i4.18521>
- Andreotti, V. (2014). Critical and transnational literacies in international development and global citizenship education. *Sisyphus-Journal of Education*, 2(3), 32–50. <https://doi.org/10.25749/sis.6544>
- British Council. (2023). *The future of English*. <https://www.britishcouncil.org/future-of-english>
- Busch, B. (2014). Building on heteroglossia and heterogeneity: The experience of a multilingual classroom. In A. Blackledge & A. Creese (Eds.), *Heteroglossia as practice and pedagogy* (pp. 21–40). Springer.
- Busch, B. (2015). Linguistic repertoire and *Spracherleben*: The lived experience of language. *Working Papers in Urban Language & Literacies*, (145), 2–16.
- Camicia, S. P., & Franklin, B. M. (2011). What type of global community and citizenship? Tangled discourses of neoliberalism and critical democracy in curriculum and its reform. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 9(3–4), 311–322. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2011.605303>
- Candau, V. M. (2008). Multiculturalismo e educação: Desafios para a prática pedagógica. In A. F. Moreira & V. M. Candau (Eds.), *Multiculturalismo: Diferenças culturais e práticas pedagógicas* (pp. 13–37). Vozes.
- Carraro, E. A., & Del Mouro, K. A. G. (2016). O processo histórico da Língua Brasileira de Sinais. *Anais do Encontro Científico e Tecnológico* (pp. 10–13). FAG Toledo.

- Cavalcanti, M. C. (1999). Estudos sobre educação bilíngue e escolarização em contextos de minorias linguísticas no Brasil. *DELTA: Documentação e Estudos em Linguística Teórica e Aplicada*, 15, 385–417. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0102-44501999000300015>
- El Kadri, M. S. (2022). Criando inéditos-viáveis na educação bilíngue: Proposta do material “Global Kids” para a construção de uma educação bi/multilíngue crítica. In M. S. El Kadri, V. B. Saviolli, & A. C. Molinari (Eds.), *Educação de professores para o contexto bi/multilíngue: Perspectivas e práticas* (pp. 116–150). Pontes.
- El Kadri, M. S., Passoni, T. P., & Megale, A. (Eds.). (2024). *Construindo horizontes na educação bilíngue pública: Reflexões e utopias para a equidade*. Tikbooks.
- Flores, N. (2013). The unexamined relationship between neoliberalism and plurilingualism: A cautionary tale. *TESOL Quarterly*, 47(3), 500–520. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.114>
- Fornet-Betancourt, R. (2001). *Transformación intercultural de la filosofía latino-americana: Ejercicios teóricos y prácticos de la filosofía intercultural en el contexto de la globalización*. Desclée de Brouwer.
- Fornet-Betancourt, R. (2004). *Interculturalidade, críticas, diálogos e perspectivas*. Nova Harmonia.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogia do oprimido* (75th ed.). Paz & Terra Editora.
- Freire, J. R. (2018). Changing policies and language ideologies with regard to Indigenous languages in Brazil. In M. C. Cavalcanti & T. M. Maher (Eds.), *Multilingual Brazil: Language resources, identities and ideologies in a globalized world* (pp. 27–39). Routledge.
- García, O. (2009). *Bilingual education in the 21st century: A global perspective*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Gaudelli, W. (2009). Heuristics of global citizenship discourses towards curriculum enhancement. *Journal of Curriculum Theory*, 25(1), 68–85. <https://doi.org/10.63997/jct.v25i1.41>
- Guilherme, M., & Menezes de Souza, L. M. T. (Eds.). (2019). Introduction: Glocal languages, the South answering back. In *Glocal languages and critical intercultural awareness: The South answers back* (pp. 1–13). Routledge.
- Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística. (2012). *Censo demográfico 2010: Características gerais dos indígenas – Resultados do universo*. IBGE. https://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/visualizacao/periodicos/83/cd_2010_indigenas_universo.pdf
- ISC Research. (2023). *International schools: Global market overview*. ISC Research.
