




THE PANORAMA OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN THE EARLY YEARS OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN GURUPI AND NEIGHBORING MUNICIPALITIES: A BIBLIOGRAPHIC AND DOCUMENTARY ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the status of English language teaching in the early years of elementary school in Gurupi and in the surrounding municipalities, such as Aliança, Cariri, Dueré, Peixe and Sucupira. The offer of English Language at this stage of education is considered essential for the linguistic and cognitive development of students, preparing them for greater insertion in the globalized scenario (Lima Júnior, 2021; Chaguri, 2020,

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Briggs 2013). While all the municipalities surveyed offer IL for children, in Gurupi a low offer was identified. However, the full implementation of the discipline still requires greater awareness and engagement of the community and local managers. The research adopted a methodological approach based on bibliographic and documentary review, consulting sources such as Lima Júnior (2021); Chaguri (2020), Briggs (2013) and the Ministry of Education with all official documentation presented. The results offer subsidies for the formulation of more effective educational policies, aiming at reducing educational inequality and improving English language teaching in the region.

Keywords: English Language Teaching. Basic Education. Educational Policies. Gurupi and Region. Educational Inequality.



INTRODUCTION

Contemplating a qualitative and democratic education is a right provided for by legislation, this instructive instrument regulates and ensures that a citizen is properly enrolled in some educational unit in his municipality for integral learning of disciplines and socialization with others, it also guarantees an open space for students to get involved according to their physical individualities, mental and expression. When it comes to public education, it is notorious that there are several barriers to the exercise of its right, according to the laws and educational guidelines.

This work analyzes and introduces the importance of the implementation of the English Language (IL) in the early years of education, through the effects that imply the lack or non-observance that the teaching of the discipline is not necessary for this stage. In the current context of education in the public sphere, the teaching of IL is not mandatory for the initial years, being optional. On the other hand, private schools offer the IL within their disciplines in the first years of Elementary School, systematizing teaching from an early age, these two education systems – public and private – reflect an inequality of learning for the same educational stage.

The public of the municipal units served in the early years of elementary school knows the language of IL autonomously through TV, cell phone, games, movies, drawings or music. The fact is that these children absorb the language according to their experiences, without any supervision or formal teaching, causing a shallow and fossilized learning. In the cities of southern Tocantins, it would not be uncommon to find cases in the same neighborhood or family in which there are students from the municipal network and the private network in the early years of elementary school in which there is a visible discrepancy in knowledge of a foreign language (FL).

In recent years, the teaching of IL in the early years of elementary school has become a topic of growing interest and debate in the educational scenario, especially in peripheral contexts such as the municipalities bordering the city of Gurupi-TO. In view of the growing importance of English proficiency for the insertion of students in a globalized world, there is an urgent need to understand and evaluate the effectiveness of teaching this language in this crucial stage of education.

The region of Gurupi and its neighboring municipalities, such as Aliança, Cariri, Dueré, Peixe and Sucupira, constitutes a diversified scenario in socioeconomic, cultural and educational terms. In view of this diversity, it is essential to understand how the teaching of IL is approached in these locations, the challenges faced by educational actors and the impact of this teaching on the educational and socioeconomic development of students.

Thus, this study aimed to provide a comprehensive and grounded analysis of the panorama of IL teaching in the early years of elementary school in Gurupi and in the surrounding municipalities. To this end, specific objectives were outlined that aim to investigate the current status of IL education, contribute to the development of more effective educational policies and combat the educational inequality of IL education in the region.

The investigation on how the teaching of IL is approached in the institutions of these locations, the main challenges faced by teachers and students and the perceived impact on the cognitive, educational and socioeconomic development of students was essential to answer the following question: What is the current status of English language teaching in the early years of elementary school in Gurupi and in the neighboring municipalities?

This research was motivated by the urgent need to deepen the understanding of the teaching of IL in peripheral contexts. Access to quality education, including foreign language learning, recognized as a fundamental right and a cornerstone for human, social and economic development since in the early years of primary education, the teaching of IL plays a vital role by providing essential linguistic and cognitive tools. However, educational realities in peripheral regions present challenges such as precarious infrastructure, lack of didactic resources and the lack of specific teacher training.

