

Issues and challenges faced by Brazilian adults to learn English¹

Questões e desafios enfrentados por adultos brasileiros para aprender inglês

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Resumo

In Brazil, all students in regular schools have English classes at some point in their lives, most of them usually start in 6th grade. However, when teachers and job interviewers ask about their knowledge, the answers show that they cannot speak, read, or write the language well. The Brazilian Educational Law of Guidelines and Bases requires a “foreign language” which may be Spanish, for example. When they become adults, it is essential to speak a second language to get better job opportunities. This study has investigated some aspects of English teaching/learning in Brazil, which may encourage many people to come to the U.S. to learn. Nowadays, there is a big wave of Brazilians coming to study English as an additional language. The study has mainly focused on adult Brazilian English learners living in the U.S. and it has identified the profile of these adult students, their motivation, their challenges, as well as issues about age, affection, and beliefs related to this topic.

Palavras-chave: english learners; adults; USA.

Abstract

No Brasil, todos os alunos das escolas regulares têm aulas de inglês em algum momento de suas vidas, a maioria normalmente inicia na sexta série. No entanto, quando professores e entrevistadores de emprego perguntam sobre seus conhecimentos, as respostas mostram que eles não falam, lêem ou escrevem bem o idioma. A Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação brasileira exige “língua estrangeira” que pode ser o espanhol, por exemplo. Quando se tornam adultos, é fundamental falar um segundo idioma para conseguir melhores oportunidades de trabalho. Este estudo investigou alguns aspectos do ensino/aprendizagem de inglês no Brasil, que incentiva muitas pessoas a virem para os Estados Unidos para aprender. Hoje em dia, há uma grande tendência de brasileiros virem para os EUA para estudar inglês como língua adicional. O estudo se concentrou principalmente em alunos adultos de inglês brasileiros que vivem nos EUA e identificou o perfil desses alunos, sua motivação, seus desafios, bem como, questões sobre idade, afeto e crenças, relacionadas a esse tópico.

Keywords: alunos de inglês; adultos; EUA.

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1 Introduction

When people go abroad, they usually expect to arrive at the country they are heading to with at least a basic level of the language spoken there to be able to communicate. However, the United States is a country that has a history of receiving a great deal of foreign people: immigrants, workers, and students. Many of those people arrive in the country without speaking a word of English. Some of them look for English schools to learn the language. Others have this specific objective of learning English because for some reason they were not able to learn in their countries. An international student center in the Boston area, in Massachusetts, has a concentration of adult learners, most of them are from Brazil, and it was observed that many Brazilians come to the USA to learn English because they feel frustrated for not being able to learn in their own country.

Many of these adults went to college in Brazil and have good jobs there, but they could not speak any English. They literally arrived here to start learning from scratch. It was also noticed that they have family and children, so they really need to learn to be able to run their errands and live their lives in this new country. Another observation was the number of Brazilians in this international student center, it seems to be upwards of 90%, and they end up speaking too much of their native language, Portuguese, around the school and frequently, during class. It is understood that they feel more comfortable speaking their native language with fellow citizens, but in this case, it is something that delays learning.

Moreover, Brazil has a history of immigration to the U.S. with a huge community in Massachusetts, so it is easy to carry out a full day speaking and living in the Brazilian culture and Portuguese language, and this happens exactly because they arrive here with no English, so it is easy to stay within the community speaking the language they know. There are several stores and markets where people can go and buy whatever they need, and they do not need to speak English. Therefore, they end up having a social life within the community; that is, they are most of the time speaking their native language, thereby delaying their English language learning.

All those points are relevant to go deeper in this research approaching this topic. Brazil has issues with English teaching as an additional language in elementary, middle, and high school. So, this research has explored some aspects of English teaching/learning in Brazil, the reasons why many people are encouraged

to come to the U.S. to learn. The study will mainly focus on Brazilian adult English learners, and it will identify their motivation, and challenges they face, as well as some issues related to this topic.

2 Discussion

According to Campos (2017) in an article for a government owned and operated website, “Brazil Agency,” in Brazil, 73.5% of students nationally attend public schools, (data collected from IBGE Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics cited in Brazil Agency). During the academic life of a child, they will have English classes mainly in Middle and High School. Later, when they are asked in job interviews what their knowledge of this language is, the answers show that they cannot speak, read, or write the language well. This happens because the English language teaching is not mandatory – the Brazilian Educational Law of Guidelines and Bases (Lei de Diretrizes e Bases Nacional) requires “foreign language,” which may be Spanish, for example. Students in 6th grade are required to take 2 lessons of 45 to 50 minutes a week. The lessons have focused on grammar, vocabulary and reading, but usually there have been at least twenty-five students in class, so it is very difficult to establish a communicative approach. There also has been no way to test learning in a standardized way: the only common test, “Enem,” (National High School Exam). However, there are only five English language questions. If there is no standard on what one learns, the teacher also gets poor support in the classroom. Both students and teachers don’t seem to have the motivation to learn and teach. Briefly, English language teaching in Brazil has had many issues and they are far from being solved.

The results of these issues are: Only 5.1% of the population has claimed to have some knowledge in the English Language, according to the British Council Brasil (2014). The population does not learn a second language, many of them go to colleges and universities, become good professionals; even though often they miss good job opportunities because, they do not speak a second language. The options they have had either has paid for private classes domestically or go abroad to study another language. As adult learners, they will face challenges to learn a new language at this age. English, of course, is the most sought language to learn (British Council Brasil, 2014). In view of these problems of English learning in Brazil, one may assert that Brazilians struggle to find motivation and reasons to learn a second language. When they

come as students or immigrants to the United States, they still struggle to learn English properly and extensively, although they are conscious of the importance of learning to have better opportunities in their lives.

