


**CONSIDERATIONS ON THE LITERACY PROCESS OF MEBÊNGÔKRE/KAIAPÓ
INDIGENOUS STUDENTS****CONSIDERAÇÕES ACERCA DO PROCESSO DE ALFABETIZAÇÃO DE
ESTUDANTES INDÍGENAS MEBÊNGÔKRE/KAIAPÓ****CONSIDERACIONES SOBRE EL PROCESO DE ALFABETIZACIÓN DE LOS
ESTUDIANTES INDÍGENAS MEBÊNGÔKRE/KAIAPÓ** <https://doi.org/10.56238/sevened2025.002-007>**Clebson de Oliveira Alves¹, Ivânia Hilário Dias², Maycon Silva Aguiar³****ABSTRACT**

This article investigates both foundational technical skills and broader socio-cultural literacy practices among Mebêngôkre/Kayapó indigenous students, taking as its locus the Municipal Elementary School Marechal Rondon, located in São Félix do Xingu, in the state of Pará. The discussion begins with a historical and political analysis of indigenous school education in Brazil, highlighting the provision of bilingual and intercultural education to indigenous peoples. It examines the factors that motivate indigenous families to migrate from their traditional communities to urban areas, the participation of these communities in the formal school environment, the teaching methodologies applied to students, and the main everyday challenges faced by both teachers and students. Drawing on a qualitative approach that included semi-structured interviews and participant observation, a case study was conducted, revealing the primary obstacles to ensuring bilingual and intercultural education for the Mebêngôkre/Kayapó people: the lack of bilingual teaching materials (Portuguese-Mebêngôkre/Kayapó), the absence of teacher-training programs (both basic and continuing), and the lack of consistent public policies. The study concludes with recommendations focused on teacher training, the production of intercultural teaching materials, the centrality of family participation in indigenous school education, and the formulation of more inclusive evaluative pedagogical strategies.

Keywords: Indigenous School Education. Bilingualism. Interculturality. Foundational Technical Skills. Broader Socio-Cultural Literacy Practices.

RESUMO

Este artigo investiga processos de alfabetização e de letramento de estudantes indígenas da etnia Mebêngôkre/Kayapó e adota, como locus, a Escola Municipal de Ensino Fundamental Marechal Rondon, localizada em São Félix do Xingu, no Pará. A discussão parte de uma análise histórica e política da educação escolar indígena no Brasil e enfatiza a oferta de educação bilíngue e intercultural aos povos originários. São examinados fatores que motivam a migração de famílias indígenas de suas comunidades para a zona urbana; a participação das comunidades tradicionais no ambiente escolar formal; as metodologias de

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ensino aplicadas aos estudantes; e os principais desafios enfrentados por professores e por estudantes no cotidiano. Por meio de uma abordagem qualitativa, que incluiu entrevistas semiestruturadas e observação participante, realizou-se um estudo de caso em que se evidenciaram, como principais entraves à garantia de educação bilíngue e intercultural aos indígenas da etnia Mebêngôkre/Kayapó, a falta de materiais didáticos bilíngues (português-Mebêngôkre/Kayapó), de programas de formação docente (básica e continuada) e de políticas públicas consistentes. A conclusão do estudo aponta para recomendações voltadas à formação de professores, para a produção de materiais didáticos interculturais, para a centralidade da participação familiar na educação escolar indígena e para a formulação de estratégias pedagógicas avaliativas mais inclusivas.

Palavras-chave: Educação Escolar Indígena. Bilinguismo. Interculturalidade. Alfabetização. Letramento.

RESUMEN

Este artículo investiga la alfabetización y los procesos de alfabetización entre estudiantes indígenas de la etnia Mebêngôkre/Kayapó, centrándose en la Escuela Primaria Municipal Marechal Rondon, ubicada en São Félix do Xingu, Pará. La discusión comienza con un análisis histórico y político de la educación escolar indígena en Brasil y enfatiza la provisión de educación bilingüe e intercultural a los pueblos indígenas. Se examinan los factores que motivan la migración de las familias indígenas desde sus comunidades hacia las zonas urbanas; la participación de las comunidades tradicionales en el entorno escolar formal; las metodologías de enseñanza aplicadas a los estudiantes; y los principales retos que enfrentan docentes y estudiantes en su vida diaria. A través de un enfoque cualitativo, que incluyó entrevistas semiestruturadas y observación participante, se realizó un estudio de caso en el que se destacaron los principales obstáculos para garantizar la educación bilingüe e intercultural al pueblo indígena de la etnia Mebêngôkre/Kayapó, a saber, la falta de materiales de enseñanza bilingües (portugués-mebêngôkre/kayapó), programas de formación docente (básica y continua) y políticas públicas consistentes. Las conclusiones del estudio apuntan a recomendaciones para la formación docente, la producción de materiales didácticos interculturales, la centralidad de la participación familiar en la educación escolar indígena y la formulación de estrategias pedagógicas evaluativas más inclusivas.

