




Hearing families and deaf children: the role of Libras in communication

Famílias ouvintes e filhos surdos:
o papel da Libras na comunicação

Familias oyentes y niños sordos:
el papel de Lengua de Señas Brasileña
em la comunicación

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Abstract

Introduction: The Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) is a visual-motor language with its linguistic system and grammatical structure and its timely acquisition is important for deaf children's cognitive and communicative development. Deaf children's hearing families should engage in learning this language, since not knowing Libras may lead to communication and relationship difficulties with their deaf children. **Objective:** This study aimed to understand the role of Libras in the communication between hearing family members and their deaf children treated at a rehabilitation center. **Methods:** This cross-sectional qualitative study applied a semi-structured interview with 10 open-ended questions to hearing parents of deaf children who receive care at a rehabilitation center. Data were analyzed with the content analysis method. **Results:** Altogether, 10 mothers of deaf children were interviewed. Their ages ranged from 21 to 47 years. Nine mothers said they used Libras at home with their children every day, and all reported using it in their child's daily activities. All mothers stated that the use of Libras brought benefits to the mother-child relationship. **Conclusion:** The findings highlight the important role of Libras in the daily lives and communication of hearing family members and their deaf children.

Keywords: Sign languages; Family; Deafness; Communication; Mother-child relations.

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RMM: study design; methodology; data collect; article outline.

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Resumo

Introdução: A Língua Brasileira de Sinais (Libras) é uma língua de natureza visuo-motora com um sistema linguístico e estrutura gramatical próprio e sua aquisição em tempo oportuno é importante para o desenvolvimento cognitivo e comunicativo da criança surda. As famílias ouvintes de crianças surdas devem se engajar no aprendizado dessa língua, uma vez que na ausência do conhecimento da Libras, podem apresentar dificuldades de comunicação e de relacionamento com seu filho surdo. **Objetivo:** O objetivo deste estudo foi compreender o papel da Libras na comunicação de familiares ouvintes e seus filhos surdos atendidos em um centro de reabilitação. **Métodos:** Trata-se de um estudo transversal, de caráter qualitativo. Foi aplicado um roteiro de entrevista semiestruturado com 10 questões abertas a pais ouvintes de crianças surdas que participam de atendimentos em um centro de reabilitação. A análise dos dados foi realizada por meio do método análise de conteúdo. **Resultados:** Ao todo foram entrevistadas 10 mães de crianças surdas. As idades das mães variaram de 21 a 47 anos. Nove mães afirmaram usar a Libras em casa com seus filhos todos os dias e todas relataram usá-la em atividades cotidianas da criança. Todas as mães afirmaram que o uso da Libras trouxe benefícios para o relacionamento na diáde mãe-filho. **Conclusão:** Os achados revelam um importante papel da Libras tanto na comunicação de familiares ouvintes e seus filhos surdos, como no cotidiano desses lares.

Palavras-chave: Línguas de sinais; Família; Surdez; Comunicação; Relações mãe-filho.

Resumen

Introducción: La Lengua de Señas Brasileña (Libras) es una lengua visomotora con sistema lingüístico y estructura gramatical propios y su adquisición oportuna es importante para el desarrollo cognitivo y comunicativo del niño sordo. Las familias oyentes de niños sordos deben involucrarse en el aprendizaje de este idioma, ya que en ausencia del conocimiento de Libras, pueden tener dificultades en la comunicación y las relaciones con su hijo sordo. **Objetivo:** El objetivo de este estudio fue comprender el papel de Libras en la comunicación de los familiares oyentes y sus hijos sordos atendidos en un centro de rehabilitación auditiva. **Métodos:** Se trata de un estudio transversal, cualitativo. Se aplicó un guión de entrevista semiestructurada con 10 preguntas abiertas a padres oyentes de niños sordos que participan en el cuidado en un centro de rehabilitación. El análisis de los datos se realizó mediante el método de análisis de contenido. **Resultados:** En total, se entrevistaron 10 madres de niños sordos. Las edades de las madres oscilaron entre 21 y 47 años. Nueve madres dijeron que usan Libras en casa con sus hijos todos los días y todas informaron que lo usan en las actividades diarias de sus hijos. Todas las madres afirmaron que el uso de Libras trajo beneficios a la relación madre-hijo. **Conclusión:** Los hallazgos revelan un papel importante de Libras tanto en la comunicación de los miembros oyentes de la familia y sus hijos sordos, como en la vida diaria de estos hogares.