A large wave of Brazilian immigration occurred in the 1980's (Blizzard; Batalova, 2019). Brazilian immigration to the U.S became common due to the political/economic turbulences in the country. They immigrated seeking a better life for them and their families, with the American dream in mind. Almost all of them came with no English and only a few attended schools in America. Some learned by themselves the everyday language and others have never learned, always being among their own culture, community, and language. At that time, they did not worry about overstaying their visas, so many people lived undocumented. The Brazilian immigrant population continued to grow in the early 2000s and then stabilized for about a decade. Between 2014 and 2017, the Brazilian immigrant population rose again, reflecting difficult conditions in the country, including a 2013 recession that was followed by high unemployment and inflation. Approximately 450,000 Brazilian immigrants resided in the United States in 2017 according to the Migration Policy Institute, an increase of nearly one-third over a seven-year span that was marked by the difficult conditions in Brazil (Blizzard; Batalova, 2019).

This new wave of Brazilian immigrants seemed to be aware of the importance of learning the language of the country they have immigrated to. Currently, many of them go to English schools to learn English. For instance, the language school that was observed in this study, Brazilians are approximately 80% of the population of the school, while the 20% remaining are international students from other countries. On the other hand, they are also worried about overstaying their visas and they seek to stay in the country legally so that they can have possibilities to get the document of residency, the green card. To achieve this, the first step is to keep legal status in the country as international students, which makes them enroll in English schools to learn English.

However, the Brazilian community in Massachusetts today continues to grow. Malden, Everett, Somerville, Framingham, and Marlborough have a significant number of Brazilians. So, it is easy to carry out a full day speaking and living in the Brazilian culture and Portuguese language. There are stores and markets where people can go and buy whatever they need, and they do not need to speak

English. They also have a social life in the community, and when they go to school, they meet their Brazilian classmates, so they end up speaking their native language most of the time; thereby delaying their English language learning.

Knowing the history of problems that Brazilian citizens have, especially in the teaching and learning of the English language, a question arises: What are some motivating factors there might be to learn English more quickly? Moreover, what are the challenges that these adults face while learning a second language, particularly English, since it does not fall into the romance languages as does Portuguese, their native tongue.

To answer these questions, a quantitative and qualitative study were conducted having a survey, and interviews as instruments to collect data. This research further analyzed the details and outcomes of the findings.

2.1 Review of Literature

Adults learn differently from children. So firstly, this literature review has explained two major theories of language acquisition. The Critical Age Period Hypothesis, as the name itself has implied, it is the period in which the acquisition of a first language is possible. The end of the critical period would mark the end of the possibility of acquiring a language as a native speaker (Penfield; Robert, 1959). In Brazil, children start learning a second language when they are in puberty, around 12 years old, which is the age at the end of the critical period. However, most of the population will really learn a second language when adults, necessitating a more comprehensive scholarly analysis of the differences in learning a second language when either a child or an adult.

According to Ren (2017), the concept of the critical period in language acquisition was introduced by Penfield and Roberts for the first time. They believed that all individuals had a phase for specific language acquisition, which they could learn a language in a conscious way, without any outside distractions. This phase was called the "Best age." The explanation for the ability to learn a language was related to the development of the brain, that is, the strong plasticity in the juvenile period. However, with the arrival of puberty, the plasticity would gradually decline until it disappears.

In 1976, Lenneberg (1976) developed Penfield and Roberts' ideas in his major book, *The Biological Foundation of Language*. His main philosophy was

that language was the product of the brain. He supported this premise that there is a critical period to learn a language before the onset of adolescence. In his perspective, the human brain has strong plasticity in the range of two years old to the advent of puberty. Equally important, the understanding and producing of language are related to the two hemispheres of the brain and the whole brain is involved in language learning activities, so it can absorb new language information fast and easy in this period. After adolescence, brain lateralization has occurred for most people. Brain lateralization refers to the process that the different sides of the brain begin to take charge of different functions. Human functions of language intelligence, logic, and analysis naturally lateralizes to the left hemisphere, and the emotional social function lateralizes to the right hemisphere gradually. Once this process completes, the automatic capabilities that the left hemisphere is responsible for controlling the neural coordination mechanism of language will be weakened. Thus, it will be relatively difficult to learn a language.

Linguists have often extended this theory to a critical period for second-language acquisition (SLA), even though this is much less widely accepted. Certainly, older learners of a second language rarely achieve the native-like fluency that younger learners exhibit, despite often progressing faster than children in the initial stages. According to Schouten (2009), hoping to extend Lenneberg's hypothesis to second language acquisition, prime studies concerning the CPH intended to establish a link between the age of an individual's first exposure to a second language and his or her ultimate attainment in that language. Researchers reasoned that if learners exposed to a second language after puberty were deficient in their ultimate attainment—while learners acquiring the language before the onset of puberty performed in a nativelike fashion—the effects of the critical period must be responsible for this gap.

Ren (2017) still asserted that Noam Chomsky's Language Intrinsic Theory (Chomsky, 2006), suggested that people have the innate ability to acquire language: The Universal Grammar and the Language Acquisition Device. When language materials activate the Language Acquisition Device, the general grammar in the human brain converts into the specific grammar represented by the pronunciation. If the speech sounds of all languages stimulate children before the universal grammar conversing, they could entirely master multiple languages. However,

the Language Acquisition Device has a wocritical period (about 9 years old to 10 years old). During this period, the Language Acquisition Device would degrade gradually, and the second language learning ability would be weakened.

