

## Communication between nurses and deaf people: an educational diagnosis

*Comunicación entre enfermeras y personas sordas: un diagnóstico educativo*

*A comunicação realizada por enfermeiros com as pessoas surdas: um diagnóstico educacional*

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### Abstract

This study focused on the teaching of Brazilian Sign Language (LIBRAS) in nursing education. It was observed that many graduates lack the skills to communicate with deaf people, compromising the quality of care provided. The aim was to identify how LIBRAS is taught in undergraduate nursing courses in the state of Rio de Janeiro. This is a qualitative, descriptive study based on the analysis of institutional documents available on official websites, such as Political-Pedagogical Projects, curricular matrices, and course outlines. The guiding question, formulated using the PICO strategy, was: "How is LIBRAS taught in undergraduate nursing courses?". Forty-six Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) registered in EMEC were found to offer the course; however, only 42 provided information online. Among these, 33 mentioned the subject of LIBRAS, and only 9 provided materials for analysis: 3 public and 6 private. It is concluded that, in the materials examined, the workload and content of LIBRAS (Brazilian Sign Language) are insufficient for the development of communication skills necessary for nurses, which confirms the need for training and capacity building, as well as the broader inclusion of this topic in nursing education.

**Descriptors:** Communication; Sign Language; Nursing; Undergraduate Programs; Deafness.

### Resumen

Este estudio se centró en la enseñanza de la Lengua de Señas Brasileña (LIBRAS) en la formación de enfermería. Se observó que muchos egresados carecen de las habilidades necesarias para comunicarse con personas sordas, lo que compromete la calidad de la atención brindada. El objetivo fue identificar cómo se enseña LIBRAS en los programas de pregrado de enfermería en el estado de Río de Janeiro. Se trata de un estudio cualitativo y descriptivo basado en el análisis de documentos institucionales disponibles en sitios web oficiales, tales como proyectos político-pedagógicos, matrices curriculares y programas de estudio. La pregunta guía, formulada mediante la estrategia PICO, fue: "¿Cómo se enseña LIBRAS en los programas de pregrado de enfermería?". Se encontraron 46 instituciones de educación superior (IES) registradas en EMEC que ofrecen el curso; sin embargo, solo 42 proporcionaron información en línea. De estas, 33 mencionaron la asignatura de LIBRAS, y solo 9 proporcionaron materiales para el análisis: 3 públicas y 6 privadas. Se concluye que, en los materiales examinados, la carga de trabajo y el contenido de LIBRAS (Lengua de Señas Brasileña) son insuficientes para el desarrollo de las habilidades de comunicación necesarias para las enfermeras, lo que confirma la necesidad de capacitación y desarrollo de capacidades, así como la inclusión más amplia de este tema en la educación en enfermería.

**Descriptores:** Comunicación; Lengua de Señas; Enfermería; Programas de Graduación; Sordera.

### Resumo

Este estudo teve como objeto o ensino da Língua Brasileira de Sinais (LIBRAS) na formação de enfermeiros. Observa-se que muitos concluem a graduação sem habilidades para se comunicar com pessoas surdas, o que compromete a qualidade da assistência prestada. O objetivo foi identificar como ocorre o ensino de LIBRAS nos cursos de graduação em enfermagem do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Trata-se de pesquisa qualitativa, de caráter descritivo, baseada na análise de documentos institucionais disponibilizados em sites oficiais, como Projetos Político-Pedagógicos, matrizes e ementas curriculares. A questão norteadora, formulada pela estratégia PICO, foi: "Como se dá o ensino de LIBRAS nos cursos de graduação em enfermagem?". Foram encontradas 46 Instituições de Ensino Superior (IES) cadastradas no EMEC que ofertavam o curso; porém, apenas 42 disponibilizavam informações online. Entre estas, 33 mencionavam a disciplina de LIBRAS, e somente 9 forneceram materiais para análise: 3 públicas e 6 privadas. Conclui-se que, nos materiais examinados, a carga horária e o conteúdo de LIBRAS são insuficientes para o desenvolvimento de competências comunicacionais necessárias ao enfermeiro, o que constata a necessidade de treinamentos e capacitações, além da inclusão desta temática de forma ampliada na formação de enfermeiros.