Palabras clave: Lenguas de signos; Familia; Sordera; Comunicación; Relaciones madre-hijo.

Introduction

Brazilian law no. 10.436, of April 24, 2002, legally recognized the Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) as the natural language of deaf Brazilians¹. Thus, Libras is a visual-motor language with its linguistic system and grammatical structure, able to convey ideas, just like oral languages².

Language acquisition is a process that provides linguistic input to children in the acquisition phase – which is fundamental for the construction of people's identity, as they communicate their thoughts through language³. It would be no different with sign language, whose acquisition is natural for deaf children, as it does not use the oral-auditory system. Hence, they need to acquire sign language as their first language (L1) to avoid cognitive, linguistic, and academic delays⁴.

Hearing families that have deaf children interact with them with the oral language – although deaf children have difficulty acquiring it since oral languages depend on the oral-auditory system. Therefore, family members would have to learn Libras to communicate with their children⁵. As it is a visual-motor language whose linguistic system is more appropriate for deaf people, such children must have timely access to it⁶.

Since the family chooses the deaf children's first language, parents are partly responsible for their linguistic development⁷. Therefore, it is crucial for these children that health professionals guide parents about Libras in the family context.

Approximately 95% of deaf children are born into homes of hearing families who do not have Libras as their L1, which can be a triggering factor for communication blocks with their children, as they wish they had normal hearing children. Hence, family members focus on finding a “cure” for the disability, instead of learning Libras. Another consequence of this is the difficulty for deaf children to express themselves, as they have not acquired any language to share with their family members⁸.

A study⁹ observed that most deaf people who are children of hearing parents achieve greater fluency in Libras in adulthood or when they actively participate in the deaf community. Thus, including deaf children in environments where Libras is used also provides learning spaces, since the language is learned in social interactions.

Another study¹⁰ interviewed six mothers of deaf children who attended a public institution and

found that the mothers had difficulties in acquiring Libras. It also pointed out that fluency in a second language is closely related to practicing and studying it continuously, highlighting that such parents often learn Libras with their children but do not become fluent.

The literature points to the scarcity of studies on the interaction between families and their deaf relatives¹¹. It is greatly important to know in depth how communicative relationships between deaf children and their families are established, given the importance of such relationships to their development. Communication is knowingly essential to the process of building parental dynamics and relationships, which requires a common language between them. Thus, discussing this topic – the importance of having hearing parents of deaf children learn Libras and its fundamental role in the bond between families and their deaf children – helps the scientific community to identify their challenges and the impact on children to develop strategies and guidelines that will strengthen the bond between them.

This study aimed to understand the role of Libras in the communication between hearing family members and their deaf children who attend a public health institution.

Methods

This cross-sectional qualitative study had a sample of hearing parents of deaf children who attend speech-language-hearing and pedagogical services at the Centro de Estudos e Pesquisa em Reabilitação “Prof Dr Gabriel Porto” (Cepre) of the Universidade Estadual de Campinas. It was approved by the Research Ethics Committee under no. CAAE 45204221.5.0000.5404, and evaluation report no. 4.802.052, in June 2021.

Selection of participants

The study included all hearing parents of children up to 10 years old with severe or profound prelingual deafness who were being monitored at Cepre at the time of data collection. Children should also be in the process of acquiring Libras. Therefore, it excluded parents who did not meet these inclusion criteria and whose children had attended the Cepre for less than 6 months, as they were still adapting to and familiarizing with the program.