According to Cantarotti and Simões (2006), comparing the learning of children and adults, the authors Krashen and Terrell (1983) state that children are better at the outcomes, and adults, on the other hand, are faster at the beginning of learning because they can get a more understandable input. Thus, adults are better able to recognize input received, are better at managing conversations or controlling input directed at them. The same authors also pointed out that adults have a great knowledge of the world or extralinguistic. This great extralinguistic knowledge has helped to make the input understandable.

Brown and Lee (2015), Krashen and Terrell (1983) agree that the eventual advantage of the child concerns the affective factors. The child has a low affective filter and so she will be more receptive to the input. Cantarotti and Simões (2006), in the same article, cited Lightbown and Spada (1998), who claimed that it is difficult to compare children and adult second language learners. One of the difficulties for comparison concerned the different learning conditions. According to such authors, younger learners in informal language learning environments often have more time to devote to language learning. They have more opportunities to hear and use the language in environments where there is no strong pressure to speak fluently and correctly early on. In contrast, older learners are often in situations that require more complex language. Adults are always ashamed of their lack of language mastery and they may develop a sense of inadequacy after frustrating experiences trying to express exactly what they want.

Adults are characterized by maturity, self-confidence, autonomy, solid decision-making, and are generally more practical, multi-tasking, purposeful, self-directed, experienced, and less open-minded and receptive to change. All these traits affect their motivation, as well as their ability to learn. The important characteristics of the adult learner include but are not limited to the following: Superior cognitive abilities that can lead them to great success in certain classroom endeavors, acquired self-confidence not found in children, and rich positive and negative life experiences. According to Brown and Lee (2015, p. 117), all of this "...gives them background schemata as a backdrop for the situations introduced in a curriculum".

The same authors analyze the adult student in the following aspects:

- Abstract thinking ability: Adults can better understand a context reduced segment of language;
- Attention span: They have longer attention spans that may not be interesting to them;
- Self-confidence: They frequently have good levels of self-confidence, but teachers should never underestimate the emotional fragility of adults;
- Vocational interests: Adults are more able to focus on their professional future, that is, they are supposed to keep their motivational intensity when they are focused in achieving their vocational goals.

Adults have many advantages when learning a second language, but instructors must consider other facts that adults have in their lives, that sometimes may put their learning at risk. According to Harmer (2007), the advantage that older learners have over younger learners is that they have a wider range of life experiences to draw on, both as individuals and as learners. They are supposed to be more disciplined than adolescents, being focused on a task for a larger period time even when it seems boring.

On the other hand, adult learners come with a lot of previous learning experiences which may delay their progress. Students with negative learning experiences in the past may be nervous in class. Some of them who used to failure may be consciously or subconsciously prepared for more failure. Older learners who are without studying for years may find classrooms discouraging and intimidating places. They might also judge teaching methods from their past, which the teacher will have to consider.

Harmer (2007) stated that all learners respond to various stimuli like visuals, sounds, music, movement, etc. though, for most of them, certain things stimulate them into learning more than other things do. The Neuro-Linguistic Programming model (often called NLP) takes account of this by showing how some students are especially influenced by visual stimuli and are therefore probable to remember things better if they see them. On the other hand, some students respond best to things they hear, that is, they are affected by *auditory* input. Kinaesthetic activity is especially good for learners that seem to learn way better when the activity involves physical task, such as moving around, or hands-on. The important thing here is to point out that although we all respond to these stimuli (visual, auditory, kinaesthetic), we have

one that is more powerful and enables us to learn and remember what we have learned.

Howard Gardner (*apud* Harmer, 2007) offered the concept of Multiple Intelligences. He formulated that we all have several different intelligences (mathematical, musical, interpersonal, spatial, emotional, etc.) However, a person may have the mathematical intelligence highly developed while the interpersonal (the ability to interact with and relate to other people) might be less advanced. This happens all the time with most of us, so it is inappropriate to describe someone being “intelligent” or “unintelligent”, what happens is that we have areas better developed than others.

Harmer (2007) concluded that in any classroom teachers will find a few different individuals with different learning styles and preferences. This is what we can learn from the theories seen above. “Experienced teachers know this and try to ensure that different learning styles are catered for as often as possible” (Harmer, 2007, p. 16).

When an adult who has never studied a second language before decides to learn one, it is because this person has a reasonable reason. According to Fernandes and Mulik (2011), there are many reasons that lead adults to learn English, among them the main ones have been: a planned trip to a country where they can use the language to communicate, professional growth, family encouragement, interest in language, identification with the culture, better understanding of movies, conversations with other people and, in the case here, when immigrating to an English-speaking country. Brazilian immigrants have a strong reason to learn English, and they are supposed to be motivated. However, what is motivation? How does a teacher keep adult learners motivated? What strategies should teachers use to motivate students? When the teacher finds out the students’ necessity, he or she must have the sensitivity to analyze the needs of the students and become a collaborator for them to succeed in learning.

Woolfolk (2013, p. 431) defined motivation as “an internal state that arouses, directs and maintains behavior”. Motivation is a boost that keeps people interested in, to begin, and to finish actions. Adults need high motivation when learning a second language because, besides this task of studying a new language, they have many other tasks and concerns that adult life requires, as work and family.

Brown and Lee (2015) assumed that the success of any task is proportionally linked to the level of motivation in its accomplishment. Thus, students must be

really interested and focused on learning. Academics know that adults have their lives, work and family, but they need to try to leave the other aspects of their lives aside as much as they can in order to succeed.