Palabras clave: Educación Escolar Indígena. Bilingüismo. Interculturalidad. Alfabetismo. Alfabetismo.



1 INTRODUCTION

In this study, we reflect on the literacy and literacy processes applied to indigenous students of the Mebêngôkre/Kayapó ethnic group enrolled in the Marechal Rondon Municipal Elementary School, located in the urban area of the municipality of São Félix do Xingu, in the state of Pará.

The Mebêngôkre/Kayapó, an indigenous people established in the Brazilian Amazon, stand out for their complex social and cultural organizations and for the maintenance of their mother tongue. Therefore, the provision of public school education to this community requires specific approaches and strategies, in addition to expository classes taught in Portuguese.

The original peoples of the Brazilian territory, similarly to what happens with a relevant part of traditional communities around the world, have historically faced challenges imposed by educational policies of an integrationist and assimilationist nature, whose consequences include, to a greater extent, a cultural and linguistic erosion.

After the promulgation of the Federal Constitution of 1988, Brazil advanced in the recognition of the fundamental rights of indigenous peoples. In this document, for example, their right to a differentiated, intercultural and bilingual education is ensured. Although we identify avant-garde attitudes in the legislation, significant theoretical and practical challenges persist in the implementation of constitutional guarantees, particularly in urban contexts whose traditional schools receive indigenous students, as is the case of the municipality of São Félix do Xingu, in the state of Pará.

In São Félix do Xingu, a municipality with an extensive territorial area and with a marked presence of indigenous peoples, Mebêngôkre/Kayapó students face additional barriers in the course of their educational trajectory, mainly due to significant linguistic and cultural differences in relation to the urban community.

The mother tongue of these students, distinct from the Portuguese language, which is the one used, by law, in public schools, implies the need for educational proposals consistent with their linguistic and cultural specificities. In this sense, they should aim at the acquisition of reading and writing in Portuguese, while favoring the use, preservation and appreciation of the indigenous language and identity.

Considering the context outlined, this study assumes, as a general objective, to analyze strategies adopted by school managers and teachers of the Marechal Rondon Municipal Elementary School to promote effective teaching and learning processes that are sensitive to the peculiarities of Mebêngôkre/Kayapó indigenous students. In addition, these specific objectives are met:

- to investigate motivating factors for the migration of indigenous families to the urban area of São Félix do Xingu and the subsequent insertion of their children in urban schools;
- evaluate the academic performance of indigenous students, focusing on failure and school dropout rates;
- identify the main difficulties reported by both students and teachers in the implementation of bilingual education;
- analyze the pedagogical methodologies adopted and propose adjustments that meet the demands of indigenous students.

In the next section, we will discuss, in detail, the details associated with the sociocultural context of the Mebêngôkre-Kayapó indigenous students, the characteristics of the school in focus and a set of theoretical concepts useful for achieving the objects outlined above.

2 INDIGENOUS SCHOOL EDUCATION

The reality of the municipality of São Félix do Xingu, in the state of Pará, is marked by the presence of the Mebêngôkre/Kayapó, recognized for their social organization and cultural practices. In the provision of school education to the community, orality, a basic element in the way they transmit knowledge between generations, coexists and conflicts with teaching methodologies, especially language teaching, aimed at non-indigenous students, which interposes obstacles to their school success (Bessa Freire, 2004).

To understand the educational situation of the Mebêngôkre/Kayapó students in São Félix do Xingu, we must first revisit the origins of indigenous school education in Brazil, marked by diverse political interests over the centuries. In the colonial period, the imposition of European pedagogical methods aimed at the assimilation of so-called civilized customs by the native peoples. In this period, the Jesuit missions stand out (Bessa Freire, 2004).

In the context of the Jesuit missions, catechization was the objective pursued by the teaching and learning processes focused on indigenous people, aiming at their conversion, especially that of children and young people, to Catholicism. With this procedure, the expansion of the faith imposed by Pope Nicholas V was met, with the publication of the bull *Romanus Pontifex* (Nicholas V, 1455).

