

Curricular strategies of public universities that focus on teaching English in early childhood education

Estratégias curriculares de universidades públicas com foco no ensino de língua inglesa na educação infantil

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Abstract: This article discusses English teacher education to work in early childhood education. The offer of English for this age group is an increasing reality in Brazilian contexts and, therefore, the demand for specific teacher education for this field is also expanding. Considering this scenario, the research conducted had the aim of analyzing curricular proposals of majors in English and Literature in Brazilian Federal and State Universities, focused on initial education of teachers to work with children. After searching on the E-MEC website, 108 institutions were listed as part of the research. The documentary survey resulted in 15 universities with approaches that met the criteria established by the researchers, which also had significant contributions regarding the initiatives implemented in those universities. Moreover, with the goal of also investigating local realities, five institutions were invited to participate in an interview. Through reflections based on curricular theories, trans-disciplinarity, teacher education and teaching English to young learners, the research offered a national overview and local aspects around the topic. Furthermore, the results presented in this article point out to the possibilities of understanding English

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teacher education to work with children as a new space, closely related to the local context and marked by particularities.

Keywords: Teacher education; curriculum; Teaching English to young learners.

Resumo: Este artigo discute a formação de professores de inglês para a Educação Infantil. A oferta de língua inglesa para essa faixa etária é uma realidade crescente nos contextos brasileiros e, conseqüentemente, a demanda por formação específica para essa área também está em expansão. Considerando este cenário, a pesquisa conduzida teve o objetivo de analisar as propostas curriculares de cursos de Letras-Inglês em universidades federais e estaduais do Brasil, com foco na formação inicial de professores para trabalharem com crianças. Após pesquisa no site do E-MEC, 108 instituições foram elencadas como parte da pesquisa. A análise documental resultou em 15 universidades com abordagens que atenderam os critérios, as quais apresentaram contribuições significativas no que se refere às iniciativas implementadas nessas universidades. Com o intuito de também investigar realidades locais, cinco instituições foram convidadas a participar de uma entrevista. Através de reflexões com base em teorias de currículo, transdisciplinaridade, formação de professores e língua inglesa para crianças, a pesquisa ofereceu um panorama nacional e aspectos locais acerca do tema. Os resultados apresentados neste artigo apontam para as possibilidades de pensar a formação de professores de inglês para crianças como um espaço novo, intimamente relacionado com o contexto local e marcado por particularidades.

Palavras-chave: Formação de professores; currículo; ensino de língua inglesa para crianças.

Introduction

The field of Applied Linguistics has developed towards allowing a dialogue with other fields of knowledge (Moita Lopes, 2009). Beyond a simple intersection with these other areas, it can be understood as a transgressive approach (Pennycook, 2006), challenging ideas of disciplinarity and proposing a critical point of view. Pennycook (2006) points out that this idea of Applied Linguistics (AL) is closely related to problematizing practices and dealing with the complexity of the issues it studies.

In this sense, the research on teacher education within the scope of AL involves several intercrossing areas, mainly for the context of early childhood education, which is the focus of this article. Teaching children is marked by complexity and challenges regarding educational, social, economic and political aspects. In terms of language teaching, the demand of English for this age group has been increasing, and both private and public schools have been adding this subject to their curriculum, although it is characterized as a heterogeneous implementation (Tanaca, 2017).

Such an increasing demand has its roots in the idea of urgency towards learning English, especially at a young age (Kawachi-Furlan; Rosa, 2020) combined with neoliberal (Ferraz, 2019) and job market needs. Therefore, it is important to reflect critically on those reasons behind the rapid expansion of Teaching English to young learners (TEYL), and at the same time we must deal with this demand, as

it is a reality in Brazil. One issue that arises is regarding teacher education for this specific field, since it involves language education (English Language and Literature Majors) and pedagogical aspects (Pedagogy).

The aim of this paper is to analyze the curricular strategies of teacher education programs from Brazilian public universities that focus on preparing English teachers to work in early childhood education. By investigating and analyzing these curriculums, we searched for possible dialogues and a new perspective, one that is not marked by what lacks in these programs. Moreover, we have also investigated local contexts through interviews with course coordinators and professors.

Therefore, the focus was to comprehend how the curriculum is being organized, or not, to deal with the demand to prepare English teachers to work in early childhood education. We chose to concentrate on strategies that are being developed by many institutions when faced with the need of preparing teachers for the scenario.