- Krenak, A. (2020). *Ideias para adiar o fim do mundo*. Companhia das Letras.
- Liberali, F. (2020). Construir o inédito-viável em meio à crise do coronavírus: Lições que aprendemos, vivemos e propomos. In F. Liberali & A. Megale (Eds.), *Alfabetização, letramento e multiletramentos em tempos de resistência* (pp. 13–22). Pontes.
- Liberali, F. (2022). Multiletramento engajado para a prática do bem viver. *Linguagem em (Dis)curso*, 22(1), 125–145. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1982-4017-220109-8421>
- Liberali, F., Megale, A. H., & Vieira, D. A. (Eds.). (2022). *Por uma educação bi/multilíngue insurgente*. Pontes.
- Maher, T. M. (2007). A educação do entorno para a interculturalidade e o plurilinguismo. In A. B. Kleiman & M. C. Cavalcanti (Eds.), *Linguística aplicada: Suas faces e interfaces* (pp. 255–270). Mercado de Letras.

- Maher, T. M. (2013). Ecos de resistência: Políticas linguísticas e as línguas minoritárias brasileiras. In C. Nicolaidis, K. Aparecido da Silva, R. Tilio, & C. Hilsdorf Rocha (Eds.), *Políticas e políticas linguísticas* (pp. 117–134). Pontes.
- May, S. (2014). (Ed.). *The multilingual turn: Implications for SLA, TESOL and bilingual education*. Routledge.
- Mbembe, A. (2003). *Necropolitics*. Duke University Press.
- Megale, A. H. (Ed.). (2019). *Educação bilíngue no Brasil*. Richmond.
- Megale, A. H. (Ed.). (2020). *Desafios e práticas na educação bilíngue*. Richmond.
- Megale, A. H., & Liberali, F. C. (2020). As implicações do conceito de patrimônio vivencial como uma alternativa para a educação multilíngue. *Revista X*, 15(1), 55–74. <https://doi.org/10.5380/rvx.v15i1.69979>
- Megale, A. H. (Ed.). (2021). *Educação bilíngue: Como fazer?* Richmond.
- Megale, A. H. (2022). Por uma educação bilíngue intercultural comprometida com a promoção da justiça social. In M. S. El Kadri, V. B. Saviolli, & A. C. Molinari (Eds.), *Educação de professores para o contexto bi/multilíngue: Perspectivas e práticas* (pp. 59–76). Pontes Editores.
- Megale, A. H., & El Kadri, M. (2023). *Escola bilíngue: E agora? (Trans)formando saberes na educação de professores*. Santillana.
- Megale, A., El Kadri, M., & Saviolli, V. (2023). Sonhar, ousar e esperar: A construção de inéditos viáveis em uma escola bilíngue pública. *Scripta*, 27(60), 36–64. <https://doi.org/10.5752/P.2358-3428.2023v27n60p36-64>
- Ministério da Educação. (2020). *Parecer CNE/CEB No. 02/2020*. Câmara da Educação Básica Brasília, Conselho Nacional da Educação, Ministério da Educação. portal.mec.gov.br/index.php?option=com_docman&view=download&alias=156861-pceb002-20&category_slug=setembro-2020-pdf&Itemid=30192
- Moll, L., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory into Practice*, 31(2), 132–141.
- Moll, L., & Cammarota, J. (2010). Cultivating new funds of knowledge through research and practice. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 15(1–2), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1477878511409776>
- Moore, D., Facundes, S., & Pires, N. (1993). Nheengatú (língua geral Amazônica), its history, and effects of language contact. *Proceedings of the Meeting of the Society for the Study of the Indigenous Languages of the Americas*, 2(4), 93–118.
- Moreira, A. F., & Candau, V. M. (2008). *Indagações sobre currículo: Currículo, conhecimento e cultura*. Ministério da Educação, Secretaria de Educação Básica.