The work is developed as follows: in the first topic, the literature review brings a detailed analysis of the importance of teaching IL in the early years of elementary school, addressing the effective methodologies and the challenges faced, especially in peripheral contexts. In the second topic, it is possible to find a discussion about the impact of the English language offer from the first years of schooling, considering the brain plasticity of children and the associated cognitive and cultural advantages. The final topic of the review presents the analysis of the situation of IL education in Gurupi and neighboring municipalities, highlighting the scarcity of resources and the need for more inclusive educational policies to reduce educational inequality in the region.

The in-depth analysis of these issues will make it possible to identify gaps and propose solutions to promote more inclusive and equitable educational policies, with the aim of combating educational inequality and contributing to a more just and democratic society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The teaching of IL in the early grades of elementary school has received increasing attention in the educational debate, standing out for its significant influence on the



development of children's linguistic, cognitive, and socio-emotional skills. The effectiveness of methodologies that prioritize active communication and interaction among students has been emphasized, as these approaches favor not only the practice of the language, but also the construction of collaborative skills and the engagement of students in the learning process.

However, several challenges persist, especially in peripheral contexts, such as the municipalities around Gurupi where the scarcity of adequate didactic resources, the lack of specific teacher training and the low linguistic proficiency of students are important challenges to be faced, in addition to the lack of supply of this language at a more appropriate age.

While it is possible to learn a new language at any age, children have a significant advantage in this process. This is mainly due, according to Uebel (2022), to the brain's plasticity during the first years of life, along with its natural predisposition to develop new skills and absorb knowledge.

Therefore, inserting the teaching of IL in the early years of elementary school not only takes advantage of this critical window of opportunity – as we will see later, but also promotes the global development of children, preparing them for an increasingly globalized and interconnected world.

This approach not only broadens future education and career opportunities for students but also contributes to a deeper and more inclusive understanding of cultural and linguistic diversity. In addition, by promoting English competence from the earliest years of life, children have access to a wide range of resources, materials, and cultural experiences, thus enriching their learning process and broadening their horizons.

Thus, by highlighting the importance of introducing English language instruction to children from the earliest years of schooling, we not only recognize the uniqueness of this critical period of development, but also reinforce our commitment to quality, inclusive, and equitable education for all students. This conclusion highlights the relevance of integrating English teaching from the first years of life, taking advantage of the cognitive and linguistic advantages that children have in this crucial phase of development.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN THE EARLY YEARS OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

English language teaching, if applied in the early years of Elementary School, will play a fundamental role in the educational development of students. At this stage, children are in the critical period for the beginning of learning the Portuguese language and for the acquisition of new languages.



According to Singleton and Ryan (2004 apud Lima Júnior, 2012) Critical period is a term used in biology that refers to a limited phase in the development of an organism during which an activity or competence needs to be acquired in order to be incorporated into the behavior of such an organism, which happens.

This teaching plays a fundamental role for society and especially for the local community of these students who in the future will be professionals, it also allows the expansion of the students' repertoire, enabling various opportunities, such as access to good jobs, international travel, and a high critical sense in relation to other cultures.

The importance of acquiring a foreign language in the early grades The role that an EL plays in the early grades is to help the child's social and cultural relationships, enabling a more solid intellectual development through the cultural aspect that the IL has, in order to develop individual potentialities and at the same time collective work. This implies the stimulation of the subject's autonomy, developing the feeling of security in relation to their own capacities. The student in the initial grades can perceive that through his work and effort it is possible to transform and intervene in the environment where he lives (CHAGURI, 2005, p. 9).

Children's exposure to the English language is intentionally effective, considering that they are just beginning to explore the world around them. At this stage, immersed in family and social life, children are taught from an early age about acceptable and unacceptable behaviors, assimilate the rules imposed by their parents and have the opportunity to meet new people, landscapes, food, among others. These experiences are unique and deeply marked in children's memories. At the same time, many children acquire the English language autonomously, influenced by globalization, through mobile devices, television, cartoons, music and games.

After this initial period of immersion in their culture and social environment, the time comes when parents enroll their children in daycare centers and preschools. Daycare centers generally serve children from 4 months to 3 years of age, with variations according to the legislation of each state and municipality. The preschool, in turn, receives students from 4 to 5 years old.

In the initial phase of the formal education process, the little ones are introduced to a teaching model called Early Childhood Education, provided for by the Law of Guidelines and Bases of Education (LDB) (Law No. 9.394/1996), this stage covers daycare and preschool. In the first modality, the little ones get involved in play, painting and socialization activities with other classmates, in this phase, the insertion of the language of IL is not offered in the public sphere, because, according to the LDB and the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC), it is not mandatory.