In the following sections of this article, we will present the theories that supported our analysis, regarding teacher education, curriculum and English language education with children. Afterwards, some methodological aspects will be presented, to highlight the path taken during this investigation. Then, we will focus on the data and the possibilities that are being explored in the field.

Theoretical background: Teacher education, curriculums and English language education with children

Teacher education is an increasing research area inside the field of Applied Linguistics and there is a growing concern towards educating a critical-reflexive teacher (Miller, 2013). The investigations in this area do not aim at offering solutions to problems, but are being resignified as emerging understandings on daily experiences connected to investigative reflection (Miller, 2013, p. 111).

In this regard, there are several understandings around the issue of educating English teachers to work in early childhood education, especially since the field is marked by myths (Kawachi-Furlan; Rosa, 2020) defending that “the sooner, the better” (Carvalho; Tonelli, 2016). These views are motivated by neoliberal needs (Ferraz, 2019), job market needs (Rajagopalan, 2013), competitiveness, current policies, economic factors, among others. When combined, these aspects allow an idea of English teaching as a basic skill, creating a sense of success/failure around it (Graddol, 2006). However, it is necessary to understand and problematize the impact they have on the field of English language education with children.

Learning a new language at an early age does not need to be accompanied by such a heavy burden. We agree with Menezes de Souza (2019) when the author points out that children should be presented to language sensitivity, in which the role of the teacher is “to show the child that people act, think, speak and express themselves differently in different places” (Menezes de Souza, 2019, p. 253, our translation). In this sense, the teacher should create conditions and opportunities for learning, besides understanding the learning process as developed along with the child (Malta, 2019). Thus, in order to promote meaningful learning experiences, it is important to reflect on teacher education practices.

Even though the Brazilian law only demands English to be taught in the 6th year of Elementary Education onwards (Brazil, 1996), several schools are including the subject on their curriculums of early childhood education, motivated by the continuous and increasing demand of society. Therefore, the teaching practice in this scenario is already consolidated and there is an aleatory expansion of it in the Brazilian educational context (Lima; Kawachi, 2015). This reality highlights the urgency of reflecting on teacher education for this specific field and developing research on the topic (Tonelli; Pádua, 2017).

Regarding the university curriculums, there is a tendency to follow the guidelines proposed by the law and prepare teachers to work in the final years of Elementary Education and High School. As a result, teachers often have no specific methodological preparation to deal with children and the particularities of their learning process (Santos, 2011), or have to rely on their own intuitive and experimental practices as a “learner-teacher-autonomous” (Malta, 2019, p. 38, our translation).

There are bigger issues around the structure of curriculums that can influence this matter. For instance, the fixed, inflexible and hierarchical system of organization of course subjects, marked by rigid borders between subjects (Kleiman, 2013). Due to such borders, English teacher education to work in early childhood education can be seen as a topic located between two majors (English and Pedagogy). However, we defend that research in the field of Applied Linguistics can contribute to a new view on this issue, in order to start challenging some curricular borders and comprehending the area in an interconnected way. By analyzing the context from the point of view of AL, we understand that it is possible to consider teacher education for this particular area as a unique, complex and transdisciplinary field, in which the pedagogical and the linguistic preparation should dialog and dilute barriers.

The curricular frontiers are based on policies and practices regarding initial education of teachers that are not aligned with the changes experiences in society, maintaining the same curricular and institutional structure for a century (Gatti, 2013). The challenge consists in transposing the fortresses of curricular subjects towards a more contextualized connection between subjects (Scheiffer, 2013). Moreover, there are several positive aspects to consider regarding curricular flexibility, according to Scheiffer (2013):

The flexibilization should have as a goal, when possible, to create conditions, in the academic level, for the curriculums of university courses to contemplate subjects located in different departments, but with equivalent or overlapping study objects, in order to have concrete possibilities in which the logic of thought of one could be dialogically operated from the logic of thought of others (Scheiffer, 2013, p. 934-935, our translation).

Without flexibility, the current scenario in many universities leads to a fragmentation of knowledge, which is presented in a segmented, linear and sequential way divided into parts (Freire; Leffa, 2013). In line with this idea, Gallo (2003) adds that the existing curricular organization of subjects creates a compartmentalized knowledge that is seen as limited instead of interconnected.

The current organization of curriculums is based on choices: what topics are considered important enough to be included, which ones are essential or valid, and which ones are not (Silva, 2010). Therefore, the choices are always related to selection criteria, starting from a broad universe of knowl-

edge and choosing the small part that will constitute the curriculum (Silva, 2010). These decisions lead to distinct models in different contexts and reflect the priorities and positionings adopted by the institution and the people responsible for making the choices.