There are records that literacy conducted by Jesuits occurred both in Portuguese and in native languages. José de Anchieta, for example, was renowned for conceiving the *Arte de grammatica da lingua most used on the coast of Brazil* (Anchieta, 1595), a work in which



he describes, in the manner of the Greek-Latin grammatical tradition, the Tupi language. It is also due to José de Anchieta the production of texts written in the Tupi language.

With the Proclamation of the Republic, on the eve of the passage from the nineteenth century to the twentieth century, there were attempts to secularize indigenous schooling initiatives, although, in practice, many of these actions were linked to religious missions. The creation of the Indian Protection Service (SPI) in 1910 and, later, the replacement of this body by the National Indian Foundation (Funai) in 1967 did not yet represent a break with this integrationist paradigm.

Until then, the clear goal of public policies was to make indigenous people "Brazilian citizens" and, for this, they chose the Portuguese language as a vehicle for sociocultural insertion. As a consequence, even though specific advances could be identified, especially in the guarantee of rights, school practices remained distant from the reality and desires of the indigenous people.

The promulgation of the Federal Constitution of 1988 is the legal framework that endorses the social organization, languages, customs and traditions of the native peoples as part of the Brazilian cultural heritage (Brasil, 1988). Faced with this unprecedented scenario, paths were opened for the formulation of educational policies focused on indigenous demands.

An education built on the precept of bilingualism, as is typical of communities such as the Mebêngôkre/Kayapó, contributes to the consolidation of their identities, to the recognition of their linguistic rights (D'angelis; Veiga, 2000) and, ultimately, for their emancipation in the struggle for other civil rights. Despite, however, the determinations of legal documents, Brazilian indigenous people remain alienated from educational proposals configured according to their specificities (Souza, 2012).

In view of this unprecedented scenario, paths were opened for the formulation of educational policies focused on indigenous demands, among which the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (Brasil, 1996) stands out, which regulated the criteria for offering school education to native peoples, safeguarding the respective sociocultural nuances.

The fact is that, since the end of the twentieth century, Brazilian legislation has been, with regard to the guarantee of fundamental civil rights, one of the most advanced in the world. This is reflected, in theory, in the protection of civil rights of native peoples, as is the case of bilingual and differentiated school education, but, in the scope of implementation, a myriad of factors hinder the exercise of public policies. Absence and/or contingency of financial resources, lack of qualified professionals and political instability in municipalities with



indigenous presence are examples of common obstacles to intercultural and bilingual pedagogical practices directed at indigenous people (Souza, 2012).

3 BILINGUALISM AND INTERCULTURALITY IN AN INDIGENOUS CONTEXT

The concept of bilingualism, in general terms, deals with the ability to use two languages in the most diverse socio-communicative contexts. In the indigenous universe, however, the term takes on nuances that are not limited to linguistic competence. Interculturality, a concept that should guide, according to the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (Brasil, 1996), indigenous educational practices, involves, in turn, dialogues between different cultures, respecting the particularities of each social group (Maher, 2007).

Based on a combination of both meanings, indigenous school education, by asserting itself as bilingual and intercultural, introduces the majority language, Portuguese, into the trajectory of indigenous people and, at the same time, strengthens the use of their mother tongue, transforming the schooling stage into an instrument of recognition and appreciation of their identities.

Among the Mebêngôkre/Kayapó, from São Félix do Xingu, the use of their mother tongue constitutes their social organization and permeates rituals, daily activities and the transmission of knowledge (Salanova, 2001). According to Ferreiro and Teberosky (1986), literacy in the mother tongue favors the cognitive and socio-affective development of students, since it legitimizes sociocultural experiences and, concomitantly, subsidizes the acquisition of a second language.

The promotion of interculturality, as provided for in the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (Brasil, 1996), is necessarily linked to the harmonious coexistence between different worldviews. Its starting point will therefore be the recognition that there are no "superior" and "inferior" cultures; on the contrary, each culture has its own ways of understanding its existence, of attributing meanings to socio-communicative situations and phenomena of the natural world, and of teaching consolidated knowledge to future generations.

From this pluralistic and respectful perspective, the school, as an entity whose purpose is the formation of subjects capable of operating in society based on adequate ethical and moral values, rises to the position of a privileged space for the construction of equitable coexistence between different social groups. In this way, bilingualism and interculturality converge in sustaining an educational approach that values both the local dimension, that of the original communities, and the universal dimension, that of Brazil as a whole and,



ultimately, that of the entire planet, preparing students to interact with worldviews that are separate from their beliefs, without, in this trajectory, giving up their sociocultural roots.