According to the provisions of Article 26, paragraph 5, of the LDB, the diversified curriculum of the initial years of elementary school must include, from the fifth grade onwards, the teaching of at least one modern foreign language. The choice of the language to be offered is up to the school community, respecting the possibilities of the institution.

In preschool, students are introduced to subjects such as Portuguese Language, Mathematics, Science, Arts and Children's Literature in a playful and contextualized way, with an emphasis on oral communication and logical reasoning, respecting the individual abilities of each student. In this educational stage, the English language is not included in the curricula of public schools. The inclusion of this subject would be beneficial, as it would allow children to begin to acquire skills in a foreign language in a systematized way from an early age.

Between two and four years of age, a critical window of development opens up in the child's brain. In this phase, the subject is open to the deliberation of various experiences for the expansion of language, anticipating any environmental influence on the progression of the brain, which will be stronger in childhood. In this way, the integration of children in bilingual spaces from an early age is justified, providing possibilities for them to become fluent in more than one language (BRIGGS, 2013, p. 8).

In the early years of Elementary School, children from the age of six are mandatorily attended. This period is characterized by the manifestation, in a critical and constant way, of the learning acquired both at home and in Early Childhood Education, according to the child's global capabilities. The importance of family monitoring, together with the school, is fundamental, as the child will be encouraged to learn the contents taught responsibly.

The mandatory subjects of the current curriculum in the public sphere are taught to students in this initial stage with the aim of shaping them as reflective and critical future citizens. However, in practice, the paths to ensuring quality education are fraught with challenges. The physical structures of public schools are often defective or precarious, often without air conditioning, with unavailable textbooks, lack of education professionals and unexpected changes in the teaching staff.

The initial years of Elementary School constitute the first step in the education process, and it is essential that the management of cities is concerned with maintaining the quality of teaching of compulsory subjects. This will undoubtedly be reflected in the following stages and will influence the job options that students will have when completing basic education. At this stage of education, the English language subject is also not mandatory according to the legislation, but in practice, within schools and classrooms, children know that this language exists and that it sounds like "modern", because

everything linked to it talks about technology, digital influencers, movies, music and electronic products from countries that have English as their native language.

After an analysis of Brazilian public education, it is evident that there is a gap in the process of teaching the English language, which is mandatorily offered by law only in the final years of Elementary School, when the child will be 10 years old, that is, there is a long interval without formal education, which can generate several beliefs in students (there is still no uniform idea about beliefs in language acquisition, although some authors corroborate it) as fear and shame of learning a foreign language. In addition to these beliefs, another phenomenon such as fossilization (a term used by Selinker, 1972) can occur, causing students to reach the final years with erroneous learning in the English language, making it difficult to correct these errors in formal learning.

Regarding beliefs, Silva argues that these beliefs, in the acquisition of languages: [...] can be defined as ideas that both learner and teacher have about the process of teaching/learning languages and that are (re)constructed in them through their own life experiences and that are maintained for a certain period (SILVA, 2005, apud SILVA, ROCHA & SANDEI, 2005).

The teaching and implementation of the English Language (IL) in the first stage of elementary school is essential and valuable for both students and those who are dedicated to language acquisition. The choice to learn a new language results in the broadening of horizons, the appreciation of culture and the manifestation of identity in the global context, allowing children to have access to different ways of thinking, expressing and communicating. Thus, the teaching of a second language, based on authentic literature, contributes to the social development of the learner, making him more critical of his choices in society and in the world.

According to Spink and Medrado (2004, p. 48), language, as a means of polysemic expression, offers the individual the opportunity to "[...] transit through countless contexts and experience varied situations."

Conforme Collie and Slater (1989 apud Yamakawa, 2013, p. 179),

The use of literary texts in the English classroom offers the student an immeasurable array of possibilities that can be explored by the teacher in order to increase their linguistic competence, as well as to expand their knowledge of the world, building a cultural identity and an intercultural mentality, motivating the student to interact with other cultures that interfere in their relationship with the world.

The job market is increasingly globalized and English has consolidated itself as the lingua franca used worldwide, especially in the areas of science, technology, media and



communications. All job markets and media related to these areas demand professionals with broad knowledge in a second language, with English being the most requested.

