

## THE BRAZILIAN SIGN LANGUAGE AS A MANDATORY SUBJECT IN NURSING GRADUATION: students' opinions

### A LÍNGUA BRASILEIRA DE SINAIS COMO DISCIPLINA OBRIGATÓRIA NA GRADUAÇÃO EM ENFERMAGEM: opiniões dos discentes

### LA LENGUA BRASILEÑA DE SEÑALES COMO DISCIPLINA OBLIGATORIA EN LA GRADUACIÓN EN ENFERMERÍA: opiniones de los discentes

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#### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** to describe Nursing undergraduate students' opinions about the compulsory BSL subject during their formation. **Method:** quantitative-descriptive and cross-sectional field research, developed with a sample of 119 nursing undergraduate students from a Higher Education Institution, applying a closed questionnaire and using descriptive statistics. The study complied with ethical principles, opinion No. 1.684.722. **Results:** among the interviewees, 76% did not know BSL before studying in college; 99% consider the BSL Subject important and relevant; about 87% state that classes are profitable, 67% intend to specialize in BSL and 94% request internships with the deaf. **Conclusion:** the BSL instrument, when offered as a subject of undergraduate nursing course, had a positive impact from students' perspective.

**Descriptors:** Higher Education; Nursing; Communication Barriers; Access to Health Services; Health Human Resources Qualification.

#### RESUMO

**Objetivo:** descrever as opiniões dos graduandos em enfermagem acerca da Disciplina obrigatória de Libras durante a sua formação. **Método:** estudo de abordagem quantitativo-descritiva e transversal, desenvolvido com estudantes de enfermagem (1º, 2º, 7º e 8º períodos) de uma Instituição de Ensino Superior. Para coleta dos dados, utilizou-se um questionário padronizado. **Resultados:** participaram da pesquisa 119 graduandos em enfermagem e, entre os entrevistados, 76% não conheciam Libras antes de estudar na faculdade; 99% acham a Disciplina de Libras importante e relevante; cerca de 87% explicitam que as aulas são proveitosas, 67% pretendem se especializar em Libras e 94% solicitam estágios com os surdos. **Conclusão:** o instrumento Libras, ao ser ofertado quanto disciplina no curso de graduação em Enfermagem, obteve impacto positivo na perspectiva dos graduandos.

**Descritores:** Educação Superior; Enfermagem; Barreiras de Comunicação; Acesso aos Serviços de Saúde; Capacitação de Recursos Humanos em Saúde.

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#### RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** describir las opiniones de los bachilleres de enfermería acerca de la Disciplina de Libras obligatoria durante su formación. **Método:** investigación de campo cuantitativo-descriptiva y transversal. Se utilizó una muestra de 119 estudiantes de enfermería de una determinada Institución de Enseñanza Superior, aplicándose un cuestionario cerrado y utilizándose la estadística descriptiva. Los principios éticos fueron respetados, con opinión n.1.684.722. **Resultados:** entre los entrevistados, 76% no conocían Libras antes de estudiar en la universidad; 99% consideran la Disciplina de Libras importante y relevante; cerca de 87% explicitan que las clases son provechosas, 67% pretenden especializarse en Libras y 94% solicitan pasantías con los sordos. **Conclusión:** el instrumento Libras, al ser ofertado como disciplina del curso de graduación en Enfermería, obtuvo un impacto positivo en la perspectiva de los bachilleres.

**Descriptor:** Enseñanza Superior; Enfermería; Barreras de comunicación; Acceso a los Servicios de Salud; Capacitación de Recursos Humanos en Salud.

## INTRODUCTION

The access of a hearing impaired person to public health services is ensured by Brazilian legislation through the Federal Constitution of 1988 in article 196 and in the Organic Health Law 8080 of 1990 in article 7, which define universality and equality in health actions and services.<sup>1,2</sup>

Thus, the object of this study is the opinion of Nursing undergraduate students who attended the Brazilian Sign Language (BSL) course at a Higher Education Institution (HEI) in Maceió, Alagoas. The perspective of this HEI in maintaining this subject in a mandatory way in the curricular matrix aims to promote a health care to the deaf as a socio-inclusive factor.