4 CONCEPTS OF LITERACY AND LITERACY

Literature dedicated to the teaching and learning processes, especially that oriented to the teaching and learning of reading and writing, distinguishes literacy from literacy (Soares, 2019). The discrimination of concepts can be established as follows (Kleiman, 2005):

- literacy consists of the technical mastery of the alphabetic system of a given language, encompassing the skills of identifying, codifying and decoding the relationships between graphemes (letters) and phonemes (sounds);⁴
- Going beyond the sphere of literacy, literacy contemplates the ability to mobilize the technical knowledge of the alphabetic system in different sociocultural contexts and entails the production and interpretation of texts/discourses with sensitivity to their conditions of production, which are historically anchored.

The transposition of the concepts of literacy and literacy and their respective implications for the teaching and learning processes to the context of indigenous school education immediately reveals the insufficiency of technical training in the consolidation of the development of students. The existence of literacy practices, both in mother tongue and in Portuguese, represents one of the touchstones for the success of pedagogical approaches, bringing them closer to the sociocultural repertoire of cultural peoples,

Considering that orality plays a leading role in the transmission of knowledge among the Mebêngôkre/Kayapó, the formal processes of teaching and learning must privilege it. Production of oral and written histories based on myths and traditional local rites; recording of botanical knowledge; and reports of village customs are examples of activities that, by prioritizing the literacy of students, leading them to the gradual development of language skills, bring them closer to their ancestral practices.

From this point of view, literacy and literacy acquire an intercultural dimension: on the one hand, students are introduced to the writing systems of their mother tongue and the Portuguese language; on the other hand, as focal points of the activities in which the teaching

⁴ Rigorously, the association between phonemes and sounds is crossed by the materialization of sound, which corresponds to the concept of phone. A phoneme is, therefore, an abstract entity whose existence is based on the opposition to units of the same type within a particular linguistic system; therefore, it is not directly equivalent to the sound produced during speech. For the purposes of the discussion in the body of the text, the differences between phonemes and headphones are irrelevant, which is why we will not understand each other in this note.

and learning processes are unveiled, their ethnic identity, their symbolic references and their traditional knowledge are worked on.

According to D'Angelis and Veiga (2000), the mother tongues of the native peoples should be the starting points of their literacy. In addition to the use of the mother tongue reinforcing the students' self-esteem and their awareness of their own culture, it also provides conditions for them to appropriate a second language more easily in later stages. Ignoring the mother tongue of indigenous students during this stage, more than contributing to the delegitimization of indigenous languages, can result in demotivation and, in extreme cases, school dropout.

The construction of a bilingual and multicultural education for indigenous peoples depends on the definition of methodologies that contemplate both the linguistic and cultural dimensions. One of the most well-known models is the transition model, according to which literacy occurs in the mother tongue, and throughout the process, it is gradually replaced by the majority language, Portuguese.

Although the transition model favors the inclusion of students in the literate universe underlying the Portuguese language, the risk of undermining the legitimacy of the indigenous language is considerable, if there is no planning that ensures the maintenance of the mother tongue in later stages of schooling (D'ANGELIS; VEIGA, 2000).

On the other hand, the model of maintenance or intercultural bilingual education balances the use of the indigenous language and the use of Portuguese throughout the school trajectory. Thus, a coexistence of both languages is ensured, without one standing out against the other. In this approach, the objective is not merely to teach two languages; In fact, more important than that is the formation of competent subjects capable of moving between different cultural universes. To this end, it is recommended to create bilingual teaching materials – booklets, pedagogical games, children's literature books – that thematize elements of Mebêngôkre/Kayapó daily life.

Another fundamental dimension of bilingual indigenous school education is community participation. As Bortoni-Ricardo (2005) states, involving indigenous leaders, guardians and elders in the elaboration of school curricula and pedagogical projects and in the development of school activities increases the legitimacy of the teaching and learning processes, while rescuing traditional practices and knowledge. The possibility of conducting field classes, guided research on the history of the community and linguistic and cultural revitalization projects increases student engagement.

As it is a strategic methodology, bilingual and multicultural education is not without adversity. The most common are material and institutional limitations, in which deficiencies in



the training of teachers to work with indigenous students stand out. Considering that professionals who are well-prepared to work in contexts of linguistic and cultural diversity are scarce and that there is a lack of public incentives for the specialization of indigenous and non-indigenous teachers committed to this cause, partnerships with universities and investments in continuing education courses can result in advances in the care of indigenous populations.