In Brazilian educational contexts, the traditional curricular model is still prevailing. This model is based on the logic of natural sciences, shows very little flexibility and relates knowledge to the mastery of objective facts (Giroux, 1997), being external and imposed on individuals. These objective and mechanical models often ignore the individual perspective and there is limited space for critical reflection. In this sense, curriculum theories reflect on issues that influence curricular choices, such as power and identity. According to Silva,

[...] we can say the curriculum is also an issue of power and, as curricular theories try to express what the curriculum should be, they cannot avoid being involved in issues of power. Selecting is an operation of power. Favoring one type of knowledge is an operation of power. Highlighting, among multiple possibilities, one identity or subjectivity as the ideal one is an operation of power (Silva, 2010, p. 16).

The issue of power is present in several shapes inside the curricular universe, both in the choices made by the institution that students are subjected to, and the top-down guidelines that the institution is subjected to, such as language policies, laws and regulations that dictate the rules for education. These political parameters can limit the choices of universities regarding curriculum content and structure.

Aspects related to society also have influence, since “the curriculum helps to construct/constitute society and culture and it is, at the same time, constructed/constituted by them” (Veiga-Neto, 2004, p. 166, our translation). Thus, analyzing curriculums means studying them in the context in which they are presented (Sacristán, 2017), in order to comprehend how they are developed and how they relate to the local context.

In light of those concepts, teacher education can be connected to the views of the institution, curriculum theories, political, economic, social and cultural aspects, among others, including mainly the local realities of each institution. These multiple connections allow the dialogue in this area to be open to several fields of knowledge, to comprehend and transform this space into a transdisciplinary point of view (Ferraz, 2018).

Transdisciplinarity proposes a different look in which there are no models to be followed or final formulas (Ferraz, 2018). The focus relies on the object studied and its complexities, aiming at pertinent shares of knowledge to the comprehension of that specific context. When applying these ideas to the central issue of this article, we understand that in order to reach the gaps in English teacher education to work with children, we must place this topic in the center, along with the particularities and specific local contexts to comprehend and build knowledge around it, which will be specific for each case.

For this reason, it is relevant to see how universities are approaching this situation in their curriculums because, although there is no specific legislation or law, a movement has been observed in many English and Literature majors in order to embrace this scenario. By investigating their strategies, it is possible to analyze the actions that have been taking place in the field and to reflect on future steps.

In this sense, our focus is to offer a different point of view on the area, one that is not marked by what teacher education programs lack. Our intention is to reflect on possible dialogues that can generate transformation, based on concrete examples of curricular strategies adopted in Brazilian Federal and State Universities, as well as the reports on local contexts presented in the interviews.

Methodological background

This article is based on the results of a Master's research that had the main objective of analyzing curricular proposals of majors of English Language and Literature in Brazilian Federal and State Universities, focused on teacher education to work in early childhood education. In light of this goal, the research questions presented were: What are the proposals for initial education of English teachers focused on early childhood education in English Majors in Brazilian Universities? What do these proposals reveal? What are the views around this topic inside local contexts of institutions?

To meet these problematizations, a qualitative study was conducted and data generation was based on two stages: document survey and interviews. We emphasize that before gathering data the research project was properly submitted to the Ethics Committee and it was approved³.

The document survey considered information available on the E-MEC website and reached a list of 108 Federal and State Universities in Brazil. For each of those, we investigated if the university offered a Major of English Language and Literature (or Portuguese-English), which reduced the number to 89 institutions. However, some universities did not have any documents publicly available for analysis, and the total number was 84. Thus, we analyzed their Course Pedagogical Project (CPP) to examine if there were references to early childhood education and, when an approach was identified, supplementary documents were also analyzed, such as course descriptions and regulations.

From 84 institutions, 15 presented a specific approach regarding early childhood education in their curriculums. The findings are shown on Table 1⁴.

We chose to analyze the Course Pedagogical Project because it is an official document (Bogdan; Biklen, 2007), being useful to comprehend the institution's view on what should be included in the curriculum. Nonetheless, documents are not isolated (Atkinson; Coffey, 2004) as they are designed by people and reflect understandings and points of view, as well as demands from society, legal, economic and political aspects. In this sense, we recognized the relevance of also investigating local contexts and particularities of those scenarios.