However, it is possible to observe the distance between this guaranteed right and the real practical situation found by deaf citizens in access to health services<sup>3,4</sup>, expressed mainly by difficulties in communication.<sup>3-5</sup> The service for a deaf

person is a challenge for health professionals and the deaf person.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, the communication barriers encountered by health professionals and deaf patients hinder the diagnosis and treatment of these patients.<sup>7,8</sup> In health care, only a good communication can allow identifying and solving patients' needs in a humanized and integral way.<sup>9</sup>

For the nursing team, communication with these patients will be impaired in terms of the exchange of information, lacking the ability to transmit information about their health<sup>8</sup>, which is why they use strategies such as lip reading, mimics and the intermediation of companions<sup>3</sup>, jeopardizing the appointment confidentiality.

This results from the lack of knowledge on BSL<sup>3</sup>, regulated as the Official Language of the deaf person in Brazil since 2002 through Laws 10,436 and 10,098.<sup>10,11</sup> This is a linguistic system used

by the Brazilian deaf community, and with an independent grammatical structure of the Portuguese language spoken in Brazil.<sup>12</sup>

Nurses' lack of knowledge on the BSL is a current problem arising from their professional formation, with the non-mandatory offer of this subject in the syllabus of Nursing undergraduate course, because, in Brazil, it was legalized as an optional subject for this graduation, according to Decree 5,626 of 2005:

“Art. 3 The BSL must be inserted as a compulsory curricular subject in teacher training courses for the exercise of the teaching profession, at medium and higher level, and in the courses of Speech Therapy, of public and private educational institutions, of the federal education system and of the education systems of the States, Federal District and Municipalities. (...) § 2 BSL will constitute an optional curricular subject in the other courses of higher education and professional education, as of one year of the publication of this Decree.<sup>13</sup>”

No legislation ensures the right to choose not to attend to a deaf person. The professionals are responsible for instructing themselves<sup>7</sup>, seeking training in order to improve their behavior when attending to a deaf person.<sup>12</sup>

Institutions that adopt BSL as a curricular component, allied to the hiring of qualified professionals for the integral and equitable care of all citizens, stand out.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the linguistic question, although central, cannot suppress individual freedoms or differences, thus recognizing them, considering them and valuing them in access to civil, social and political rights.<sup>14</sup>

A justification presented is that communication with the deaf is still an important problem in their access to health services, limiting care, representing a risk to health care due to the absence of BSL during the academic training of the health professional. It is necessary to implement the BSL subject in the curricular syllabus of nursing and health undergraduate courses, as an initial step to provide a decent and humanized care for deaf people, thus highlighting the importance of the study.

There is a shortage of publications on this subject in the geographic section under consideration, highlighting the pioneering nature of the HEI for making the subject available in an elective way. Based on what was addressed until then, the question that best guided the study was elaborated: How do nursing undergraduates view the support of knowledge acquired through the offer of BSL as a compulsory subject during their training at a private HEI in Alagoas?

In order to answer such questioning, this research sought to describe the opinion of nursing undergraduates about the offer of BSL as a compulsory subject in their vocational training.

## **METHOD**

Quantitative-descriptive and cross-sectional study, developed in a Private Higher Education Institution (HEI) of

Maceió, Alagoas, that offers BSL as mandatory subject in the Nursing curricular syllabus. The study population consisted of students from the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> semesters, distributed in ascending order in BSL/ I, II, III and IV semesters, totaling 180 students.

The sample was calculated maximizing the variance of 50%, i.e., since there is no previous information about these estimates, a confidence of 99% and a maximum error of 5% was considered. One hundred nineteen possible participants in the study were obtained, in six classes, also respecting the elected inclusion criteria: Nursing students from 2016.1 from the HEI, who attended the BSL subject, aged at least 18 years and who signed the Informed Consent Form (ICF) and exclusion criteria: Nursing student not enrolled in the HEI 2016.2.

The data collection instrument was developed by the research team, composed of a questionnaire divided into two parts with closed questions: seven about the socioeconomic profile and the other with questions about the study object. The ethical principles of Resolution N. 466/2012 of the National Health Council (NHC), which regulates researches with human beings, were respected, and the project was approved under the opinion n.1684.722 and CAAE:

57020416.0.0000.5013, through the Brazil Platform and the Research Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Alagoas.