Data collection procedures

Data were collected by applying a semi-structured interview with 10 open-ended questions to family members in a therapy room at the institution, while they waited for their children to be seen. The interview lasted around 10 minutes and was audio recorded to be transcribed and later analyzed. The interview aimed to obtain information regarding the role of Libras for these families with the following questions:

1. What do you understand when you hear the word Libras?
2. Have you received any guidance or information about Libras and why you should learn it?
3. Have you taken or are you taking any Libras courses?
4. Do you use Libras with your child at home? How often and in what situations or moments?
5. What was it like for you to start using Libras with your child?
6. What is it like for you to pass on beliefs or values to your child? For example, if you have a religion, can you explain to your child the rules/doctrines you follow and why?
7. Do you have/did you have difficulties learning Libras? If so, which ones?
8. Do you believe that using Libras has brought any benefits to your relationship with your child?
9. Which other family members use Libras to talk to your child?
10. Do you go to any place where Libras is used? Church? School?

Data analysis

The study used Bardin's content analysis method¹², which allows researchers to interpret collected data through inferences of knowledge about how production takes place. It is structured in three phases: 1) pre-analysis, in which the original ideas are systematized; 2) material exploration and categorization, in which the constituent elements of a set are classified by defining differences and forming groups according to previously defined criteria; and 3) treatment of results and their interpretation through inference, which is a type of controlled interpretation.

Content analysis is a technique that allows researchers to interpret collected data through objective and systematic procedures and inferences.

Such objective and systematic analysis ensures internal consistency, thus validating it, and enabling the replicability of inferences about the data. Systematization is a key point in this type of analysis, as it organizes the content according to the initial research objectives. In general terms, semantic structures (the signifiers of the statement) are related to sociological structures (the meanings) – i.e., a relationship is created between the statement and the factors that determine its characteristics, such as the speaker's cultural context and psychosocial issues and the process of producing the statements¹³.

Hence, this technique proved to be suitable for qualitative health research with interview analysis, as it reflects on the subjects' responses and approaches to social and cultural issues that determine the standpoint of deaf children's parents.

Three categories were chosen for analysis, seeking to group the reports according to similarities and discuss the role of Libras in these families' daily lives, its benefits for the relationship between the families and their children, and the challenges experienced in their learning.

Results

The study material consists of 10 semi-structured in-person interviews with participants. During data pre-analysis, the interview audios were transcribed and read to check the information – whose skimming led to the hypothesis that participants recognize the role of Libras in family communication with deaf children.

Then, the predominant topics in the mothers' speeches (e.g., Libras in communication, Libras in everyday life, and learning sign language) were used as recording units – i.e., the smallest text segment used as a basis for analysis, based on which categories were defined to analyze the results. Categories join registration units based on common characteristics. Finally, the results were organized, discussed, and interpreted through inferences in three analysis categories, establishing relationships with the bibliography found on the topic, for a critical and reflective analysis.

Altogether, 10 participants were interviewed, all of them mothers of deaf children. Four were stay-at-home mothers, and only one had a bachelor's degree. Three had not finished high school, one of whom studied only until finishing middle

school. The mothers' ages ranged from 21 to 47 years old.

All mothers were identified with the letter M followed by a number assigned to each one, se-

quentially. Their children were identified with the letter C followed by the number corresponding to the mother's identification. The interviewer was identified as I.

Chart 1. Study participants' personal data.

Participants	Age (in years)	Educational attainment	Occupation
M1	47	Bachelor's degree	Journalist
M2	39	Middle school graduate	Cook
M3	21	High school graduate	Unemployed
M4	29	High school incomplete	Stay-at-home mother
M5	32	High school graduate	Baker
M6	30	High school graduate	Stay-at-home mother
M7	44	High school graduate	Stay-at-home mother
M8	26	High school incomplete	Stay-at-home mother
M9	29	High school graduate	Self-employed
M10	25	High school graduate	Administrative assistant

Captions: M = mother

Regarding the characteristics of their children, seven were boys and three were girls. Their ages ranged from 4 to 10 years old, and 9 had bilateral

profound sensorineural hearing loss. Only one child had severe sensorineural hearing loss in the left ear and profound hearing loss in the right ear¹⁴.

Chart 2. Deaf children's personal data regarding their age, sex, and classification and degree of hearing loss.