Based on Table 1 and the documents, five universities were selected to participate in interviews with course coordinators and/or professors. The aim was to comprehend local aspects around the issue, since the interviews made it possible to add voices and particularities, exploring it deeply (Cohen; Manion; Morrison, 2018). The participants, their universities and their job position can be seen on Table 2.

³ The number of the Presentation Certificate for Ethical Review (CAAE) was: 32856020.6.0000.5542, and the project was approved by the Consolidated Opinion of the Research Ethics Committee no. 4.192.208.

⁴ Verify GALVÃO (2022) for a more detailed version of the obtained data.

Table 1: Approaches to early childhood education on the documents

	INSTITUTION	APPROACH
1	UEG	Optional subject: English language teaching for children ⁵
2	UEL	Mandatory subject: Teaching initiation course Mandatory Curricular Teaching Practicum
3	UENP	Optional subject: English for children
4	UFBA	Optional subject: Early childhood education
5	UFC	Optional subject: English language teaching for children
6	UFCG	Mandatory Curricular Teaching Practicum
7	UFES	Optional subject: English language teaching in early childhood education
8	UFMG	Optional subject: Group of specific subjects on the topic
9	UFS	Mandatory Curricular Teaching Practicum
10	UFSJ	Optional subject: English language teaching for different age groups
11	UFV	TWO Mandatory subjects: English teaching practice I and II
12	UNEMAT	Optional subject: Methodology of English language teaching for children
13	UNESPAR	TWO Optional subjects: Language teaching for children and English language teaching for children
14	UNIPAMPA	Optional subject: English language teaching for children
15	UTFPR	Optional subject: English language teaching for children

Source: elaborated by the authors

Table 2: Interviews (real names withheld)

Fictitious name	University	Job Position
José	UFSJ	Course Coordinator (English Major)
Sandra	UFS	Course Coordinator 2021 / NDE President
Raquel	UNESPAR	Course Coordinator (English Major)
Livia	UEL	Course Coordinator (English Major)
Lara	UEL	Professor (English Major)
Thais	UNEMAT	Professor (Portuguese-English Major)

Source: elaborated by the authors

We highlight that each interview had an individualized script in order to include questions about that institution's documents and context. Therefore, they were flexible, semi-structured (Ludke; André, 2017) and conducted using online platforms.

⁵ The names of the disciplines were translated from Portuguese to English for the purpose of this article.

We are aligned with Bogdan and Biklen (2007) when defending that different forms of data generation are able to provide a broader understanding of the topic. Thus, we believe the documents and the interviews were complementary and allowed both a general and a localized approach. In the next section, we will present some of the data generated and the discussions around it.

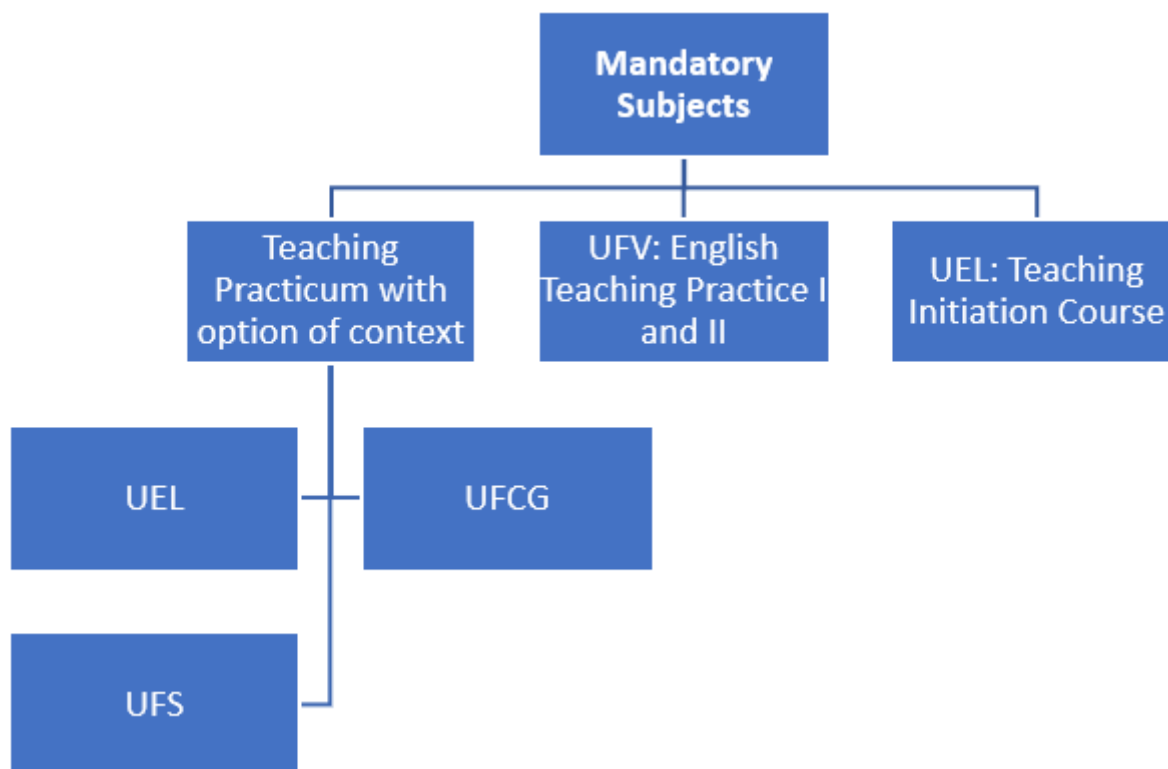
Curricular strategies: teacher education programs and local voices