After this approval, from August to September 2016, the data were collected at the HEI, during class intervals, from Monday to Friday, in the morning and evening shifts, and a database was created for the quantitative data, based on the chosen variables (sex, address, schooling, age range, study shift, employment and student relationship, marital status, studied BSL [I, II, III and IV]) in Microsoft Excel 2010<sup>®</sup> with the application of descriptive statistics in tables and charts.

## RESULTS

One hundred nineteen Nursing students were approached, obeying the variables and the criteria chosen in the research.

Table 01 contains socioeconomic characteristics of the subjects, showing a predominance in relation to the female sex (96%), 18 - 45 age group (97%). The HEI does not offer classes during the afternoon, and most of the students were enrolled in the night shift (55%), had an employment (52%) and attended the second semester, equivalent to the II module of the BSL subject (35%).

**Table 01 - Sample Characteristics, Maceió – AL, Brazil.**

| <b>Variable</b>          | <b>N</b> | <b>%</b> |
|--------------------------|----------|----------|
| <b>Sex</b>               |          |          |
| Male                     | 05       | 04       |
| Female                   | 114      | 96       |
| <b>Age group</b>         |          |          |
| 18 - 25 years            | 49       | 41       |
| 26 - 35 years            | 49       | 41       |
| 36 - 45 years            | 18       | 15       |
| 46 - 55 years            | 03       | 03       |
| > 56 years               | 00       | 00       |
| <b>Study shift</b>       |          |          |
| Morning                  | 53       | 45       |
| Night                    | 66       | 55       |
| <b>Employment</b>        |          |          |
| Yes                      | 62       | 52       |
| No                       | 57       | 48       |
| <b>Semester/Subject</b>  |          |          |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> /BSL I   | 24       | 20       |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> /BSL II  | 41       | 35       |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> /BSL III | 37       | 31       |
| 8 <sup>th</sup> /BSL IV  | 17       | 14       |

Source: Research Data, 2016.

Table 02 shows the students' opinions about the importance of learning BSL and how lessons were facilitated. A predominant percentage of 99% of Nursing students at this HEI find the BSL subject during the course extremely important, which is a mandatory part of the syllabus.

From the opinions, 71% were not aware of BSL before studying in the HEI, with a considerable number of positive interactions (87%). As for the use of innovative materials in the classroom,

adding to the used approaches (textual, slides, theaters and video lessons), 76% verified an innovative resourcefulness of the professor to facilitate the classes. Furthermore, the level of achieved expectations in this subject was satisfactorily demonstrated (87%). In relation to their intention to improve the knowledge on BSL after graduation, 63% sought another way to specialize in the communication process with the deaf.

**Table 02 - Students' Opinions on the Importance of Learning BSL and how the Subject was facilitated. Maceió - AL, Brazil.**

| Questions/Answers                                                        | N   | %  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|----|
| <b>Do you think Nursing students studying BSL is important?</b>          |     |    |
| Yes                                                                      | 118 | 99 |
| No                                                                       | 01  | 01 |
| <b>Did you know BSL before studying at the HEI?</b>                      |     |    |
| Yes                                                                      | 35  | 29 |
| No                                                                       | 84  | 71 |
| <b>Did you face difficulties interacting with the BSL professor?</b>     |     |    |
| Yes                                                                      | 15  | 13 |
| No                                                                       | 104 | 87 |
| <b>What resources did the professor adopt to carry out classes?</b>      |     |    |
| Text                                                                     | 02  | 02 |
| Slides/exploratory                                                       | 27  | 23 |
| Video classes                                                            | 12  | 10 |
| Theater                                                                  | 02  | 02 |
| 3 or 4 options                                                           | 60  | 50 |
| 2 options                                                                | 16  | 13 |
| <b>Did the BSL subject correspond to your expectations as student?</b>   |     |    |
| Yes                                                                      | 103 | 87 |
| No                                                                       | 16  | 13 |
| <b>After graduation, do you intend to improve your knowledge on BSL?</b> |     |    |
| Yes                                                                      | 75  | 63 |
| No, I think it's enough                                                  | 41  | 34 |
| No, I don't think it's important                                         | 03  | 03 |

Source: Research Data, 2016.