Participant's child	Child's age (in years)	Child's sex	Child's hearing loss classification ¹²
C1	9	M	Bilateral profound SNHL
C2	8	M	Bilateral profound SNHL
C3	4	F	Bilateral profound SNHL
C4	5	F	Bilateral profound SNHL
C5	5	M	Bilateral profound SNHL
C6	8	M	Severe SNHL in the left ear and profound SNHL in the right ear
C7	10	M	Bilateral profound SNHL
C8	7	F	Bilateral profound SNHL
C9	5	M	Bilateral profound SNHL
C10	5	M	Bilateral profound SNHL

Caption: SNHL – sensorineural hearing loss
C – children
F – females
M – males

The first interview question aimed to understand parents' knowledge about Libras (What do you understand when you hear the word Libras?). The results show that only three of the 10 mothers defined Libras as a language, and two mothers referred to Libras as a language. Some important excerpts are given below:

M₁: Oh! The Brazilian Sign Language.

M₂: I understand it involves learning a language, right? Is that it?

M₃: I understand it is a Brazilian sign language because we learned about that. But so far, we understand very little of Libras.

M₇: So, now I believe it's a language that not only I, mother, but also many others should know just as Portuguese.

When asked about being instructed about their children's language after the deafness diagnosis, five mothers reported that health professionals – particularly physicians – advised them not to use Libras with their children.

M₂: No, the physician said that C₂ had to speak and that I should force him to speak. But I noticed the opposite, that C₂ doesn't like to speak; he likes Libras.

Speech-language-hearing pathologists, followed by teachers and physicians, were the most cited professionals who highlighted that learning Libras was beneficial for the children's development.

M₃: The speech-language-hearing pathologist told me that it would help her (C₃) development. Even if she didn't speak after the implant, she would have a means of communicating with Libras.

I: Did the otorhinolaryngologist or the medical team say anything?

M₃: Yes, they said that we should introduce Libras early so she could communicate.

M₆: Yes. He (the physician) said I wasn't alone, that there were many resources available, many things, like Libras and interpreters. He explained everything there is, opening a range of options. But C₆'s speech-language-hearing pathologist thought differently.

M₇: He had a Libras teacher as early as nursery school helping him, and the teacher instructed me to learn at least some signs so I could talk to him

from now on at least. Because the child was born with a disability, and the teacher said, "You need to learn so you can help your son", but no one ever told me, "Hey, you have to go deeper into it", but I want to for this very reason.

Among the answers to question 3 (Have you taken or are you taking any Libras course?), five mothers reported having taken Libras courses at other institutions. Only one mother stated that she had participated once in the Libras class taught by deaf instructors at Cepre, while the others stated that they followed the classes. Furthermore, five mothers reported using or having used apps that teach Libras signs.

In question 4 (Do you use Libras with your child at home? How often and in what situations or moments?), nine mothers stated that they used Libras at home with their children every day in their daily activities, such as eating, bathing, sleeping, etc. Only one mother stated that she did not use Libras at home with her daughter, except in everyday moments such as eating and bathing. Moreover, five mothers stated that they also used oral language with their children:

M₁: We even say that our Libras is not that good because we use Libras and speak at the same time. So, it's not right because Libras has a different structure. But we're always using Libras and speaking at the same time. Always. That's how we communicate, using both.

M₅: I use Libras every day with him, but he doesn't recognize the sounds; he recognizes Libras. On the other hand, he doesn't recognize everything with Libras, which is when I include the sound. But even when he uses Libras, I speak to him; I speak and use Libras.

When asked question 5 (What was it like for you to start using Libras with your child?), five mothers reported that it was difficult to start using Libras with their children. Four of these mothers explained their difficulties due to not knowing the language:

I: What was it like for you to start using Libras with her?

M₃: Well, it was hard at first.

I: Why?

M₃: Because I didn't know it, so I had to learn it, which was difficult.

Nonetheless, four mothers considered it beneficial to include Libras in their communication with their children:

M₅: Since he was diagnosed as bilateral deaf, was growing, had the implant, and began using the hearing aid, there was no moment when I automatically said, "No, I'll start using it today". It wasn't automatic; I little by little realized he wasn't going to hear me, but if I used certain gestures, he would understand me. It really was little by little.

M₆: It was normal, no problem. Because there was nothing I could do; as his mother, I had to accept his choice.

M₁₀: I had to teach him, so he would learn to talk to me. It was good because he was very nervous.