5 INDIGENOUS SCHOOL EDUCATION IN SÃO FÉLIX DO XINGU

The growth of indigenous populations in Brazilian urban areas was due to multiple factors throughout the twentieth century: socioeconomic pressures, territorial disputes, and demand for health and education services (Oliveira, 1998). This displacement is problematic for indigenous peoples, who are forced to adapt to administrative routines guided by values different from their own.

In São Félix do Xingu, the Mebêngôkre/Kayapó families living in urban areas experience this paradox. If, on the one hand, an urban school has a more robust infrastructure in terms of facilities, technological resources and diversity of professionals, on the other hand, it does not have a pedagogical proposal that portrays the linguistic and sociocultural realities of indigenous students and that provides training (continuing education) to teachers regarding the specificities of these students.

The most pressing consequence of gaps in school infrastructure is the perpetuation of barriers to the effectiveness of teaching and learning processes, barriers that favor school dropout and reinforce prejudices (Luciano, 2006). In addition, the lack of integration between the school and the indigenous community resulting from the urban dynamics highlights the lack of channels of participation and intervention through which families and leaders are able to contribute to the construction of pedagogical projects.

In view of this situation, the importance of public policies that strengthen indigenous school education in an urban environment is highlighted. The training of bilingual teachers, the production of intercultural teaching materials and the articulation of dialogues with local leaders are examples of actions capable of mitigating the negative effects of migration. In addition, by recognizing the legitimacy of indigenous languages and cultures, the school has a position from which it can encourage dialogue between parents, students, teachers and managers, fostering an institutional environment marked by respect for differences and more inclusive pedagogical strategies.

As in other regions of the country, the public schools of São Félix do Xingu are unaware of primary aspects of the Mebêngôkre/Kayapó culture and do not have tools that enable them



to welcome students from the villages. Without a bilingual education project, it is common for teachers to resort to standardized pedagogical practices for students with other profiles, making it difficult and even preventing the engagement of students and their families with school activities (Luciano, 2006).

As much as educational legislation treats the notion of literacy as the protagonist of the teaching and learning processes of Brazilian students, both indigenous and non-indigenous, it is not uncommon for indigenous school education institutions to strip it of the anthropological dimension associated with learning, which covers everything from affective relationships to socially shared memories (Street, 2014).

In seeking better living conditions in the urban area of São Félix do Xingu, the Mebêngôkre/Kayapó families are challenged by tensions between social insertion and the preservation of their identity. School practices that are sensitive to the conditions of learners have the ability to mitigate the tensions mentioned, since they recognize the sociocultural facets of the population segments for which they are intended (Gomes, 2021). As values inherent to the Mebêngôkre/Kayapó language and culture are admitted, the greater the guarantee that the academic trajectory of indigenous students will be successful, and the greater the chances that they will become citizens aware of their place in the world.

6 DECOLONIAL PERSPECTIVES AND INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

One of the most significant contributions to reflections on indigenous school education and interculturality arises from decolonial approaches, which question the historical legacy of exploitation and cultural imposition of European peoples in relation to the original peoples of the Brazilian territory (Quijano, 2005).

According to the understanding of colonial approaches, formal education, traditionally structured on Eurocentric bases, reproduces power dynamics that silence minority voices (Freire, 1987), a set that includes all population segments that disagree with the white and heteronormative configuration. The investigation of colonial history and the different class struggles for which it served as a stage is, therefore, essential to the formulation of public policies and pedagogical policies that assure indigenous peoples the role of protagonists of their own socio-cultural narratives and their own worldviews.

In the Brazilian context, decolonial approaches dialogue with the constitutional guarantee of indigenous rights (Brasil, 1988) and the equality of the various population segments in the eyes of the law. The Federal Constitution of 1988 (Brasil, 1988) established and the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (Brasil, 1996) regulated educational practices that are not limited to integrating indigenous people into the universe



of the dominant culture. Instead, they should endorse the exchange of knowledge between cultures (Walsh, 2009), something that, from a decolonial perspective, necessarily entails the revision of teaching materials, curricula, and forms of evaluation, in order to incorporate knowledge and worldviews of native peoples (Gomes, 2021).

Freire's conception of education, which is based on dialogue and liberation based on the democratization of knowledge and class consciousness, argues that school environments are institutional spaces in which students and teachers share socio-cultural, ethical, and more experiences and values (Freire, 1987).