For the questions directly related to the study object in relation to BSL, about 71% of Nursing students did not know BSL before studying at HEI.

Table 03 related the opinions whether they felt prepared to attend to the deaf patient, demonstrating that the sum of those who are prepared to attend to a deaf person (22%) with those who do not know

how to attend to this population (34%) achieves a considerable number of 56%. There is also the sum of the answers about having already attended to a deaf person (32%) with the answer of the question whether another professional attended to him/her (57%), reaching a percentage of 89%.

**Table 3: Students' Opinions on their Possible Relation of Service for the Deaf.  
Maceió - AL, Brazil.**

| Questions/Answers                                                              | N  | %  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|----|
| <b>Do you feel prepared to attend to a deaf person?</b>                        |    |    |
| Yes                                                                            | 26 | 22 |
| No                                                                             | 52 | 44 |
| Unable to answer                                                               | 41 | 34 |
| <b>Have you ever attended to a deaf person during internship?</b>              |    |    |
| Yes                                                                            | 38 | 32 |
| No                                                                             | 81 | 68 |
| <b>Have you heard of any professional who had gone through this situation?</b> |    |    |
| Yes                                                                            | 68 | 57 |
| No                                                                             | 38 | 32 |
| Unable to answer                                                               | 13 | 11 |

Source: Research Data, 2016.

## DISCUSSION

The prevalence of Nursing students in the night shift and employed, that is, working, suggests access to the higher level that, in this study, was through a private HEI, resulting in the need to provide income to meet the needs of graduation. Nursing students commonly have employment during their professional training:

“Although with a double day of activities, most subjects evaluated as satisfactory their living and health conditions, regardless of the time distribution, since they report health, stable financial situation and admit to be able to reconcile the profession with family, studies and tasks (... ) Workers seek graduation not only motivated by knowledge, but also by the desire for better working conditions and wages, because, as they evolve in the knowledge construction, they have prospects for changing the financial pattern, which shows courage and determination in the pursuit of their objectives, considering that the battle of studying and working is arduous<sup>15</sup>.”

The opinions found in this study demonstrate importance in receiving the knowledge on the BSL subject, reaffirming that BSL is the language used by deaf

people to express themselves, and health professionals need to study it to have a quality communication during appointments.<sup>16</sup> Communication with the deaf person indicates the promotion of humanized and propitious care for these patients.<sup>6</sup>

Interpersonal communication problems are present in every health system and become more significant when they encompass language and cultural barriers<sup>5</sup>, making it essential for health teams to seek new knowledge to meet the needs of their clientele, facilitating the interaction and aiming at promoting a more humanized service.<sup>17</sup>

The profile of graduated nurses has undergone metamorphoses over the years, since their trajectory is connected to the current socioeconomic and political model of the country. In it, this path was characterized as heterogeneous, finding challenges that were overcome in the

context limits of the society. Nursing HEIs have a duty to be an example of good practice, starting with a respect for the human person, bringing with it integration and real simulated clinical experiences in their curricula.<sup>18</sup>

The preference for care provided by professionals who know BSL guarantees independence and privacy.<sup>19</sup> Deaf people

## CONCLUSION

The compulsory BSL subject in the HEI curricular syllabus had a positive impact on the students' point of view, something of great importance for their professional formation, since most of them had the first contact with the subject in the HEI and during their graduation, have already had to communicate with a deaf person using their first language, understanding the deaf communicational emission.

In relation to the BSL facilitator at the HEI, most of the graduates said they did not have problems in the teaching and learning

who seek health services seek, in addition to care, that the principles of confidentiality are maintained, generating relationships of trust with professionals in order to solve their health problem<sup>20</sup>. With the acquisition of knowledge on BSL in their formative process, graduates guarantee greater support while attending to a hearing-impaired person.

process, because the classes are dynamic and interactive, expository, musical and theatrical, but suggests the need for the HEI to offer internships with the deaf in the classroom experience, thus having an opportunity to experience BSL together with the deaf and not with listeners. The relevance and importance of the BSL subject during the formative process of the nursing students is clear.

Moreover, this object also brings as a limiting factor the small number of publications, evidencing the scarcity of researches addressing this subject with nurses and the methodological design itself.

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