Brown and Lee (2015), from the behaviorist perspective, commented that motivation is related to reward through positive reinforcement. If the student has already experienced this positive reinforcement, his or her next actions will always be motivated to acquire new rewards. In this sense, it has appeared that motivation is related to beliefs, which are acquired through the positive and negative experiences of learners. In cognitive terms, the same author insisted that motivation lies in the choices people make to reach the product, which the student will experience at the end of their learning. In the constructivist view, everyone is motivated in a different way, but this individuality is inserted in a culture within a context, so the context in which the student is inserted in their learning process must be taken into consideration.

Ideally, these three views on motivation interface, interconnect and complement each other. Creating basic conditions for motivation is essential, and the teacher is also responsible for motivating the student, because if he does not have enough intrinsic motivation, the teacher needs to develop the extrinsic for this student, assisting him in his process of learning. Some things that the teacher can do are increase learners' expectations of success by promoting the pursuit of goals in the second language and enthusiasm for the course; make teaching materials always relevant to students; encourage positive self-assessment by offering motivating rewards and grades; change the monotony of classroom routines; create chances for students to experience a successful learning and control the level of anxiety in their students.

However, there are factors that end up negatively influencing learning and may be due to the students' lack of motivation, beliefs about teaching and even the teacher's lack of sensitivity to understand students' needs, so it is beneficial that the teacher be sensitive to understand the needs of his or her students and positively interfere with their learning, always trying to encourage students who will not be motivated in this journey.

Fernandes and Mulik (2011) asserted that every learner, whether consciously or unconsciously, has a belief system built on their learning experiences. For Barcelos (2006), beliefs are built not only socially, but also individually, being dynamic, contextual, and paradoxical. They are dynamic and contextual because

they change over a period or even within a situation. Beliefs are paradoxical in that they are largely influential in the teaching-learning process functioning as obstacles, preventing learning from happening.

Research indicates that learners' beliefs are factors that directly reflect students' learning. Horwitz (1988) was one of the pioneers in belief research. The results obtained in her studies were that the beliefs that students have, reflect on the learning process. With adults it is not different and, in some ways, affects even more since they have a larger belief framework than an adolescent, for example due to their life and learning experiences.

Fernandes and Mulik (2011) cited Alvarez and Bonfim (2008) in their article, saying that these authors argued about the extrinsic and intrinsic demands that occur in the 30-year transition. The adult is demanded by his family, society, western culture, and himself/herself. At this moment, the adult experiences two stressful phenomena: the feeling of failure for not having met the social, family and self-expectations, and the feeling of loss of physical power, by the appearance of the first feelings of old age.

Moreover, it is highlighted that the adult confronts already formed concepts with fixed neural structures, that is, the new neural structures of the foreign language have no relation to those already formed, thus hindering the association. Regarding the cognitive factor, the author formulated the concept that as much as the adult has clearer goals and well-directed motivation, adults do not have enough time to spend studying, there are other responsibilities and social roles that make learning difficult.

Krashen and Terrell (1983) discussed the idea that adults do not learn as easily as younger people has become popular. However, the author states that age is not the differential factor in this acquisition, but the level of the affective filter and the amount of effort the student has for the learning. Fernandes and Mulik (2011) stated that affection is very important in adult learning a second language. Many of them before adulthood did not have a good experience of affection with a teacher of this language, which probably led to learning failure. The student should feel confident about the teacher, be sure that his attempt to succeed will be viewed with care by the professional, not with a scolding look. The adult learner, who is already under pressure from society, needs to feel comfortable during language classes.

For the affection to be alive in the classroom, the teacher must obviously enjoy helping their students

develop their skills in the target language. He or she also needs to show interest in being a mediator during this learning process and know the main reasons their students present to learn English. Having this affectionate contact with students makes them more comfortable expressing themselves in the target language.

Krashen and Terrell (1983, p. 31) described the affectionate filter hypothesis, as being primordial for the acquisition of a second language. The author confirmed that "the level of affection is related to success in second language acquisition". The affectionate filter is part of the internal process in which the learner's emotional state, attitudes, needs, motivation when learning a language are set, regulating, and selecting language models to be learned, the order of priority in acquisition and the speed in this acquisition.

2.2 Strategies and principles to Teach Adult English Learners

Total physical response (TPR) is a language teaching method developed by James Asher, a professor emeritus of psychology at San José State University. It is based on the coordination of language and physical movement. In TPR, instructors give commands to students in the target language with body movements, and students respond with whole-body actions.

According to Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011, p. 109), "teachers who use TPR believe in the importance of having their students enjoy their experience of learning to communicate in another language."

Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) stated that TPR was developed to reduce the stress people feel when they are studying other languages and thus motivate students to persist in their study beyond a beginning level of proficiency. Regarding the role of the teacher and the role of the students, initially, the teacher is the director of all student behavior. The students imitate all nonverbal model of the teacher. Usually after 10-20 hours of instruction, some students will be "ready to speak". At that point, there will be a role reversal with individual students directing the teacher and the other students.

According to Conroy (1999) Total physical response has several advantages: Students enjoy getting out of their chairs and moving around. Simple TPR activities do not require a great deal of preparation on the part of the teacher. TPR is aptitude-free, working well with a mixed ability class, and with students having various disabilities. It is good for kinesthetic learners who need to be active in the class. Class size

need not be a problem, and it works effectively for children and adults.

According to Harmer (2007) CLT has two main guiding principles: the first is that language is not just patterns of grammar with vocabulary item slotted in, but also involves language functions such as inviting, agreeing and disagreeing, suggesting, etc., which students should learn how to perform using a variety of language exponents, for instance, invite somebody by saying "Would you like to come to the cinema?", or "How about a film?". Students also need to be aware of what appropriate kind of language to use (formal, informal, tentative, technical, etc.). CLT is not just about the language, it is about how it is used.