**Descritores:** Comunicação; Língua de Sinais; Enfermagem; Programas de Graduação; Surdez.



communicate without the use of LIBRAS, a right guaranteed to them by Brazilian law<sup>9</sup>.

Given these considerations, the problem addressed in this study lies in the curricula of undergraduate nursing courses, in the practice of teaching, and in the disregard for what is established in current national legislation regarding the needs of people, in this case, the hearing impaired<sup>10</sup>.

In a study conducted and published in 2020, it was found that "of the 553 nursing courses found online through curriculum matrices throughout Brazil that offered the subject of Libras (Brazilian Sign Language), 482 (87.2%) were offered in Private Educational Institutions, and 71 (12.8%) in Public Institutions. The offering of the Libras subjects significantly predominated in private institutions compared to public ones ( $p < 0.001$ ). Of these, 52 (9.4%) were Federal Institutions and 19 (3.4%) were State Institutions. Regarding campus location, 340 (61.5%) were in the interior of Brazilian states, while 213 (38.5%) were in capital cities. The minimum workload for the Libras (Brazilian Sign Language) course was 15 hours, and the maximum was 88. The predominant workload, of 40 hours, was found in 218 (39.4%) undergraduate nursing courses and constituted the median of the workloads, with an interquartile range of 24<sup>10</sup>.

Therefore, the question that guided this study was: "How is LIBRAS (Brazilian Sign Language) taught in undergraduate nursing courses?". The study's objective was to identify how LIBRAS is taught in undergraduate nursing courses in the State of Rio de Janeiro. This study aims to produce knowledge for society, for people with disabilities, and above all, for nursing and its professionals, with a view to reflecting on the training of nurses and their practice, and thus adapting their programs, teaching structure, course structure, and study plan to empower students and future professionals.

The motivation for conducting this research stemmed from personal experiences that, through living with deaf people, allowed me to perceive the difficulties faced by nursing professionals in communicating with these individuals. Many nurses do not receive specific training on how to communicate with deaf people during their education. This can result in a lack of confidence and inadequate skills when dealing with these patients, as well as a failure to understand the client's real needs at any given moment.

## Methodology

This is a qualitative study with a descriptive approach. Qualitative research aims to answer questions by exploring the universe of meanings, presenting and interpreting the results, and should not be translated into numbers<sup>11</sup>.

To answer the guiding question, a documentary research was carried out, distinguished by working with primary sources, not produced by other researchers, and which allows for a new perspective and interpretation of the collected data<sup>12</sup>.

Thus, it can be said that documentary research is that in which the data obtained are strictly derived from documents, with the objective of extracting information

## Introduction

In the healthcare field, communication between professionals and patients is the primary way to build rapport with users and their families. For effective communication between healthcare professionals and deaf individuals, strategies that facilitate language and avoid barriers are necessary. Communication is a basic and fundamental tool in nursing care, especially when dealing with this population, whose communication is more complex, as barriers often arise that ultimately hinder the care provided<sup>1,2</sup>.

Once communication fails, the deaf person's relationship with the nursing professional is compromised, as the information process between them is blocked, preventing the necessary understanding and hindering the professional from providing adequate care to meet the patient's needs.

Although few studies have yet been conducted on this topic, it is common knowledge that lack of communication is the main cause of misunderstandings and conflicts in any relationship, which points to the importance of communicative competence in all nursing actions performed, since this will directly influence the person<sup>3</sup>.

Communication, in its various forms, plays a significant role as a humanizing instrument, and for this to happen, the team needs to be willing and involved in establishing this relationship and understanding that it is essential to recognize the client as the subject of care and not passive to it<sup>4</sup>.

Decree No. 5,626, of December 22, 2005, in its Article 2, states that a deaf person, due to hearing loss, understands and interacts with the world through visual experiences, expressing their culture mainly using Brazilian Sign Language (LIBRAS)<sup>5</sup>.

The Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) reports that 5% of the Brazilian population has some form of hearing impairment. This percentage means that more than 10 million citizens have this impairment, and 2.7 million have profound deafness, meaning they cannot hear at all<sup>6</sup>.

The United Nations Convention recognizes that, for people with disabilities to fully enjoy human rights and fundamental freedoms, it is necessary to guarantee access to health, information, and communication, among others, and, for this, the State must facilitate the use of Sign Language in society<sup>7</sup>.

In Brazil, Law No. 10,436 of April 24, 2002, addresses the Brazilian Sign Language and, in its Article 3, stipulates that "Public institutions and companies that provide public health services must guarantee adequate care and treatment to people with hearing impairments"<sup>8</sup>. However, most professionals do not recognize LIBRAS (Brazilian Sign Language), and there are no interpreters in health services.

It is worth highlighting that the first language of a deaf client is Brazilian Sign Language (LIBRAS), which means that attempts to understand interactive connections using written language are not always satisfactory. It is important to remember that, generally, deaf people cannot



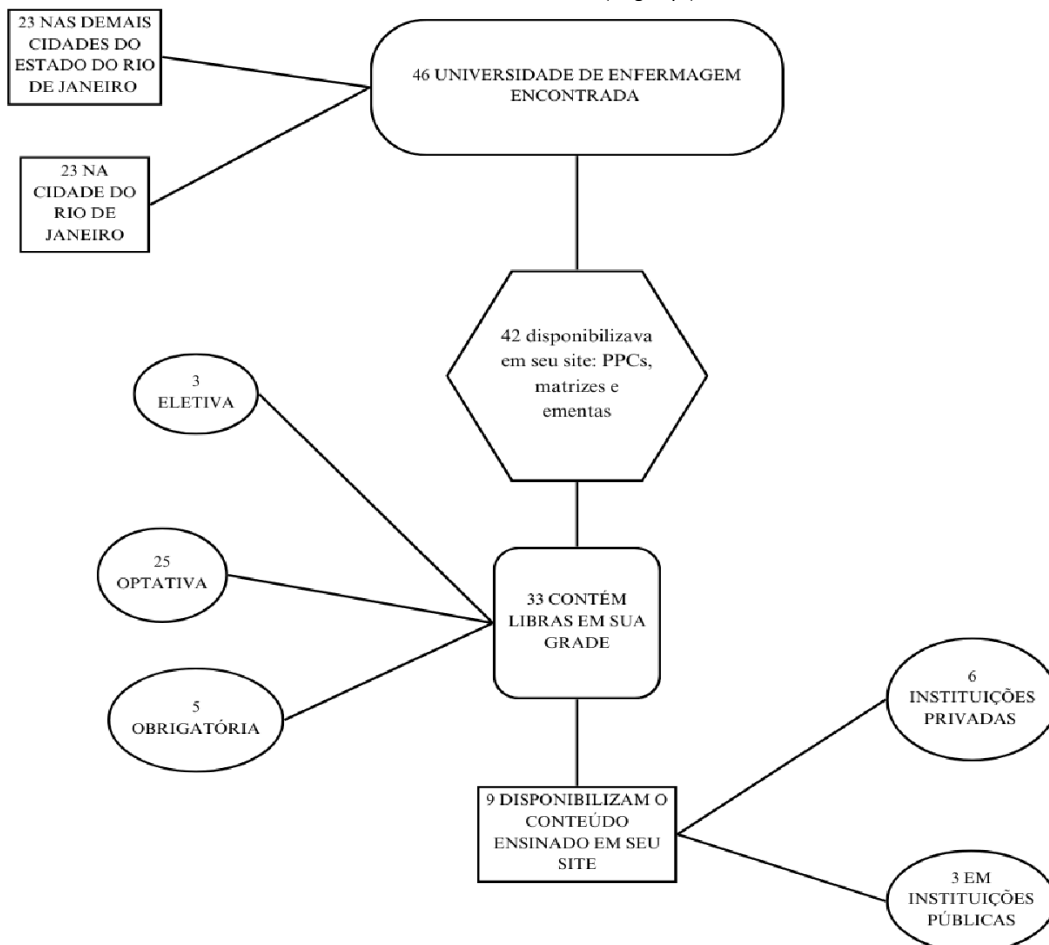
contained therein to understand a phenomenon; it is a procedure that uses methods and techniques for the apprehension, understanding, and analysis of documents of the most varied types; it is characterized as documentary when this is the only qualitative approach, being used as an autonomous method. However, it is also possible to use documents and document analysis as complementary strategies to other methods. The qualitative approach is an increasingly widespread orientation in the field of scientific activity today. In recent years, studies guided by this approach have been actively participating in the production of evidence for reforms in the health sector, in different countries and social contexts. A person who wishes to undertake documentary research must constitute a satisfactory corpus; exhaust all leads capable of providing interesting information<sup>13-15</sup>.