Regarding question 6 (What is it like for you to pass on beliefs or values to your child? For example, if you have a religion, can you explain to your child the rules/doctrines you follow and why?), mothers reported using Libras, oral language, and technological resources to explain family and religious rules and values:

M₅: So, little by little. I can't explain it all to him at once, but as he grows, as we participate in my church, I teach him by speaking and using Libras. One way or the other he understands that we're in church, that it's time to pray and be quiet. He understands when we're getting ready to go to church. And the values are the same as we teach day to day. The way we teach and raise him automatically in our routine, he gradually learns without extra effort to teach him.

M₆: I tell him what I know. What I don't know, I look for videos on YouTube or resort to Hand Talk, and that's how we manage it.

As for question 7 (Do you have/did you have difficulties learning Libras? If so, which ones?), seven out of the 10 mothers stated they had difficulties learning Libras. They particularly cited memorizing signs and learning new signs. Two mothers stated that they had no difficulty, although one of them (M₈) reported forgetting some signs and another (M₁₀) reported only having difficulty memorizing the signs.

M₅: I have difficulties every day because there's always something new he wants, but I don't know the Libras sign; then I speak, but he doesn't understand

me, or he uses signs with me, but I don't know what they mean. So, I try to learn and understand what he means. We learn every day; we have questions every day. There's no specific day; every day we learn something new.

M₈: Oh, not difficulties; but sometimes we forget a little; sometimes I know I have already studied that, but I forgot.

When question 8 was asked (Do you believe that using Libras has brought any benefits to your relationship with your child?), all mothers stated that Libras brought benefits to the mother-child relationship, highlighting improved communication with their children also improved their relationship.

M₅: Yes, sure, because if it weren't for Libras, I don't know what it would be like. He has a cochlear implant, but it caused a lot of trouble and took a long time to repair. If it weren't for Libras, I don't know what it would be like, because he was a long time without the device because of broken parts. So, during this time we handled it well, very well, with Libras. So, if I didn't know anything of Libras, I don't know how we'd have managed simple things, like sleeping, taking a shower, eating, going to Cepré, going to his aunt's house, or any other situation if I depended only on the device. I don't know. So, Libras was essential, it is essential.

M₈: Yes, it brought many benefits. For one thing, she understands me, and I understand her, which I didn't use to.

M₁₀: All benefits. Communication. To express affection, love, and respect, because he didn't know anything. I believe he learned values through Libras because he didn't know anything. Nothing at all. He was vegetating without Libras, and I wasn't going to wait for the cochlear implant and someone's willingness to operate on my son. I was using Libras even if they [health professionals] told me not to.

Further on question 8, another important report was that of M₁, who recalls the moment when her son understood that each object had a sign and that he could name all things around him using Libras:

M₁: Totally, right? Totally. [...] Oh, but some things are special. We remember clearly when he woke up one day and understood that there was a sign for each thing. Because he would use the sign for, say, the "bathroom", very simple things, but I think he didn't quite understand what that was. Then, one morning he understood, "Oh, this is Toddy"; then

he went around the house all day, asking “What’s the sign for this one? And for that one?”.

M_6 referred to Libras as a “key to a padlock”, indicating its transformative role in the lives of her child and family:

M_6 : Many, many, many, many benefits. C_6 wouldn’t speak at all when we attended the speech-language-hearing pathologist in that other place. He wouldn’t speak a single word because she kind of forced him to speak. When we came here, wow, on the first visit C_6 left jumping for joy. This is his world; here he uses Libras as he likes it. Here if you speak with him, he says a few things. Since we spend all the time with him, we understand him. Perhaps someone who is not with him often would not understand him yet, but we understand because we’re always with him. So, Libras was our... our... I don’t even know how to put it. It was wonderful because C_6 was a nervous child, always yelling. Not anymore, C_6 is easy-going and calm; he doesn’t yell much. I tell him, “Hey, you’re increasing the volume”, and he immediately realizes. It was like a key to a padlock. It greatly improved our lives.

Moreover, M_6 , M_9 , and M_{10} reported that their children had negative feelings, such as nervousness, because of their communication difficulties – which improved by using Libras.

The analysis of the answers to question 9 (Which other family members use Libras to talk to your child?) also drew attention, as four mothers stated their role as mediators of their children’s communication with other family members.