The list of universities presented on Table 1 shows the institutions that referred to the context of early childhood education in their documents. For each of those 15 universities, the documents were carefully investigated to identify the focus and the specific characteristics.

It was possible to notice a variety of approaches in the documents, however, they also presented similar points and recurrences. Firstly, some curricular subjects were mandatory and others were optional. Among the mandatory ones, a predominance of subjects of Curricular Teaching Practicum can be identified, as the image shows:

Three mandatory subjects have the similar characteristic of being related to a Teaching Practicum, presenting to the student-teacher the possibility of conducting this part of their⁶ education process

Figure 1. Mandatory subjects



Source: Elaborated by the authors

⁶ In this paper, we decided to use the pronouns they and their instead of “he or she” in an attempt to avoid bias related to social gender.

in a different context. It is worth mentioning that due to the current legislation most English Majors organize their curriculums to offer Teaching Practicum in the context of Elementary Education (final years) and High School. Therefore, offering this option of early childhood education or Elementary Education (early years) is an innovative movement, which is closely related to the expansion of English teaching for this age group in schools throughout the country.

Regarding the optional subjects, they presented very similar curricular names, as presented on Table 1, however, their description showed a multiplicity of topics approached in each context, with different focuses. The following image lists the main topics that appeared on the investigated documents.

Considering the topics listed, the most common ones were related to theoretical and methodological principles, characteristics of childhood, language acquisition and specific teacher education to work in the area.

Some particular points can be highlighted about the topics. Four universities (UFSJ, UFS, UFV and UNIPAMPA) explicitly mentioned the importance of teacher education to the selection and development of teaching materials, emphasizing the specificity of the materials that are used in early childhood education and the importance of proper preparation in order to make those choices. Moreover, ludicity and technology are mentioned by two universities (UFES and UFV) and it is very connected to children's reality.

Some documents emphasize broader issues related to teaching and learning, such as “physical, psychological, affective and socio-cultural factors that can influence language teaching in different age groups (UFSJ, 2018, p. 98). The external and internal aspects show a concern to prepare teachers to deal

Figure 2. Optional subjects

Legal Bases	Guiding principles	Pedagogical practices	Epistemological bases
Cognitive and linguistic theories	Foreign language acquisition by children	Methodological procedures	Language Education
Cross-cutting themes	Characteristics of the learner	Children's complete development	Teacher Education
Ludicity and Criticality	Teaching Planning	English language teaching and learning	Selection and development of teaching materials

Source: Elaborated by the authors

with those influences. The term “language education for children” appears in the course description of UFES, related to cross-cutting themes such as ethics, health, sexuality, race, environment and poverty, suggesting an expanded view that is not limited to the linguistic content (Cavalcanti, 2013). Furthermore, the subject of Mandatory Curricular Teaching Practicum of UEL also brings similar themes and highlights these topics should be considered in order to promote meaningful language learning.

Moving from the content to the actual structure of the curriculums analyzed, some Course Pedagogical Projects can be highlighted by the flexible way in which they were organized. For instance, at UFMG the English Language and Literature course is divided into groups. The students must complete subjects of a Common Core, which are mandatory for all teaching courses, then, there are Mandatory Subjects related to a specific knowledge of the professional practice or language. The remaining subjects of the course are optional with flexible contents and a total of 240 hours. We believe this amount of course load available for the students to choose is relevant for an educational process that makes sense to students.