The second principle is that if students get enough exposure to language, and opportunities for language use – and if they are motivated – then language learning will take care of itself. The focus of CLT is on communicating real messages, and not just grammatically controlled language.

Communicative Language Teaching has had a thoroughly beneficial effect since it reminded teachers that people learn languages not so that they know about them, but so that they can communicate with them. Giving students different kinds of language, pointing them towards aspects of style and appropriacy, and giving them opportunities to try out real language within the classroom humanized what had sometimes been too rigidly controlled.

Task-Based Learning (TBL)

Harmer (2007) stated that TBL is a natural extension of communicative language teaching. In Task Based Learning, the emphasis is on the task rather than the language. For example, students perform real-life tasks such as ordering food, or making a presentation on a certain topic. After the task has been completed, they can look at the language they have used and work on any imperfections that have arisen, correcting grammatical mistakes, or thinking about aspects of style. In other words, instead of language study leading to a task, the task itself is the focus and jumping-off point for possible subsequent study later. TBL like a communicative methodology, has allowed teachers and students to concentrate on how we achieve things with language, and how we can use language for certain tasks.

2.3 Brazilian Immigration to the United States

For the reader to better understand Brazilian immigration to the U.S, it is interesting to go back in the past and know how everything began. According

to Marcus (2009), in the 1940s, quartz was Brazil's most sought-after product for war industries because it was "the only known commercial source of quartz suitable for radio-frequency control" (Abreu, 1946, p. 24 *apud* Marcus, p. 485, 2009). In southwestern Goiás (a state) and east-central Minas Gerais (a state) overlapped precisely with areas of mica/quartz (crystal) extraction during World War II (Marcus, 2009, p. 224). American engineers settled themselves in those areas in the 1940s and carried out a system of mechanized mica extraction (Marcus, 2009, p. 242). As a result, mica/quartz extraction, especially in Governador Valadares – Minas Gerais and the encompassing Rio Doce Valley led to the development of constant contacts between residents and visiting U.S. engineers/geologists, generating ties between these locals and Americans as well as to subsequent first migrations. Local newspapers in Governador Valadares widely covered the U.S. experience of local upper-middle-class exchange students, further inspiring -- that is, stimulating the geographical imagination of -- other residents to migrate to the United States (Siqueira; Lourenço, 2006). Additionally, U.S. Protestant missionaries, mostly Pentecostals, had evangelized in those regions, particularly in Piracanjuba, during the 1970s and 1980s. Later, after the U.S. missionaries left Brazil, locals in those regions who stayed in contact with them also gained access to religious and labor -- market networks -- construction work; for example -- available to them through those ties, particularly in Atlanta, generating and sustaining successive and exponential migration flows. Still Marcus (2009), said that Brazilian immigration was a recent phenomenon that achieved momentum in the 1980s in unknown numbers, mostly because of Brazil's political/economic disruptions.

Lima and Castro said

The Brazilian emigration process begins in the 1970s and has experienced abrupt growth throughout the 1980s. The 1990s represent a moment of relative stabilization, with a decline in outflows. This process has resumed its growth since 2000. According to the Center for Development and Regional Planning of the Federal University of Minas Gerais, more than 2.5 million Brazilians lived abroad in 1995. The Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs estimates that in 2014 there were about 3.1 million Brazilian immigrants spread across all continents. Unlike many other groups, Brazilian immigrants in the United States and other countries are not fleeing conditions of absolute poverty or civil war. As well they are not political refugees seeking asylum.

Most of them come from urban areas and the lower middle and lower classes, and many went to college. The exception is only for agricultural workers and prospectors who left for the border regions of Brazil (Lima; Castro 2017, p. 15).

Lima and Castro (2017) also stated that Brazilian immigrants, particularly those who emigrated in the 1980s, ran away mainly from the economic crisis that struck the country, making it impossible for the middle class to maintain their standard of living. This period, called the "lost decade," in addition to experiencing hyperinflation, was marked by deep unemployment, low wages, high cost of living, and economic recession. This drastic economic situation can be exemplified by the fact that Brazil experienced, during this period, four currencies, five wage and price freezes, and nine economic stabilization programs.

The five-decade history of Brazilian immigration to the United States shows that the reasons for the decision to emigrate are many and complex. These motivations go beyond the simple financial goal. In addition to the economic motivations that drive so many people to the decision to live in another country, there are also psychological, cultural factors and issues related to their personal relationship networks. According to Soares, Martes and Fleischer (2003 *apud* Lima; Castro, 2017), kinship and friendship contribute to intensify the migratory flow and maintain the link between places of origin and destination. Therefore, social networks are an important factor in understanding international migrations, including those destined to the United States.

Following on the reasons for emigration, research by Lima and Plastrik (2007) indicated that for 48% of Brazilians living in Massachusetts, the reason for emigration was the "pursuit of a better life". Another 5% "joined their families already in the United States"; 8% came to "start a life"; or give a better "education to the children" (1%). For 28% of the people, the reasons for emigration were work related, with 20% emigrating "for a better salary" and 8% emigrating "looking for a job".

According to Lima and Castro (2017), Brazilians, in 2000, were the 28th largest immigrant community in the United States (2000 U.S. Census), ranking 19th in 2014 (2014 ACS – American Community Survey 1-Year Estimate). Florida, with about 260,000 Brazilians, according to MRE (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) estimates and ACS distribution by state, is the most popular destination among Brazilians. A census tract analysis of the Brazilian population shows that there are two primary settlement areas

for Brazilians in Florida: Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach and Orlando.