In the context of a globalized society, as discussed by Phillipson (1992) in "*Linguistic Imperialism*", English has become the global lingua franca due to historical, economic, and cultural factors. Widespread fluency in English can result in competitive advantages in areas such as international trade, science, and technology.

Thus, learning the English language not only expands professional opportunities, but also strengthens the ability to communicate and interact interculturally, preparing individuals for an increasingly interconnected and dynamic world.

THE OFFER OF THE ENGLISH SUBJECT IN MUNICIPAL SCHOOLS

The absence of a guiding document for the teaching of English in the early years of Elementary School represents a major obstacle in the educational system. Without a clear and unified guide, teachers may face difficulties when planning their lessons and adapting content to students' needs. Additionally, the lack of guidelines can result in discrepancies in teaching between different schools and regions, leading to inequality in students' mastery of the language. A guiding document would not only provide a solid framework for English language teaching, but it would also promote equity and quality in education, better preparing students to face the language challenges of the globalized world.

The offer of English language instruction in the early years of Elementary School can vary from city to city due to a number of factors. Financial resources are one of the main aspects, since not all cities have sufficient funds for the inclusion of this education. Costs with teaching materials, teacher training and infrastructure can influence. Above all, the emphasis is on traditional subjects such as Portuguese, mathematics and physical education, leaving the English language on the sidelines, despite its potential for immediate difference in a community.

In addition, teacher training is also a relevant factor. Not all teachers who work in the early years of Elementary School have specific training in English, making it difficult and influencing the non-provision of education. Another aspect is the educational situation of the place. The offer of English language teaching in the early years of Elementary School may vary according to the inhabitants of some cities. This is because the municipality may contain schools with large levels of lag in their own mandatory subjects.

The departments of education and school management have a great demand to level the teaching of these students with those of the reference municipalities. And the implementation of a foreign language would end up accumulating another challenge for



professionals in these municipalities that are supported by the legislation, offering only according to the LDB legislation and BNCC guidelines from the 6th year of elementary school to the 3rd year of high school.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN THE SOUTH OF TOCANTINS IN THE EARLY YEARS OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

In the state of Tocantins, the teaching of English in the early years of Elementary School follows the guidelines established by the National Common Curriculum Base (BNCC), which defines the competencies and skills that students must develop throughout this stage of basic education. According to the BNCC, English language teaching should be guided by communication, prioritizing real situations of language use and valuing local culture in line with the global one.

One of the main guidelines of the BNCC is the integration between mother tongue and foreign language, in order to create connections between the knowledge acquired in both disciplines. This means that English teaching should dialogue with other areas of knowledge, such as science, mathematics, and the arts, providing more meaningful and contextualized learning. The teaching of English in municipal schools is mandatory from the 6th year of elementary school.

The lack of provision of the subject in the early years of elementary school shows this discrepancy in access to English teaching from the early stages of basic education, contributing to the perpetuation of inequality of opportunities, reinforcing the division between those who have access to quality education in a foreign language and others who do not.

METHODOLOGY

This research was carried out in the municipality of Gurupi and in the surrounding cities, including Aliança, Cariri, Dueré, Peixe and Sucupira, located in the south of the state of Tocantins, Brazil. The inclusion of neighboring municipalities is justified by the geographical proximity to Gurupi, which allows us to observe how different educational jurisdictions, even close ones, can impact the offer of English Language (IL). The study compared the offer of education in different locations to identify variations in the implementation of the discipline in the early years of elementary school, highlighting the differences between municipal administrations.

The survey was conducted between June and December 2024, and the data were collected exclusively from public documents and official records made available by the

municipal education departments. The research did not involve direct interaction with teachers, students or managers, focusing only on documentary data that indicate the offer or absence of the offer of English Language in the early years of Fundamental Education, in the municipal schools of Gurupi and neighboring cities.

The methodology was predominantly descriptive and exploratory, focusing on the verification of documents that detail the curriculum of municipal schools to identify whether the IL is being offered in the early years of elementary school. This focus aims to present an overview of the current supply of IL in the region, limiting itself to the verification of this offer, without analysis of the quality of teaching or the pedagogical materials used.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria of the analyzed documents followed the relevance, timeliness, and credibility of the sources. Only official documents from municipal schools located in Gurupi and surrounding municipalities were included, excluding data from other regions of Tocantins. There was no need to submit it to the Research Ethics Committee, since all the documents analyzed were publicly accessible, according to the guidelines of resolution 510/2016 of the National Health Council.