In this sense, to meet the research objective, the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the State of Rio de Janeiro that offer undergraduate courses in Nursing were identified. For this identification, information was sought in the e-MEC database, which is an electronic system for monitoring the processes that regulate higher education in Brazil.

After identifying these higher education institutions (HEIs), a search was conducted on their institutional websites during August and September 2024 to identify the presence of academic documents for the course. Information on the course's Political-Pedagogical Project, curricular matrices, and/or syllabi was sought through these websites. Based on the available information, it was possible to identify the existence of subjects that address the use of Brazilian Sign Language (LIBRAS) during professional training. Furthermore, information was gathered regarding the workload, content covered, and whether these subjects were mandatory or elective/optional.

Thus, 46 HEIs registered in e-MEC that offered undergraduate courses in Nursing were identified. Of these, only 42 made the aforementioned information available on their websites. The subject of LIBRAS (Brazilian Sign Language) and/or related subjects was identified in only 33 Nursing courses from HEIs, and of these, only 9 made the Course Political-Pedagogical Project (PPC), syllabus, and/or curriculum matrix available for analysis, with 3 from the public sector and 6 from the private sector. The above is schematically presented in Flowchart 1.

**Flowchart 1.** Identification of Higher Education Institutions that offer LIBRAS (Brazilian Sign Language) in Undergraduate Nursing Courses. Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil, 2024 (Aug-Sept)



Note: Universidade de Enfermagem encontrada: Nursing University found. Nas demais cidades do Estado do Rio de Janeiro: In other cities in the State of Rio de Janeiro. Na cidade do Rio de Janeiro: In the city of Rio de Janeiro. Disponibilizava em seu site PIPCs, matrizes e ementas: Provided on their website PIPCs, matrices and syllabi. Eletiva: Elective. Optativa: Optional. Obrigatória: Required. Contém LIBRAS em sua grade: Contains LIBRAS in its curriculum. Disponibilizam o conteúdo ensinado em seu site: Provides the taught content on its website. Instituições privadas: Private institutions. Instituições públicas: Public institutions.



To analyze the data, the materials available on the websites were read and analyzed thoroughly, in a search for content offered to nursing students regarding LIBRAS (Brazilian Sign Language) and communication with deaf people.

**Results**

Of the 46 higher education institutions (HEIs), 42 had accessible data. The subject of Brazilian Sign Language (LIBRAS) was identified in 33 courses, but only 9 provided detailed information, such as syllabus and course content.

The workload offered in each subject was not standardized, varying from 30 to 80 hours. It was possible to analyze the information available in 9 HEIs, 4 of which were public and the rest private.

There was a predominance of in-person courses and irregularity regarding the content offered in the subjects analyzed. The topics covered in the course content included the history of LIBRAS, an approach to deaf culture, grammar, basic vocabulary, and syntax of the language. In addition, phonology was addressed, but with little practical application described in the analyzed documents.