Massachusetts is the state with the second largest population of Brazilian immigrants, about 218,000, using the same methodology. Three areas of primary concentration of Brazilians stand out in the state: Boston and the North Shore, the region known as Metro West, and the Southern Coast of the state and its islands of Martha's Vineyards and Nantucket (South Shore). Cape Cod & Islands).

Blizzard and Batalova (2019) stated that approximately 450,000 Brazilian immigrants resided in the United States in 2017, an increase of nearly one-third over a seven-year span that was marked by difficult conditions in Brazil, including a recession accompanied by high unemployment and inflation. Brazilians, who now represent 1% of the 44.5 million immigrants in the United States, have historically sought improved economic opportunities via emigration, especially since the 1980s. After civilian government returned to Brazil in 1985 following two decades of military rule, hyperinflation crippled the country's economy until the mid-1990s. During this time, Brazilians began to arrive in the United States in growing numbers. In 1980, about 40,000 Brazilian immigrants lived in the United States. By 1990, that figure had doubled, and further growth followed: During the 1990s, the Brazilian population nearly tripled, reaching more than 200,000 by the turn of the 21st century, and has doubled again since then.

2.4 English Proficiency and Degree of Education

Lima and Castro (2017) said that Brazilians' mastery of the English language differs somewhat from the proficiency of other US immigrants. Brazilians generally have a lower proportion of non-English speakers 4% compared to other immigrants 10%. At the same time, they have more people who speak English only, or speak English well or very well: 83% of Brazilians speak English well or very well, compared to 71% of all immigrants.

The proportion of non-English speaking Brazilians is higher for the Brazilian population of the New York-New Jersey (6%) and Massachusetts (6%) regions, and lower for the Florida (3%) and California (3%) regions.). Of Florida Brazilians, 82% speak English only, or speak English well or very well compared to 90% of these California residents, 81% in the New York-New Jersey region and 74% for Massachusetts.

When compared to immigrants from other

countries, Brazilians are less represented among those with a low education and better represented among those with higher levels of educational backgrounds. While 30% of all immigrants residing in the United States do not have secondary school (equivalent to high school), among Brazilians this proportion is only 11%. Almost a third of Brazilians have a high school diploma 30%, compared to 23% of all immigrants.

In addition, Brazilians also have a higher proportion of college graduates than immigrants in general. While 24% of Brazilians have a bachelor's degree, only 17% of all immigrants have it. Finally, the proportion of people with postgraduate degrees (masters and / or doctorates) is also higher for Brazilians 13, compared to 12% for all immigrants and 11% for natives.

2.5 Methods

In this quantitative and qualitative study, data was collected from Brazilian students at an English Language School in Boston, Massachusetts. They study 20 hours a week to keep their visas or legal status in the country. The sources were a survey and interviews with the objective of finding their history of learning English in Brazil, the difficulties they have to learn a second language and the motivation to come to the United States, in most cases with family and children. Both methods were applied to increase the credibility and validity of the study's findings.

For this study, an online survey was provided to the participants. The online platform utilized was Google Forms. The survey was in the form of a questionnaire containing thirteen structured questions and two descriptive questions. Sixty-five students from Brazil were asked to answer the survey. They are from different parts of Brazil, most from the following states: Sao Paulo and Minas Gerais. The age of the respondents varies from 18 to 50 years old.

Face-to-face interviews were done to achieve better results for the purpose of this study. The participants were three people, also students at the English school in Boston. The interviews were done in a natural environment. This indicates that the interviews will be adaptable. The participants were required to answer ten questions related to their experience of learning English in Brazil and here in the US, what motivated them to come here and, what their goals are here in this country. Each interview session took from 30 minutes to 1 hour and were face-to-face. The responses of the interviewees were captured on audio recorders. Notes were also taken using notebooks. The

reason for using interviews in this research is to collect extensive and detailed data from the participants.

Considering that this study is quantitative and qualitative, the objective of analyzing the collected data in the survey was to find out demographics about the Brazilian adult population that are coming to the US to study English, and general statements about how Brazilians learned the English language in Brazil. Why did they come to the USA to learn? What motivates Brazilian immigrants in America to learn English? What challenges do they face while learning a second language being adults?

The interviews had the same objectives, however, with the interview, it was possible to have more details about the reasons that made them come here and, what their expectations are about learning English here in the U.S. Also, these face-to-face interviews were good to feel their emotions when talking about their experiences learning English.

The survey was sent to about 53 people, all of them are Brazilian students in an English school in Boston, Massachusetts, at the beginner level (A1) according to the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages), but only 29 people answered. Among these people, 69% of the respondents are between 31 and 40 years old, 17.2% are between 41 and 50 years old, 10.3% are between 18 and 30 years old and only 3.4% are older than 50 years old. They are from the following states: Minas Gerais, Espírito Santo, Mato Grosso do Sul, Santa Catarina, Sao Paulo, Paraiba, and Rio De Janeiro. Regarding the marital status, 75.9% of the respondents are married, 13.8% are single, 6.8% divorced and 3.4% are in a steady relationship. When asked if they have children, 65.5% said of the respondents said yes and 34.5% said no. 51% of the people who responded to the survey stated that they went to college.