This research adopted a qualitative-quantitative approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a more complete analysis of the English language offer in the early years of elementary school in Gurupi and in neighboring municipalities.

The quantitative approach was used to collect numerical data, such as the number of schools that offer the English language subject in the early years of elementary school and those that do not yet offer it. These data were collected from official documents of the departments of education and municipal schools, allowing an objective analysis of the situation in terms of absolute numbers and proportions.

On the other hand, the qualitative approach was used to interpret the local educational contexts, understanding the reasons that can influence the supply (or absence) of the discipline in schools. The qualitative analysis also allowed us to examine the challenges faced by managers and the possible implications of this limited offer for the educational development of students.

This combination of methods allowed not only a numerical understanding of the English language offer in the early years of elementary school, but also a reflection on the social, political and institutional factors that may be impacting this reality.

RESULTS

The research revealed that, in the cities of southern Tocantins, including Gurupi and its neighboring municipalities, there is a significant variation in the offer of English Language



in the early years of elementary school. In Gurupi, of the 23 municipal schools analyzed, only five are offering the subject, and this occurs only in full-time schools, through a pilot project. The other 18 schools still do not offer the subject as part of the regular curriculum.

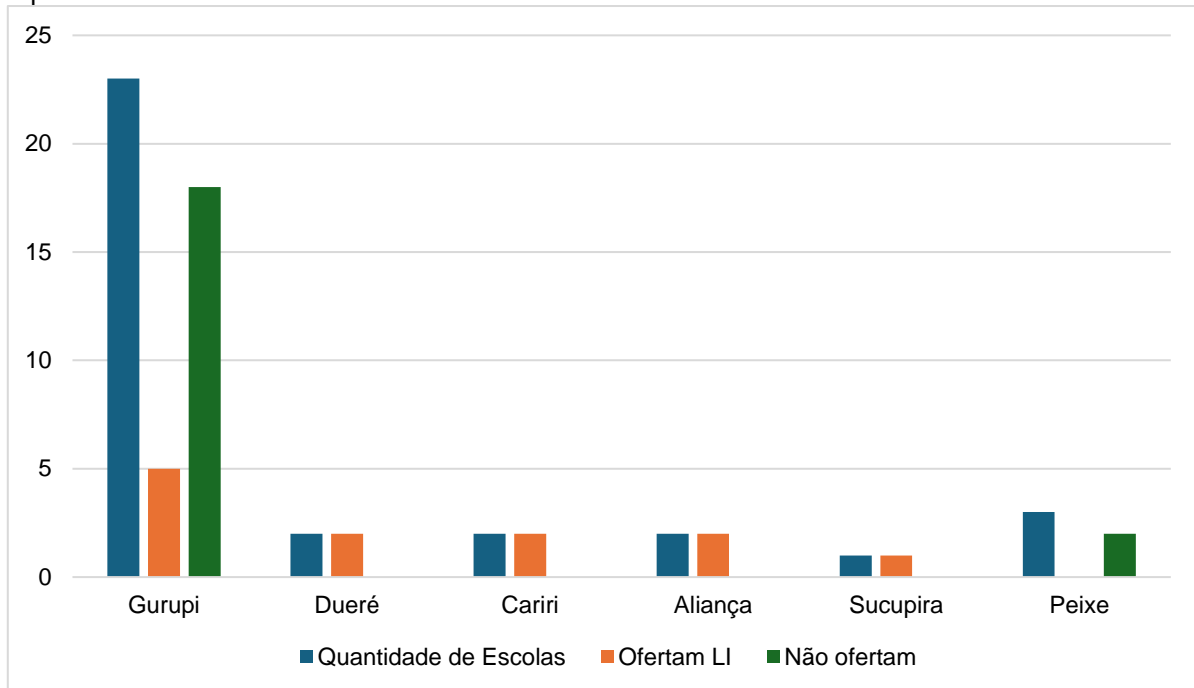
In neighboring municipalities, the offer of English Language in the early years of elementary school has different degrees of implementation. Cities such as Aliança, Cariri, Dueré and Sucupira offer the discipline in all their municipal schools. On the other hand, Peixe stands out negatively, with three schools that still do not offer IL in the early years of elementary school.