**Chart 1.** Synoptic chart characterizing higher education institutions offering the subject of LIBRAS. Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil, 2024 (Aug-Sept)

HEI	Type	Workload	Course delivery format	Content
University A	Public	40h	In-person	History of LIBRAS (Brazilian Sign Language), Deaf culture, grammar
University B	Private	60h	In-person	Facial expressions, spatial syntax
University C	Public	30h	In-person	Historical and legal aspects
University D	Private	40h	In-person	Basic vocabulary, morphology
University E	Private	50h	In-person	Deaf culture, legislation
University F	Public	80h	In-person	Advanced grammar, inclusion
University G	Private	40h	In-person	Historical process of LIBRAS and phonology
University H	Private	60h	In-person	Basic conversation, phonology
University I	Private	40h	In-person	Historical-cultural context, legislation

**Discussion**

Based on the methodology described above, it was possible to select the available content regarding the provision of LIBRAS (Brazilian Sign Language) in 6 HEIs (Higher Education Institutions), given its availability on their institutional websites. However, it is worth noting that, among the HEIs registered in e-MEC (Brazilian Ministry of Education's online system), LIBRAS was not offered in all curricula. According to Decree No. 5,626, of December 22, 2005, LIBRAS should be an optional curricular subject in other higher education courses and in vocational education<sup>5</sup>.

In the materials analyzed, no curricular pedagogical proposals and/or syllabi for the subject of LIBRAS (Brazilian Sign Language) were identified in any of the HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) that claimed to offer this curricular component. This makes it more difficult to present a subject regulated by law, but which lacks the necessary clarity to allow students the power of choice.

Regarding the delivery method of the subjects, through analysis of the available online websites of nursing education institutions, it was not possible to identify information on whether they were offered in person or remotely. This condition may influence the learning of the offered content and the acquisition of skills and competencies by students in training. As for the workload, the study of these platforms showed that it mostly ranged between 40 and 60 hours in total.

The difficulties in accessing information on curricula, course outlines, and subjects for nursing programs at higher education institutions contradict the provisions of Normative Ordinance No. 40, of December 12, 2007, from the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), which states

that institutions must display the curriculum matrix of their courses in a visible location near the student services office. It is also worth highlighting what Law No. 9.394/96 states in its Article 47: "The institution must inform interested parties, before each academic period, of the course programs and other curricular components, duration, requirements, teacher qualifications, available resources, and evaluation criteria, and is obligated to comply with the respective conditions"<sup>16</sup>.

Furthermore, considering the information available on the institutional website, it is observed that Decree No. 7,724/2012, which regulates the Access to Information Law (LAI), Law No. 12,527/2011, is in effect, the purpose of which is to ensure the constitutional right to request and obtain information from public entities and institutions<sup>17,18</sup>. Therefore, people of all ages and nationalities should have access to information, as well as companies and entities. The right to information is universal and a duty of the State. The lack of accessible information on educational websites, exposing the insufficiency of elements related to LIBRAS (Brazilian Sign Language) - little transparency regarding content, format, and workload – goes against regulations.

Concerning Nursing courses, the DCN (National Curriculum Guidelines) for undergraduate nursing programs establishes, in Article 4, that professionals must be accessible, employing a process of verbal and non-verbal communication and/or writing and reading skills, in addition to mastering communication and information technologies, while maintaining the confidentiality of the information received<sup>19</sup>.

It is therefore noteworthy that the content enabling nurses to develop the skills to communicate with deaf



patients during their care was scarce, given the non-mandatory nature of the related subjects and the identified workload. In healthcare settings, where nurses are involved, the lack of proficiency in LIBRAS (Brazilian Sign Language) can contribute to deaf individuals feeling marginalized from healthcare services, without their rights being guaranteed by law.

Brazilian Sign Language (LIBRAS) must be offered as a subject in the training of future nurses to ensure effective communication with the individuals being assisted. In this sense, it is estimated that there is no inclusion of deaf people if people do not know LIBRAS, the first language of the community. Furthermore, it is highlighted that the absence of mandatory inclusion of this content can be a determining factor in the lack of training and motivation for these professionals. Academic training hinders the effective reception of deaf people in health units, making care inefficient for the patient.