M_5 : At home, there’s me, my daughter, my husband, and C_5 . I use it more often because I know more. I take the course and bring home the information, so I know it more than the others. My husband does not use it often, and he sometimes uses homemade signs. My daughter too, she uses what she knows and I teach her with him (C_5). The other family members who are not always with us at home use homemade signs or whatever they know of Libras. But I’m the one who studies Libras and tries to learn something new every day.

M_6 : Look, in our family, everyone, I, his father, his grandmothers, his grandfather, his aunt, his cousins, all relatives that live near us use Libras with him. Those who cannot use it yet call me and ask me to talk to him, and so on.

M_9 : He doesn’t know much because he (the father) cannot accompany me here. I teach him some things, but not much. There are many things he doesn’t know.

In question 10 (Do you go to any place where Libras is used? Church? School?), five mothers reported not going with their children to any place where Libras is used, except for speech-language-hearing therapy. Furthermore, four reported that their children have access to Libras at school with bilingual teachers or Libras interpreters. Only two mothers stated that they have Libras at the churches they attend, and one mentioned participating in events organized by her city’s association for deaf people.

Discussion

One limitation of this study is the lack of interviews with the deaf children’s hearing fathers since all the family members who took their children to the appointments and agreed to participate in the research were mothers. Thus, the study was limited to analyzing only maternal perspectives.

The interview findings were discussed in three analysis categories: (1) the role of Libras in the families’ daily lives; (2) the benefits of Libras in communication; and (3) the challenges experienced by parents in learning and using Libras.

The role of Libras in the families’ daily lives

Only three of the 10 mothers defined Libras as a language, and two mothers referred to Libras as a language. This points out that, despite living with deaf people, the concept of Libras as a language with all its characteristics is still not well understood. When parents do not know Libras, they limit their conversations with their deaf children to everyday matters, which can create relationship difficulties¹⁵.

The interviewees’ mediating role in their deaf children’s communication with other family members stands out, corroborating a study that highlights that this role possibly belongs to the deaf children’s main caregivers. Furthermore, not all family members invest in learning Libras, which can overload even the caregiver who knows the language¹¹.

Some authors observed the mothers’ role as mediators of deaf children. They interviewed seven mothers who attended a bilingual institution and highlighted that they were quite fluent in Libras and permeated their children’s communication with other family members and friends¹⁶.

Deaf children need to have contact with deaf adults, who would be their identity references¹⁷. Therefore, they should attend places where Libras is used, such as associations for deaf people, churches, etc., as such environments will allow them to interact with their peers.

However, deaf people knowingly face challenges in finding inclusive environments, despite public policies that encourage the use and dissemination of Libras throughout the country. A study¹⁸ used a semi-structured interview with four deaf subjects, and its analysis demonstrated situations of discrimination and difficulties in receiving attention in Libras, which impacted their autonomy in social activities. Thus, the authors point out that Libras is still insufficiently used in deaf subjects' homes and social spaces to effectively include them in our society. They also authors reflect on the importance of legitimizing deaf language and culture rights in the family environment.

Deaf children's hearing parents must understand that Libras is the first and natural language for some deaf people, through which they communicate. Accordingly, deaf children interact with and relate to others using sign language. This so-called "deaf community" is made up of deaf people who are connected by the way they relate to the world and culture¹⁹. Deaf children's hearing parents may not know Libras and its role in forming deaf children's subjectiveness and identity⁸. This prevents these children from developing their deaf identity. Research links the lack of initiative on the part of hearing parents to use Libras with their deaf children with the rejection of deafness²⁰.

Thus, it is clear how important it is for deaf children's parents to introduce Libras into their family routine with quality and consistency, as it is through this language that their deaf children will find meaning in the world and themselves.

The benefits of Libras in communication

There is a need for professionals trained in the subject to guide hearing parents who are unaware of Libras, so they will understand its importance and benefits.

A piece of research¹⁷ addresses the need to train qualified professionals to instruct deaf children's families to learn sign language. These hearing families are unaware of the aspects of deafness,

which can lead them to many questions about the future of their children.