These data indicate that, although the southern region of Tocantins as a whole demonstrates a growing commitment to the provision of English at this stage, implementation still faces significant challenges, especially in Gurupi, where the offer is restricted to a few institutions and is not fully incorporated into the curriculum of regular schools.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of the results shows a discrepancy in the offer of English language between Gurupi and its neighboring municipalities. While cities such as Dueré, Cariri and Sucupira have already integrated the teaching of IL in their municipal schools, Gurupi still faces difficulties in expanding the offer beyond a pilot project restricted to full-time schools.

Figure 1: English Language Offer in the early years of Elementary School in Gurupi and Surrounding Municipalities: number of Schools.



Source: Research Authors (2024).

The graph above illustrates that most of the cities surrounding Gurupi have a considerable offer of English Language in schools in the early years of Elementary School. Municipalities such as Dueré, Cariri, Aliança and Sucupira stand out, offering English language teaching in the early years of elementary school in all their municipal schools. This data reflects a consistent effort by these localities to ensure access to language learning from the first years of schooling.

On the other hand, Peixe has the lowest offer, with three schools that still do not offer the teaching of the subject. In contrast, in the city of Gurupi, which has 23 municipal schools, only five schools offer the English language as a curricular component in the early years. This data draws attention, considering the size of Gurupi in relation to the surrounding municipalities and highlights the need for more effective public policies to expand this offer in the city.

This limitation may be related to the lack of robust public policies that encourage the inclusion of the subject in the curriculum of all municipal schools. The absence of a systematic and comprehensive offer puts the children of Gurupi and Peixe at a disadvantage in relation to those of other cities in the region that already have access to IL education from the early years.

It is important to note that, according to current legislation, the offer of English Language is mandatory only in the second phase of elementary school. However, the study reinforces the importance of expanding this offer to the first phase and even to Early



Childhood Education, taking advantage of the critical windows of language development in children. Early development of competence in a foreign language can have significant benefits, both cognitive and social, for learners.

In view of this, it is recommended that the educational authorities in Gurupi consider expanding the pilot English language program in the early years of elementary school to all municipal schools, with due adaptation to local realities, following the example of neighboring municipalities.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to analyze the offer of English Language in the early years of elementary school in municipal schools in Gurupi and surrounding municipalities, highlighting the differences and challenges faced by these locations. The results obtained demonstrate that, in general, these cities are committed to offering English language teaching in the early years, although they face significant difficulties, such as the scarcity of teaching materials and limited workload.

The cities of Dueré, Cariri, Aliança and Sucupira stand out for offering the subject in all their municipal schools, reflecting a robust commitment to bilingual education from the early years of Elementary School.

In contrast, the situation in Gurupi reveals a worrying reality. Although the city has 23 municipal schools, only five schools have started offering the language to children in the early years and as a pilot project of the English language, in a full-time school context. This limitation in the offer of the discipline shows a low concern of local managers in providing a broader and more systematic teaching of English. This discrepancy is alarming, considering the proven benefits of learning a foreign language from the earliest years of life, which include children's cognitive, linguistic, and socio-emotional development.

The lack of a consistent and comprehensive offer of English language for children in the early years in Gurupi puts these children at a disadvantage in relation to those in other cities in the region, which are already immersed in an education in which teaching is already implemented. The absence of effective public policies and the scarcity of investments in resources and teacher training contribute to this situation, highlighting the urgent need for a more focused and uniform approach to the implementation of English language teaching at this stage of education.

To improve the situation, it is recommended that educational managers in Gurupi and other locations with a similar situation consider the following actions:



1. Expansion of the English Language Offer: Implement the English Language discipline in more municipal schools, ensuring that the offer is systematic and comprehensive from the early years of Elementary School.
2. Investment in Resources and Training: Invest in appropriate teaching materials and promote continuous teacher training to ensure quality teaching.
3. Elaboration of Public Policies: Develop and implement public policies that encourage the inclusion of the English Language in the school curriculum of the first phase of EF in a uniform way, with the definition of clear guidelines and follow-up strategies.
4. Monitoring and Evaluation: Establish monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure the effectiveness of the policies and practices implemented, adjusting them as needed to meet the needs of students and schools.

The implementation of these measures can contribute significantly to improving the supply and quality of English language teaching for children, promoting a more equitable education and preparing these children for a globalized and interconnected future. Effective and well-targeted actions can ensure that all children, regardless of location, have access to the educational opportunities they deserve.



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