The possibilities include several groups of subjects with varied themes related to specific working areas for the student-teacher to develop more studies and experience. The advantage is to be able to choose according to their own interests and future fields of work. Among the options, there are some groups that allow different curricular paths in order to make the education process more dynamic, this group can include subjects to be taken in other Collegiates and Departments of UFMG. According to the CPP, there is an agreement with six other Collegiates that made available groups of subjects to be chosen by the student involving different themes. Thus, the student’s path through different Departments and Collegiates shows a flexibilization of the curriculum, promoting a more dynamic way of connecting and building knowledge (Scheiffer, 2013).

Furthermore, one of the groups available is named “Complementary education in Pedagogy: early childhood education and first years of elementary education”. The group is composed of six subjects and presents a very broad approach to the topic. It can be noticed that the focus is on establishing a dialogue with pedagogical aspects and offering the student-teacher the possibility of enhancing their studies in the area. The subjects are offered by the Pedagogy course and are not focused on language education, but on specific knowledge about the age group, since it is usually not perceived in the scope of the English Language and Literature course. Even though the subjects are not about English teaching, they present information on the context and possibilities to develop practice in Teaching Practicum subjects.

Other topics available as groups are: Social Education, Inclusive Education, Youth and Adult Education, and even Tourism, Philosophy and Theater. This variety of options and flexibility is an important movement of change in the curriculum, since the “traditional” academic divisions and limits are not enough to meet the current demands of society (Young, 2002). In this sense, Young (2002) points out:

From the point of view of the curriculum there are two key issues; increasing flexibility—the opportunity for individual students to make choices and combine different kinds of learning in new ways—and improving coherence—the sense of clarity that students need in order to know what they need to learn and where a particular course of study or cluster of modules will lead them (Young, 2002, p. 74).

The author highlights the relevance of having paths and routes inside the curriculum, as a way of providing choices to students. This can encourage them to think critically about their own teacher education process and assume an investigative attitude towards expanding their knowledge. In this sense, Larsen-Freeman (1983) states that the teacher education process is itself a process of preparing teachers to make their own decisions, and these informed choices are the basis of teaching. The choices can be more informed and less intuitive from the moment the student-teacher has the means of making their own decisions, and the curricular structure has an important role in this process.

The path towards more flexibility in the curriculums can also be explicitly observed in the CPP of UFSJ, which presents an intention of flexibilization and justifies that “it allows the course to adapt to new demands and the development of areas of knowledge, offering different content related to the units that already exist” (UFSJ, 2018, p. 13). It can be noticed some concern present in this document regarding demands of contemporaneity, and the need to change the dynamics to meet them. The English major is divided into cores, the first one focuses on basic content and goes from the first to the fourth semester, when the student chooses an advisor to help with the organization of the course, since the next semesters are flexible.

The curriculum organization was proposed in three (03) cores, within which modules are organized and designed as educational thematic areas and there are minimum course loads to be fulfilled by the students. Some modules of the second core are constituted by blocks of subjects that the students can choose in order to organize their education process according to their profile (UFSJ, 2018).

Thus, there is a declared concern towards allowing students to make decisions according to their own preferences, contributing to an education process that can be more meaningful, since it is based on their individual choices. In this sense, the curriculum can be understood in a way that facilitates the production of subjectivities from those choices, avoiding pretensions related to disciplinarization and control (Matias, 2008), which is the focus of more traditional models.

In this CPP, one of the options in the second core is the block of subjects named “Studies in Applied Linguistics”, in this block the student has four options and should choose two of them. One of the subjects available is “English language teaching for different age groups”, which is focused on teaching and learning a foreign language for children, teenagers, adults and seniors. This subject is not specifically focused on teaching children, but it brings relevant aspects on childhood and particularities such as development of teaching materials and evaluation of students according to their age.

The development of teaching materials is an essential activity for teachers in all contexts. Moreover, when considering children, Tonelli and Moreno (2016) highlight the importance of investing in the preparation of specific materials for their contexts and the need to invest in teacher education that also focuses on developing, adapting and choosing materials. Other relevant points mentioned are the factors that influence on English teaching for each age group and theoretical-methodological procedures that vary in each context.