Freire's logic highlights the intrinsic collapse of pedagogical theories and practices that bet on the centrality of the figure of the teacher, to the detriment of the autonomy of students and the sociocultural reality that surrounds them. When we focus on indigenous school education, we conclude that, on the surface of teachers' concerns, there will be respect for traditional forms of construction and transmission of knowledge; the socio-cultural relations within the communities and between the communities and non-indigenous individuals; and a conscious work with mother tongues and with the Portuguese language, considering native oral practices and the importance of the Portuguese language as an instrument of dialogue with the State, with the labor market and with the broader Brazilian society (Bortoni-Ricardo, 2005).

7 METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

To carry out the intended case study and to achieve the objectives presented in the introduction of this work, a qualitative methodological triangulation was adopted. This methodological triangulation encompassed the combination of multiple sources of evidence (semi-structured interview, participant observation, and bibliography and document survey) to validate the findings and to ensure the credibility of the research (Denzin; Lincoln, 2018).

We selected a qualitative methodological approach because it allows us to apprehend subjective and sociocultural aspects that would hardly be captured by quantitative instruments, thus revealing perceptions, values and motivations of the subjects assumed as targets (Minayo, 2009). The data collection instruments adopted to carry out the case study were the bibliographic and documentary survey, the semi-structured interview and the participant observation (with maintenance of a logbook).

The data collection of the investigation took place in three phases. In the first, a bibliographic and documentary survey of indigenous school education policies, specialized literature on bilingualism and literature specialized in intercultural literacy was carried out. Official documents were consulted, such as the Federal Constitution of 1988, the Law of

Guidelines and Bases of National Education, the National Curriculum Guidelines and publications of the Ministry of Education aimed at the training of teachers for indigenous schools. The result of the bibliographic and documentary survey was presented in sections 1 to 5.

In the second phase, semi-structured interviews were developed with three groups of subjects related to the Municipal School of Elementary Education Marechal Rondon Marechal Rondon:

- (a) teachers, including both indigenous and non-indigenous teachers;
- (b) parents or guardians of Mebêngôkre/Kayapó students; and
- (c) school managers and pedagogical coordinators.

The interviews followed scripts and contained questions directed to pedagogical practices, the challenges identified in the processes of teaching and learning mother tongue and Portuguese, public and institutional inclusion policies, teacher training and expectations regarding indigenous schooling.

The data obtained from the interviews were transcribed and submitted to content analysis, a technique that identifies, in a *corpus*, relevant categories and patterns of meaning (Bardin, 2011). The categories of analysis initially adopted included

- (i) perception of bilingualism and interculturality;
- (ii) literacy and literacy methodologies;
- (iii) the role of the community in the school process; and
- (iv) challenges faced in daily school life.

During the analysis, subcategories emerged that enriched the understanding of the dynamics of the Marechal Rondon Municipal Elementary School.

In the third stage, participant observation was used: classes and school activities were observed, and a field diary was kept, concentrating records of situations related to the use of the language, the participation of indigenous students in classes and the interaction between teachers and students (Lüdke; André, 2013).

The participant observation data were systematized in the form of a logbook (field records) and described situations of the school's daily life. These records were compared with the interviews in search of convergences, divergences and complementarities. The logbook enabled us to capture aspects of indigenous school education not verbalized by the interviewees and to identify any divergences between discourse and practice.



The research subjects were selected according to the intentional sampling technique. Individuals who provided relevant information about the phenomena investigated were prioritized (Gil, 2019). Ten teachers, five parents of indigenous students and two school administrators participated in the interviews. All participants were informed about the objectives of the research, about the voluntary nature of their participation and about the possibility of withdrawing from the study at any time; and demonstrated their written consent, by means of a specific term, authorizing the use of their answers for academic purposes. The names of the interviewees were replaced by alphanumeric codes, in order to ensure their anonymity.

The research complied with the ethical guidelines established by Resolution No. 466/2012 of the National Health Council (CNS), which regulates research with human beings in Brazil. There was prior authorization from the coordination of the Marechal Municipal Elementary School and the Municipal Department of Education of São Félix do Xingu to carry out interviews and participant observation.

8 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this section, the main findings of the research are presented and discussed, focusing on the challenges faced by Mebêngôkre/Kayapó indigenous students in their literacy and literacy processes. It should be noted, at the outset, that, according to the records provided by the Municipal Department of Education of São Félix do Xingu, the Marechal Rondon Municipal Elementary School has received, in recent years, a growing number of indigenous students. In 2019, for example, 38 Mebêngôkre/Kayapó students were registered, distributed from the 1st to the 9th grade of Elementary School. In 2022, this number jumped to 56, which corroborates the trend of increasing indigenous enrollments in the urban area of the municipality.