The perceived absence of LIBRAS (Brazilian Sign Language) instruction can influence the fulfillment of certain professional nursing duties described in the Code of Ethics for Nursing Professionals, regulated by Cofen Resolution No. 564/2017, and outlined in Articles 38, 39, 40, and 42; such as: providing complete and reliable written and/or verbal information necessary for the continuity of care and patient safety; clarifying to the individual, family, and community the rights, risks, benefits, and complications regarding nursing care; guiding the individual and family on preparation, benefits, risks, and consequences arising from examinations and other procedures, in order to respect the right of refusal of the individual or their legal representative; respecting the right of the individual or their legal representative to exercise autonomy in making free and informed decisions about their health, safety, treatment, comfort, and well-being, carrying out necessary actions in accordance with ethical and legal principles. Therefore, the lack of Brazilian Sign Language in nursing training has repercussions on their service and care<sup>20</sup>.

Brazilian Sign Language (LIBRAS) has its own grammatical structures, composed of linguistic levels such as phonological, morphological, semantic, and syntactic, differentiated by visuospatial perception, understood through hand movements<sup>21</sup>. Addressing all these elements would be of fundamental importance for nurses to acquire communication skills with deaf people.

In the curricula provided by the 9 higher education institutions identified in this study, it was evident that the topics covered included: the approach to theoretical-historical content; linguistic considerations; proper nouns; personal pronouns; phonology of LIBRAS (Brazilian Sign Language); demonstratives; possessives; locatives in simple question-and-answer sentences with "what" and "who" and other basic vocabulary; numerals; quantity; topicalization; verb conjugation; negation conjugation; facial and body expressions; visual perception; conversation; texts; deaf culture and community; myths about sign language; morphology of LIBRAS; the process of sign formation; spatial syntax; construction of simple sentences in Brazilian Sign

Language; policies for the inclusion of the deaf; and specific laws.

The curriculum analysis revealed that only 4 higher education institutions (HEIs) focused on teaching facial expressions in the learning of Brazilian Sign Language (LIBRAS) for nursing students. Facial and body expressions are head movements, gazes, body language, and expressions that can convey emotions such as joy, sadness, anger, love, and delight. According to author<sup>22</sup>, in their research for the Methodist University of Piracicaba (UNIMEP), expressions manifest themselves as a way of enriching the iconic representation of objects. In agreement, authors<sup>23</sup> emphasize that the differentiation in LIBRAS (Brazilian Sign Language) between affirmative, exclamatory, interrogative, and negative forms is achieved through facial and body expressions made simultaneously with the signs.

The most frequently found theme was the theoretical, historical, and cultural aspects of deafness, neglecting practical material for developing good communication. It is stated that "in sign languages, the presence of some visual iconicity is sometimes evident and needs to be recognized by the user of that language to better execute it." From this same perspective, visual iconicity is the ability of an image to represent reality, creating hand gestures that a deaf person can understand. Therefore, hearing people learning LIBRAS (Brazilian Sign Language) face significant challenges in using this resource of simultaneously producing several signs with each hand. Generally, they sign the same phrase without using simultaneity. However, because it is a tool widely used by deaf people, LIBRAS programs should address it in a structured way. Similarly, in the case of incorporation, hearing students tend to sign the same phrase without using simultaneity. However, because this is a resource widely used by deaf people, LIBRAS courses should work on it systematically<sup>22</sup>. No content was found listing the simultaneous learning teaching approach.

## Conclusion

The study identified that LIBRAS (Brazilian Sign Language) instruction was predominantly found in nursing courses at public institutions. The lowest number of hours taught was 30, the highest was 80, with a median of 40 hours.

Based on the available materials, it is possible to state that the content taught and the workload do not provide conditions for the development of communication skills throughout the training. This limits or hinders the right to health, leading the deaf population to seek healthcare from each other, resulting in the segregation of deaf patients. The non-mandatory nature of the subject, merely fulfilling the legal requirement on an optional basis and with content and workloads that do not encompass the necessary skills for nurses, allows the higher education institution autonomy to create its curriculum, but highlights the need for mandatory inclusion.

The lack of available information on institutional websites was a hindering and limiting factor in obtaining data, and therefore, further research is suggested to



improve the results. Investigations are needed to determine the optimal number of hours that the subject of LIBRAS (Brazilian Sign Language) should have in undergraduate

nursing courses, so that students can be equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary for basic communication with deaf people.

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