Moving on to the questions about learning English, there was the following non-structured question: What was your motivation to come to the U.S. to learn English? Most of the respondents answered similarly, stating that they can have better job opportunities not only in Brazil but also anywhere. But there were answers like: *“To have the experience and opportunity to live abroad and really learn the language and to get to know the culture.”* *“The inability to learn the English language in Brazil.”* From this statement it is clear that they do not believe they can learn the English language in Brazil. *“I wanted to have daily contact with English since in Brazil my approach was almost zero and my learning was*

terrible, I could not develop my learning and ended up giving up studying.” *“To live in a place that speaks the language I want to learn.”*

When they were asked: “How did you learn English in Brazil”? 51.7% of the respondents said that they learned only in public middle and high schools. The following question was “How do you rate the instruction you received? 58.5% claimed that the English instruction they had was terrible. However, in the question: “What was your level of interest in learning another language in Brazil, in this case, English, on a scale where: 0 – no interest, 1 – little interest, 2 – some interest, 3 – reasonable interest, 4 – much interest – 13.8% answered that they had no interest, 6.9% said they had little interest, 24.1% had some interest, there was a tie in the percentage of the last two options – 27.6% had reasonable and much interest in learning English in Brazil.

Regarding their English practice here, I asked: “How do you communicate in public places in your daily life?” For this question, they had either two structured options to answer or they could write their personal answer, and the results were:

- 93.1% said: “I go everywhere and try to communicate the way I can because I need to learn”.

Nobody answered the structured option: “I only go either to Brazilian stores or places where I know there are people who speak Portuguese”. Another structured question was “How much do you speak English in your daily life?” and the answers were:

- 37.9% – Very little, but I have some connections who are either Americans or people from other countries;
- 27.6% – Only at school;

When asked to complete the statement: “Learning English is...”, they had the following options to answer and the results were:

- 48.3% – Hard, but despite the difficulties, I am putting effort into it.
- 27.6% – Complicated, I want to learn, but the worries of adulthood take my time and focus, delaying my learning.
- 24.1% – Enjoyable, I like learning and I am dedicating myself.

They also responded to a question: “What skills do you have more difficulties?” For this question they could mark more than one option:

- 69% – Speaking
- 62.1% – Listening comprehension.

Almost at the end of the survey, they answered

questions that are crucial for the objective of this study: “Do you feel motivated to study English?” 88% said “yes”, and only 12% said “a little bit” and nobody answered “no”. The last but one question was: “What do you think it delays/impedes your learning? Check one or more options.” Below are the results:

- 60% – Do not spend the ideal time to study.
- 52% – Daily contact with the Brazilian community.
- 44% – A lot of Brazilian students at school, ending up speaking too much Portuguese;

The final question was: “What are your goals here in the U.S.?” The answers were:

- 44.8% – Learn English, go to college and try to get residency documents in the country;
- 24.1% – Learn English, go to college and return to Brazil.
- 13.8% – Learn English and return to Brazil.

The interview data were collected from three participants, both Brazilian female students from the same English school in Boston. The interview was conducted in Portuguese because the interviewees are at a low level of English, so they felt more comfortable speaking their native language. Basically, the same questions of the survey were asked, but in the interview, they provided more detailed answers. All the interviewees came to the U.S. with a “tourist” visa and to go to this English school, they changed their immigration status to “students”. When they apply for this change, they have to wait until the process is approved by the U.S. immigration department, which usually takes a few months. So the amount of time they are in the country does not reflect the time they are studying English.

The first interviewee is a female student, she is 38 years old and has been in the U.S. for 1 year and 3 months. At school, she is at the beginner level (A1) according to the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). In Brazil, she finished high school but did not go to college. During her time at school, she had some English classes but she does not remember what she studied. Although she had some interest in learning English, she never looked for a course. She came to this country with her husband and two children. She said her family decided to come here for two reasons: the first one is because she works in Brazil in the textile and fashion design field, so it is really important to speak English to be updated with the products and everything in this area. She said that she wanted to go to college to study fashion design. The second reason is that her oldest

son is really into English and he always showed the desire to study abroad.

She reported that she is willing to learn and has been learning many things since she started studying, but she is shy to speak, and she feels insecure to speak in English. She has difficulties to understand some teachers when they are giving instructions and when she needs to speak in public she completely freezes, and this issue delays her learning. Regarding to her daily routine here, she goes everywhere for shopping and she always tries to communicate in English even having difficulties. Sometimes she needs to use the translator on her phone. Besides this, she has few contacts with the English language. She does not have acquaintances to speak English, so basically, the only opportunity to practice is at school with the teachers. Despite the difficulties, she feels motivated to learn, although many times she cannot focus because of the preoccupations of being a mother and wife. She is aware that she should dedicate more time to learn and practice. However, she tries to practice watching movies and series on Netflix. When she watches series, she likes to watch one episode twice, once with subtitles in English, and the second time with no subtitles. She hopes she will reach a good level of English in order to go to college here. She likes her experience living in the U.S. and she said she would like to get documents to reside here.

The second interviewee is 33 years old and has been in the U.S. for 1 year and 8 months. She is also at the A1 level. She finished High School, but she never went to college. She is married and has one child. She studied English only during her time at school (Junior and High School) but she said that it is like she had never studied because it was really superficial, and she does not remember anything about what she studied. She reported that she had some interest in learning English because she used to work in a company where she dealt with international sales, but there was a co-worker who spoke English and this person was designated to talk to the international customers. However, she took some English classes in a private school in order to learn and talk to the clients herself, but she gave up because she did not like the teaching method at school. The main reason to come to the U.S. was to really have an experience abroad, learn and practice the language, and the culture.

Although she has difficulties communicating in her daily life, she goes everywhere, that is, every place she needs to go like supermarkets, stores, restaurants, etc. but often she needs to use the translator.

She stated that her son who is 6 years old and goes to school already speaks very well, so she speaks with him daily, besides some acquaintances who she has some contact. She also listens to music and to the radio every day, as well she watches movies and series to have listening practice. She likes learning English here and she feels motivated despite the difficulties. At this level, she can understand many things and she can write something, but she cannot speak.