According to internal data from the school, collected in semiannual reports, most indigenous students have problems following the subjects, especially those that require greater proficiency in reading and writing in Portuguese. Contrary to what one might think, however, the average number of failures is not uniform: it is concentrated in the early years (from the 1st to the 3rd year), when the literacy process is in its initial phase and when language barriers are more visible.

In terms of infrastructure, the school has classrooms that, for the most part, contain desks and conventional teaching materials. It was observed the absence of adequate technological resources – computer labs and stable access to the internet – factors that enhance more interactive teaching methodologies. There is also no physical space for



indigenous cultural practices, such as rooms in which handmade objects and/or rituals can be exhibited, something that would value the Mebêngôkre/Kayapó identity.

Formed by teachers from different areas, the pedagogical team does not receive continuous and specific training on bilingual education. In informal conversations, many teachers expressed interest in learning pedagogical strategies that consider the indigenous language and culture, but regretted the lack of training courses and partnerships with higher education institutions that would assist in this process. These factors, when combined, help to explain the high dropout and failure rates among indigenous students, since, according to reports from some teachers and some managers, the lack of pedagogical adaptations demotivates students and their families.

Conducted with ten indigenous and non-indigenous teachers, the interviews demonstrated the coexistence of different perceptions regarding the teaching-learning process of the Mebêngôkre/Kayapó students among the subjects. Non-indigenous teachers highlighted difficulties in adapting pedagogical planning to contemplate the students' mother tongue, due to factors such as the absence of continuing education on bilingual education and the lack of specialized teaching materials.

One of the interviewees, designated P2, highlighted the following: "We don't have the appropriate material to work with their language. I do my best, but I feel that they [the indigenous students] are shy and sometimes even embarrassed to speak their mother tongue in the classroom" (P2, non-indigenous teacher). The placement reveals the perception that the school space, although open to interculturality, does not yet offer material and formative conditions to sustain bilingual pedagogical practices.

On the other hand, indigenous teachers showed greater familiarity with the linguistic reality of the students and reported a lack of autonomy to include elements of the Mebêngôkre/Kayapó culture in the school curriculum. According to teacher P8, of indigenous origin, comments, "I, as Kayapó, know our language and our culture, but I can't always use it in the classroom, because the school has a defined curriculum that follows the Department of Education. So, we get by as we can."

Some teachers mentioned that, even when they make an effort to include bilingual activities and indigenous cultural aspects in their activities, they come up against time constraints and pressure from higher levels to comply with a rigid syllabus. Teacher P5, who is not indigenous, reported the following: "When I try to insert the Kayapó language, I have to do it almost as an 'extra activity', because class time is very focused on the official curriculum. I miss greater support from the Secretariat to include these practices."

In general, the teachers pointed out the need for continuing education in bilingual and intercultural education and indicated openness to change. They also registered frustrations with the lack of institutional support and the limited structure to develop projects with the effective participation of indigenous communities.

The participation of parents and Mebêngôkre/Kayapó guardians in the academic life of the students was a recurring theme in the interviews. In general, parents and guardians showed interest in the academic training of their wards; and they saw, in the urban school, an opportunity to access a better quality education and, consequently, to new possibilities of social and economic insertion.

When asked about the reasons that led them to migrate to the city and enroll their children in the Marechal Rondon Municipal Elementary School, the family members interviewed (from F1 to F5) mainly mentioned factors such as

- possibility of access to more health services and the best infrastructure;
- presence of relatives in the urban area; and
- search for better professional prospects for their children, especially in areas such as commerce and services.

At the same time, a relevant part of the group of parents and guardians expressed concerns about the loss of cultural values and the lesser coexistence of their wards with the traditional practices of their people: "My children now speak more Portuguese than our language. I want them to study, but I want them not to forget where they came from" (F3, indigenous mother).

F3's speech translates the dilemma experienced by indigenous families who seek a path to social ascension by enrolling their children in an urban school, but who fear that this choice will result in the weakening of their ethnic identity. One of the suggestions pointed out by the interviewees was the creation of extracurricular activities that involve dance workshops, body painting, handicrafts and storytelling in the mother tongue.

In addition, some parents reported the difficulty of following the educational process of their children because they do not master the Portuguese language. This leads them to a gradual withdrawal from the school institution, since they do not feel comfortable attending pedagogical meetings and to ask questions about school tasks. Such distance aggravates the feeling that the school does not welcome the indigenous culture, and families come to see the school environment as foreign and hostile to the way of life they practice.

The results showed specific difficulties in the literacy and literacy process, especially in the early years of Elementary School. Teachers reported that some students enter the



school with little or no previous contact with the written Portuguese language, which impacts the understanding of their instructions and the assimilation of the content.