The documents analyzed presented several differences among themselves and particularities, for this reason, we decided to investigate local contexts and conduct interviews about aspects of the doc-

uments and the scenario. The participants are listed on Table 2 and for each interview a different script was used, with specific questions about the curriculum of that institution.

From the data generated by carrying out the interviews, it was possible to notice the proximity of curriculum and society, as they are responsible for the production of one another (Veiga-Neto, 2004). In this sense, in places where teaching English to young learners was not a striking reality, mainly in public education, it was also not a priority to the institution. Even though there is an expansion of TEYL throughout Brazil, it is important to emphasize that this expansion is random (Lima; Kawachi, 2015) and it does not assume the same characteristics in all municipalities, cities and states. One of the interviewees, José, highlights this aspect about the context:

We give back to the community according to what is demanded, firstly, from the closest regions that depend on what we offer (...) It is true that teaching children, early childhood education, has not been a broad demand, it is something that exists, but it is a very specific niche, private, so we do not place it in a very high position, we consider it as something that the person will have an idea of, a curricular subject that has a part focused on that (José, interview, our translation).

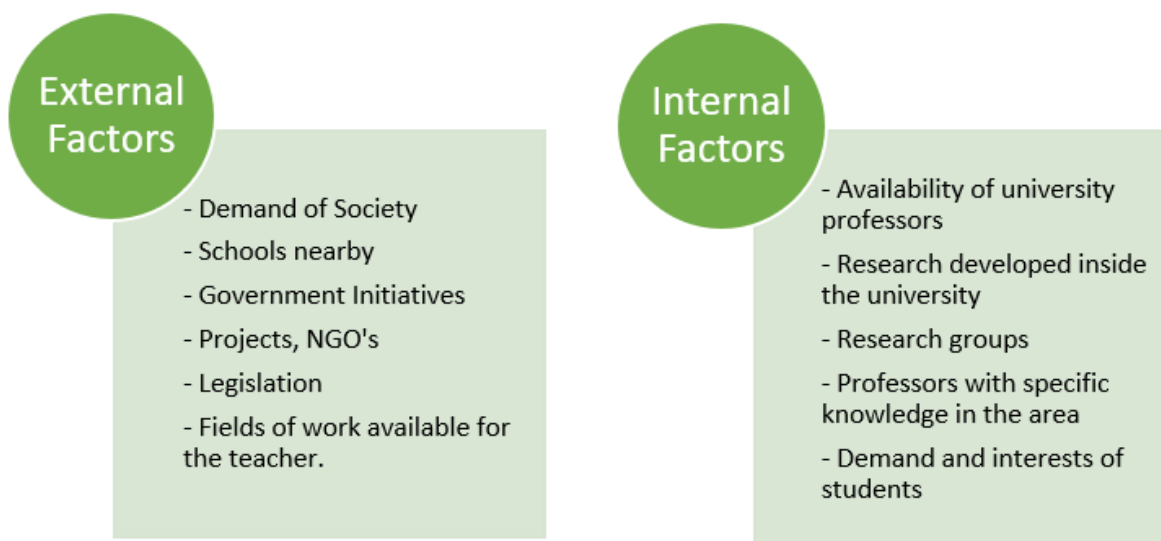
Therefore, the local demand influences the priorities of the curriculum, which can also be observed in places where TEYL is a reality and the interviewees mention an urgent need of preparing teachers to work in this scenario. Raquel states that “*many of our students, there is a lack in the market indeed, they are in the first semester of the course and the City Hall calls them, because the municipal schools are full-time and, among other activities, English is offered*” (Raquel, interview, our translation). It can be noticed that both José and Raquel point out particularities of their contexts that influence on the curriculum and the existence, or not, of specific subjects focused on TEYL.

Furthermore, from the data of all interviews it was possible to identify some factors that are related to local contexts. Figure 3 presents external and internal reasons mentioned by interviewees that affect the choices made by the institution.

The list of factors presented in figure 3 reassures the particularities around teacher education for this context, because it is surrounded by specific characteristics of the place and society. In this sense, the curriculum is also always in movement and needs to be constantly reviewed, as Raquel points out, “*we need to be continuously looking at it and making adjustments, as we see the necessities*” (Raquel, interview, our translation), she exemplifies that in the beginning of the course there was no need of educating teachers to work in this field, but it had to be reformulated later. These adjustments are necessary to meet the demands that already exist in society, such as TEYL.