Regarding the school environment, she asserted that there are too many students in the class (from 15 to 17) all of them are Brazilians, so they end up speaking Portuguese, delaying the learning. She said that this happens because these students have different backgrounds, but all of them including her, of course, are in a different country, living a different life they had in Brazil. They have to deal with a spouse, children, they miss their families in Brazil, plus they are trying to adapt to a new culture, so they use the classroom as a place to feel at home as they have so many fellows. Despite these issues, she wants to reach a level to go to college and she stated she would like to get documents to reside here. She said that she feels very welcomed in the country, so she wants to stay and live here with her family.

The third and last interviewee is also a female student, she is 29 years old, married with no kids. She has been in the United States for 1 year and 7 seven months. She started at school in April. In Brazil, she studied English only in middle and high school, but it was poor learning. She started college but did not finish, because she decided to come here. Her major was in Industrial Engineering and speak English is really important in this area. She reported that she could not apply for some training positions in her area because all of them required very good skills in English. She tried to apply for positions in automaker factories like Volvo, Renault, but she never passed the first interview because she did not speak English. So this was the main reason to come to this country and learn the English language.

Regarding her life here, in the beginning, she preferred to go shopping at Brazilian stores, but now she goes everywhere in order to practice what she has been learning at school. She is willing to learn but she stated that her life changed completely since she came here and she feels overwhelmed, delaying her learning. She thinks it is very difficult to learn English, more difficult than the math problems that she had to solve in her major. The most difficult thing for her is to speak, due to shyness. She stated it is extremely

difficult for her when she must speak in public even in her first language.

In addition to the classes at school, she watches video-lessons on the internet and practices through applications on her phone. She practices every day and she feels she is improving compared to the time she started. She can read and write in English, she understands the teachers, but speaking is a challenge. She also stated that the fact of having many Brazilians in the school, makes her stay in the comfort zone because she knows she always has somebody to speak Portuguese. However, she feels motivated to learn, and her goal is to reach an advanced level to either go to college here or go back to Brazil to finish her degree there and be able to get one of the jobs she could not get because she did not speak English.

3 Conclusion

As expected through this research, it was found that a great percentage of Brazilians come to the U.S to learn English because of their frustration about not being able to learn in their home country. As stated in the problem of this study, in Brazil, English teaching in elementary and high school is an issue that seems far from being improved. One of the reasons seems to be the fact that English is not mandatory. The federal law requires a “foreign language,” which may be Spanish, for example. Students in middle and high school are required to take 2 lessons of 45 to 50 minutes a week. The lessons are often based on grammar, vocabulary, and reading. Classrooms have around twenty-five to thirty students, making the teacher’s job more difficult to apply a communicative approach. However, when the population goes to the job market, they are required to have advanced skills in order to do certain jobs.

The study revealed that they are so frustrated about the poor learning they had at school that they do not believe they can learn in Brazil, so they come to the U.S. and hope to learn the language. As they experience a new life in the new country, with opportunities, they start dreaming the “American dream”, seeing a better future for their families. Nevertheless, they face challenges as adult learners, like shyness to speak in public, dealing with a new culture while they have families and kids to take care of, etc.

A survey and interviews were used as methods for this study and all the participants were Brazilian students, most between 31 and 40 years old, all of them with a student visa or maintaining a student status in the country for language training in a school

in Boston. They have to study long hours in order to keep their legal status before the U.S immigration. The survey was answered by 29 people and it showed that more than 50% of the respondents went to college in Brazil. Also, more than 50% of the respondents said that they had poor English learning during middle and high school and they came here to have daily contact with the language and live the American culture.

The survey and the interviews also showed that they are willing to learn, they put a lot of effort into this, but at the same time it is difficult, it is hard to keep the focus on learning due to the concerns of adult life delaying their learning. Beyond the hours they spend at school, they are aware they need more practice, but they do not spend the necessary time to learn outside of school. On the other hand, they do not have this practice, because they do not have friends or acquaintances to speak English, they usually live within the Brazilian community and the fact that more than half of students at the school are Brazilians, they feel comfortable to speak Portuguese.

Besides of all these issues, they feel motivated, and they hope to reach an advanced level or even become fluent in the English language in order to go to college here for undergraduate or graduate school. The survey showed that 44% of the respondents want to get a degree here and want to stay in the country and reside legally and permanently.

The study found out that this new wave of Brazilian immigrants come to the U.S. to learn English because they feel frustrated of not having learned the language at school and now their jobs require an advanced or fluent level, so they think it is better to come to the country where the language is spoken. Learning English is something that can bring them more opportunities and most of them when having the experience of living and studying in the USA, start thinking of settling and getting documents of residency. However, they face challenges to learn because being adults with a life, family and other factors to deal with, they do not find enough time and motivation to really study. Moreover, the age factor might contribute for the shyness to speak, and lack of confidence, which may delay their learning. They also feel frustrated for not having learned in Brazil and many of them missed job opportunities because they did not speak English. Now, they are trying to make up for lost time. They are trying their best, but they have their weaknesses, difficulties and what they reported most is the shyness they feel to speak and fear of being judged by others.

Before the research was conducted, it was believed that Brazilians came to the United States only to pursue the "American dream" and were not interested in learning English. In the process of learning more about them, it was discovered that they are extremely frustrated about not having learned English in Brazil, and many of them were unable to secure jobs due to their inability to speak English. Efforts are now being made to catch up with what was missed. Despite their efforts, weaknesses and difficulties are experienced, and what is most reported is their shyness and fear of being judged by others, which may be rooted in their adult status. It is certain that a change in the way the students are viewed will occur now that the findings have been uncovered. The goal is to provide students with a comfortable and confident environment where they can express themselves. It is important that recognition is given for the effort put into their work.

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