Literacy classes, which are focused on the Portuguese writing system, do not usually include linguistic transition methodologies, through which the mother tongue becomes the cornerstone of the introduction of the writing system of another language. The absence of interpreters and bilingual monitors aggravates the situation, demotivating students and increasing their difficulties in following the subjects. According to teacher P4, who is not indigenous, "We try to teach Portuguese, but without knowing their language, it gets complicated. Sometimes, I need to use gestures, figures, but I feel that that bridge with the mother tongue is missing."

From this perspective, literacy is not limited to the decoding of symbols; it also triggers access to meanings that connect the Portuguese language to the experience of Mebêngôkre/Kayapó students. Several teachers recognized that, without an adequate intercultural focus, the literacy process tends to fragment and contextualize.

In addition, the lack of teaching materials dedicated to the Mebêngôkre/Kayapó culture hinders the treatment of curricular contents. Textbooks, in general, do not contemplate the indigenous cultural reality, nor that of the Mebêngôkre/Kayapó; and they do not present translations and explanations of concepts in indigenous language. Some interviewees pointed out that they try to produce their own resources (posters and images related to local fauna and flora, for example), but these initiatives are insufficient in the face of the daily demands of teaching and learning.

We also emphasize the lack of flexibility of evaluation strategies. In most cases, indigenous students are subjected to tests and evaluation criteria applied to other students, which disregards their cultural and linguistic background. As a consequence of this, there is an accumulation of cases of school failure, which are reflected in failure and dropout.

The analysis of the data suggests convergence between the empirical reality and the reflections present in previous sections. The absence of a consolidated policy of bilingual intercultural education (Souza, 2012; Maher, 2007) is evident in the lack of didactic materials and adequate training for teachers, especially for non-indigenous people. This gap directly influences the way in which the school curriculum is developed, which often ignores the traditional knowledge of the Mebêngôkre/Kayapó people.

The data point to what Bortoni-Ricardo (2005) calls the "invisibilization of local voices": by not legitimizing the sociocultural values and linguistic practices of the Mebêngôkre/Kayapó, the urban school delays the construction of an inclusive environment. In this sense, the interviews with parents and teachers affirm the need for a more democratic

school management, so that indigenous leaders have an active voice in the formulation of pedagogical proposals.

Even with the legal framework provided by the Federal Constitution of 1988, the curricular autonomy of the communities is restricted, minimizing the number of activities that promote the strengthening of indigenous identity (D'angelis; Veiga, 2000). Indigenous teachers interviewed confirm that, although they master the language and share the Mebêngôkre/Kayapó culture, they find little space to apply this knowledge in the classroom.

At the same time, we note that the problems faced by Mebêngôkre/Kayapó students are not limited to the linguistic aspect; they also extend to cultural and identity elements, such as the families' fear of a possible loss of values and traditional practices. This finding is in line with the perspectives of Kleiman (2005) and Street (2014), who advocate the anchoring of literacy in a context that is culturally and socially significant.

9 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The results of this research show the intricate web of elements that corresponds to the school education of Mebêngôkre/Kayapó indigenous students in the urban context of the municipality of São Félix do Xingu, in the state of Pará; particularly, within the scope of the Marechal Rondon Municipal Elementary School. The growing presence of indigenous students in school, motivated by the search for better living and health conditions and for better job opportunities, reveals the urgency of establishing pedagogical policies and practices that are simultaneously inclusive and respectful with regard to the linguistic and sociocultural identity of students.

We confirm the importance of a bilingual intercultural education, with emphasis on practices that consider the mother tongue as a starting point for literacy and literacy processes. However, reality shows that several obstacles prevent the implementation of these principles – lack of continuing education of teachers, lack of contextualized teaching materials and absence of curricular autonomy.

We identified that the participation of parents and the indigenous community in the daily school routine supports the legitimization of pedagogical practices that value the linguistic and cultural repertoire of the Mebêngôkre/Kayapó, although the families face communication problems with the school, often because they do not master the Portuguese language, a situation that is exacerbated in school environments that are not receptive to diversity.

We conclude, therefore, that the promotion of an intercultural and bilingual education for the Mebêngôkre/Kayapó of São Félix do Xingu is not limited to the goodwill of teachers



and managers; it requires, in fact, a set of actions that articulate public policies, continuing education, community participation and the production of adequate teaching materials. Only in this way will it be possible to ensure that indigenous students achieve academic success, without losing sight of the values, traditions and language that make up their identity.

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