One of the difficulties around organizing the course curriculum is stated by José, regarding the choices that need to be made. The limiting and compact structure demands complex choices and “*some contents need to be sacrificed*” (José, interview, our translation). The interviewee points out that important contents had to be removed, to fit the curriculum structure. In this regard, we believe flexibilization could be an ally to provide more options and paths to students, without the limitation of the course structure, as students would be able to transit among departments and different courses.

Figure 3. Factors that influence on the curriculum for TEYL



Source: Elaborated by the authors

The interviewees pointed out that it is common for a demand to appear unexpectedly, connected to a government initiative in schools or projects that are being developed, and when this situation happens the university needs to respond. Sandra presents a concern towards this urgency and points out that a broader dialogue among society, university and government is necessary before the implementation.

I wish there was a discussion first, with society, in order to understand what will be the role of language teaching for that age group (...) So, I guess that in an ideal world this would happen, the university would help society to think about language teaching, mainly in teacher education (Sandra, interview, our translation).

Sandra emphasizes that many things need to change to meet this age group in English Language and Literature courses. Moreover, Lara adds that “*there is a wide range of knowledge, from early childhood education to the early years of elementary education that need to be seen, studied and analyzed for possibilities, the theories that can converge for the teacher to enter the classroom more prepared*” (Lara, interview, our translation). Therefore, the implementation of subjects involves a broad discussion that may be accelerated because of the urgency of offering TEYL.

At first, teacher education can assume a more reactive shape (Tonelli; Cristóvão, 2011), but it is essential to reflect on the next steps of preparing teachers for TEYL. In this regard, Lima and Kawachi-Furlan (2021) defend a critical teacher education that allows informed choices by the professionals who will work in the area, analyzing their contexts and needs. The authors state that a more critical education involves preparing professionals who are less dependent on models and who are able to act locally, based on what is available to them. Adding to this idea, Menezes de Souza (2019) presents the concept of protagonist teachers, who are more aware of their decisions. Moreover, teacher education

would be important to prepare teachers to analyze who their students are, their teaching context, the students' needs and the resources available, which are essential aspects to those involved with TEYL.

Some curriculums analyzed presented tendencies of offering more freedom to the student-teacher to make their own decisions in the teacher education process. As previously mentioned, in some universities this movement can even include different departments, collegiates and courses, indicating an interdisciplinary approach. However, a transdisciplinary movement cannot be visualized yet, since it would only be possible if curriculums do not present a fragmentation of disciplinary knowledge (Freire; Leffa, 2013) but a constant creation of new possible spaces.

Reflecting on the broad range of knowledge inside the area of TEYL is understanding that it is not possible to approach all in one subject, the student-teacher needs to have access to several fields of knowledge and build their own understandings around it. Nevertheless, we know this scenario cannot be perceived in the current organization of curriculums, but the initiative of promoting more flexibility is a step towards this direction.

Concluding Remarks

The research conducted showed an initiative that is taking place in several Brazilian contexts, that is, teacher education programs have started to approach teaching English in early childhood education. From 108 public universities analyzed, 15 explicitly presented this context in their documents. The proposals indicate a variety of approaches with different focuses, based on internal and external factors of each local scenario, as evidenced by the interviews with course coordinators and/or professors. Based on the local voices of the participants, it was possible to notice the reasons that guide the offer, or not, of a specific subject for TEYL in the curriculums, and also the influence of society in the curriculum choices.

The English Majors analyzed offered significant contributions to the area of TEYL, as they presented ways of dealing with this demand and strategies that are being used in their contexts. Those strategies include new subjects in the course, more optional subjects available, the possibility of developing the teaching practicum in early childhood education, the creation of extension projects and research groups, and isolated initiatives by professors that report having included the topic in their classes even when not determined by the documents. Furthermore, the interviews highlighted the fragmentation of the area, since the expansion is random and marked by particular initiatives.

Teaching English to young learners is a reality in Brazil, both in public and private schools, and it needs to be directly approached in teacher education programs. We are optimistic to observe the scenario investigated, since it presents a significant number of universities that are taking action and making changes in their curriculums in order to reach this reality. It is important to highlight the several bureaucracies that are faced by the institutions that decide to go on this path, mainly because the implementation of a subject and changes in the curriculum take time due to the fixed structure that they are usually organized in. As a consequence, a current demand of society often cannot generate a fast response by universities. Aware of these problematizations, we value the institutions that are

moving in this direction and we expect it to spread throughout Brazil, to ensure quality education for student-teachers and, mainly, meaningful language education for children.

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