Professional guidance is extremely important at the time of diagnosis when such professionals must direct rehabilitation and family guidance programs as early as possible²⁰. Interpersonal relationships depend on communication, and as previously stated, changes in the quality of communication can harm family bonds²¹.

M_5 's statements make clear that her son would be unable to communicate effectively if it were not for the use of Libras since he could not use his hearing aid or cochlear implant due to broken parts. A study² reflected on how the limitations imposed by broken devices such as hearing aids and cochlear implants and the time they spend in repair can impact the child's hearing and, consequently, their oral language development. In the absence of auditory stimuli within the critical period for language development, language fluency is impaired.

M_{10} 's report shows that the deaf child's mother saw the period before her son acquired Libras as a state of vegetation for the child, as she realized her son would not understand the world around him. This highlights the role of language in human life, since through it we enter human culture²².

The literature points out that hearing families who do not know Libras interact less with their deaf children²³. Other authors²¹ stated that the way communication is established influences the family relationship between deaf people and their families. They also highlighted that Libras was the main form of bond between the observed families. However, family members who do not use Libras use their family gestures to maintain family interaction.

A study carried out with five hearing family members of deaf children attended at a public institution in São Paulo² observed in their reports the role of Libras in their children's language, helping them to become more understandable and communicative children.

As reported by M_8 , before Libras was introduced, mother and daughter could not communicate or understand each other because there was no common language for sharing ideas, feelings, and values. A study discusses the exclusion of deaf children from interactions in these contexts, as oral language predominates communication at the deaf children's homes⁷.

Moreover, M_{10} reports that through Libras his son was able to convey his affection, love, and re-

spect to his family. Likewise, the family managed to pass on their values to their son, who could not understand before using only oral language. This point is in line with what is discussed by some authors⁸, who report the difficulties of hearing families who are unaware of Libras in passing on family values to their deaf children.

Another point to address is the report by M_6 , M_9 , and M_{10} about how the use of Libras improved their children's negative feelings, such as nervousness, since sign language provided them with a means of communication. Negative feelings and aggressive behaviors are sometimes consequences of poorly established communication between deaf children and their hearing peers⁸.

Linguistic interactions are known to be essential for all subjects to establish their language use. Therefore, family guidance on these linguistic aspects is important to encourage making the home a conducive space for deaf children's language development.

Thus, all mothers stated that the use of Libras brought benefits to their relationship with their children. This highlights the role of Libras in communicative relationships in a home where hearing parents have deaf children.

Challenges experienced by parents in learning and using Libras

The reasons given in the literature for deaf children's hearing parents not to learn Libras are motor and comprehension difficulties, low availability of time for study, lack of interest, and non-involvement in deaf culture⁴.

Deaf children's hearing parents need a systematic study to learn Libras, usually requiring an institution or teachers. They also must use it in their social interactions to consolidate knowledge²⁴.

Therefore, for parents to learn effectively and become fluent in Libras, sign language must be present in these families' daily lives.

Final considerations

The findings of this study highlight the role of Libras in the communication of 10 families with hearing parents and deaf children who attended a rehabilitation center. It also points out the challenges experienced in the process of acquiring this new language and its importance in these children's everyday lives and communicative relationships.

It was found that mothers recognize the role of Libras in building bonds between them and their children since their learning favored communication and, consequently, social interactions. Thus, the introduction of Libras within the family is a milestone in these families' lives, helping them share feelings, ideas, and family values.

However, it is challenging to learn a new language, given the difficulty in memorizing signs and learning new ones. Libras is present in the daily lives of all families interviewed, even though it is not the only means by which mothers communicate with their children, as oral language is used by half of the families in the study.

The study leads to reflections on how to apply it to practical actions for these families, such as having health professionals and deaf children's families discuss about how communication relates to their psychological and emotional makeup. It is also important for speech-language-hearing pathologists to guide these parents about learning Libras to promote an environment favorable to the children's acquisition of sign language.

Lastly, despite the public policies to strengthen Libras as deaf Brazilians' natural language, there is still a lack of public and private spaces that use Libras where deaf children and their families may attend to improve their language acquisition. Therefore, both public and private instances must constantly address and widely discuss the fight to legitimize the rights of deaf people to spread the language and provide these children with greater accessibility and effective social inclusion.

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