- Morello, R. (2012). Uma política pública e participativa para as línguas brasileiras: Sobre a regulamentação e a implementação do Inventário Nacional da Diversidade Linguística (INDL). *Gragoatá*, 17(32), 31–41.
- Morello, R. (2018). The languages on the Brazilian borders: Documenting urban diversity, researching school and classroom practice, working towards change. In M. C. Cavalcanti & T. M. Maher (Eds.), *Multilingual Brazil: Language resources, identities and ideologies in a globalized world* (pp. 89–104). Routledge.

- Oliveira, G. M. (2009). Brasileiro fala português: Monolinguismo e preconceito linguístico. *Linguagem*, 11(1), 1–9.
- Oliveira, T. (2023). Dez anos de OBMigra e os indicadores sociodemográficos dos imigrantes internacionais no Brasil. In L. Cavalcanti, T. Oliveira, & S. L. Silva (Eds.), *Relatório Anual OBMigra 2023 - OBMigra 10 anos: Pesquisa, dados e contribuições para políticas públicas* (pp. 24–44). Observatório das Migrações Internacionais, Ministério da Justiça e Segurança Pública/ Conselho Nacional de Imigração, e Coordenação Geral de Imigração Laboral. portaldeimigracao.mj.gov.br/images/Obmigra_2020/OBMIGRA_2023/Relat%C3%B3rio%20Anual/RELAT%C3%93RIO%20ANUAL%2005.12%20-%20final.pdf
- Pretini Junior, A. (2022). A formação docente para contextos bi/multilíngues. In F. Liberali, A. Megale, & V. Vieira (Eds.), *Por uma educação bi/multilíngue insurgente*. Pontes.
- Preuss, E. O., & Álvares, M. R. (2014). Bilinguismo e políticas linguísticas no Brasil: Da ilusão monolíngue à realidade plurilíngue. *Acta Scientiarum: Language and Culture*, 36(4), 403–414. <https://doi.org/10.4025/actascilangcult.v36i4.23169>
- Rodrigues, A. D. (1993). Línguas indígenas: 500 anos de descobertas e perdas. *DELTA: Documentação e Estudos em Linguística Teórica e Aplicada*, 9(1), 83–103.
- Rodrigues, A. D. (2002). *Línguas brasileiras: Para o conhecimento das línguas indígenas* (4th ed.). Loyola.
- Schattle, H. (2008). Education for global citizenship: Illustrations of ideological pluralism and adaptation. *Journal of Political Ideologies* 13(1), 73–94. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569310701822263>
- Schnorr, G. M. (2015). *A Filosofia intercultural de Raúl Fornet-Betancourt: Práxis dialógica e reaprendizagem do pensar* (Tese de doutorado). Universidade de São Paulo.
- Soares, P. A. S., & Fargetti, C. M. (2022). Línguas indígenas de sinais: Pesquisas no Brasil. *LIAMES: Línguas Indígenas Americanas*, 22, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.20396/liames.v22i00.8667592>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (2001). The problem of the environment. In R. van der Veer & J. Valsiner (Eds.), *The Vygotsky reader* (pp. 338–354). Blackwell. (Original work published 1934)
- Walsh, C. (2009). Interculturalidade crítica e pedagogia decolonial: in-surgir, re-existir e re-viver. In V. M. Candau (Ed.), *Educação intercultural na América Latina: Entre concepções, tensões e propostas* (pp. 12–43). 7 Letras.
- Walsh, C. (2010). Development as Buen Vivir: Institutional arrangements and (de)colonial entanglements. *Development*, 53(1), 15–21. <https://doi.org/10.1057/dev.2009.93>
- Walsh, C. (2015). Decolonial pedagogies walking and asking: Notes to Paulo Freire from AbyaYala. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 34(1), 9–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2014.991522>
- Walsh, C. (2018). Sobre el género y su modo-muy-otro. *Cadernos de Estudos Culturais*, 2(20), 25–42.