Strategy to improve communication for deaf individuals in a basic health unit: "help, need assistance?"

Estratégia para melhorar a comunicação para indivíduos surdos em uma unidade de saúde básica: "ajuda, precisa de assistência?"

Estrategia para mejorar la comunicación de las personas sordas en una unidad básica de salud: "¿ayuda, necesita asistencia?"

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ABSTRACT
Accessibility is crucial to ensure that all users have interfaces that meet their needs and preferences, promoting inclusion in all sociocultural spaces. In the context of healthcare services in Guanambi-BA, deaf individuals face communication difficulties due to the lack of accessibility in identification signs, which are written only in Portuguese, excluding those who use Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) as their first language. This creates barriers that compromise the autonomy and quality of life of these individuals. Faced with this reality, the objective of this work was to produce images and videos in Libras, accessible through QR codes inserted in the identification signs of healthcare sectors. This initiative aims to promote the autonomy and dignity of deaf individuals using healthcare services in Guanambi, Bahia, contributing to a more inclusive and egalitarian society.

Keywords: Accessibility, Libras, Hearing Impaired, Inclusion.
Introduction

Accessibility, synonymous with approachability, is a means of providing each user with interfaces that respect their needs and preferences (Brazil, 2015). Law No. 13,146, of July 6, 2015, establishes the Brazilian Law on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (Brazil, 2015), ensuring the promotion, under conditions of equality, of the exercise of the fundamental rights and freedoms of persons with disabilities, aiming at their social inclusion and citizenship.

Still in this context, communication is a fundamental factor for a person to be truly included, as it is also through it that one accesses places, services, products, or information safely and autonomously (Ruas et al., 2021). For the deaf, this
communication is done through Brazilian Sign Language - Libras, officially recognized by Law No. 10,436, of April 24, 2002 (Brazil, 2002), and regulated by Decree No. 5,626, of December 22, 2005 (Brazil, 2005).

According to this law, Libras has a visual-motor linguistic system, with its own grammatical structure, and institutionalized forms of supporting its use and dissemination by the general public and public service concessionaires must be guaranteed. It also provides that when these services are for healthcare, adequate care and treatment for people with hearing impairments must be guaranteed.

However, the literature points out, as an example, the studies by Bernardes, Maior, Spezia, Araujo (2009), that communication is one of the major challenges faced by people with hearing impairments. In line with this, according to information from APADA (Association of Parents and Friends of the Hearing Impaired of Guanambi and Region), the deaf in the city report facing communication difficulties when seeking the municipality's healthcare services.

Considering that in these spaces, identification signs fixed on the doors of each sector are seen as a facilitator of access, with the aim of guiding users, however, written in Portuguese, thus deaf people who use Libras as their first language are at a disadvantage compared to hearing individuals, as they cannot decode the information described in these signs (Helsel, 2020). Thus, these users are not covered by the guarantees provided in the aforementioned legislation.

Therefore, despite legal support, the absence of the use of Libras is detected in a large part of healthcare spaces. In this sense, it is essential to rethink accessibility strategies that contemplate the visual-gestural condition of deaf people (Vieira; Silva; Machado; Brandão; Chagas, 2023).

In this regard, providing elements that promote the inclusion of Libras in spaces that provide services considered essential, such as healthcare environments, contributes to an equally inclusive society (Neves et al., 2021).

Hence, the project in question arose from the concern of its creators in the face of the frequent reports from the deaf individuals in the city of Guanambi-BA regarding the
communication difficulties encountered when seeking the municipality's healthcare services.

In view of the above, the objective of this project was to contribute to the autonomy and dignity of deaf individuals using healthcare services in the city of Guanambi, through the production of images and videos in Libras accessible via QR codes inserted in the identification signs of a Basic Health Unit – UBS.

2 DEVELOPMENT

The extension project began on October 30, 2021. Among the initial activities, it is worth highlighting the project presentation meeting for the deaf community of Guanambi. In this meeting, in addition to the coordinator, the scholarship holder, and volunteers, representatives of the Association of Parents and Friends of the Hearing Impaired of Guanambi and Region - Apada were also present, including the president, vice president, a Sign Language Translator and Interpreter - TILS, and two deaf individuals.

- Needs assessment: Initially, a survey was conducted to identify the main communication difficulties faced by deaf individuals when using healthcare services in the city of Guanambi. This included interviews with deaf individuals, healthcare professionals, and representatives of Apada;

- Selection of the healthcare unit: Based on the information provided during the survey meeting, a Basic Health Unit that serves neighborhoods with the highest number of deaf users was selected. Based on these criteria, the UBS Dr. José Francisco Nunes was selected, and after authorization from the responsible municipal agency, a visit to the site was carried out with the aim of promoting the project and getting to know the physical and organizational structure;

- Content development: Therefore, based on the data observed during the visit, essential information was cataloged, such as: services provided, available professionals, documents required for registration, among others. Based on this information, the content of the materials to be produced was elaborated, including
explanatory images and videos about the different sectors and services offered in healthcare institutions;

• Production of images and videos: Subsequently, the information was signed by two deaf individuals, under the guidance of two TILS from the project team and a representative of Apada, ensuring the quality and fidelity of translations and interpretations. Filming and editing techniques were used to create clear and objective materials. The videos with the signs were edited, processed, and hosted on the website created for this purpose;

• Insertion of QR codes: After the production of materials in Libras, QR codes corresponding to each video and image were created. These codes were then inserted into the identification signs of the healthcare sectors, in a visible and accessible way to users;

• Testing and adjustments: Before the definitive implementation, the materials underwent pilot tests with the participation of deaf individuals and healthcare professionals. Based on the feedback received, necessary adjustments were made to ensure the effectiveness and understanding of the materials;

• Implementation and evaluation: Finally, the project culminated on August 31, 2022, with a visit to the UBS attended by local officials, the project team, as well as the board and other representatives of Apada, for the delivery of the identification signs. An evaluation of the impact of the initiative on the autonomy and dignity of deaf individuals was carried out through interviews, questionnaires, and direct observations. The results were analyzed and used to guide any adjustments and improvements to the project.

3 CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is believed that the final product of this project contributed to improving access to specific materials aimed at the inclusion of deaf individuals because, according to the reports of the directly benefited deaf individuals, these informative signs in Libras make
them feel more autonomous and dignified when seeking healthcare services at the aforementioned UBS.

In view of the above, it is evident that this project represents an important step towards promoting inclusion and accessibility for the deaf community of Guanambi. Through the provision of visual and audiovisual resources in Libras, integrated into the identification signs of healthcare establishments, we seek to ensure that deaf individuals have access to essential information for their interaction in healthcare services, thus promoting their autonomy and dignity.

We believe that this initiative will not only facilitate communication and access to healthcare but also send a message of respect and appreciation for the linguistic and cultural diversity of the deaf community. May this project serve as an example and inspiration for other initiatives aimed at building a more inclusive and egalitarian society for all.

It is also possible that participation in this project has expanded the idea of the social role and importance of the involved students. Since understanding that inclusion and accessibility are projects beyond the specific curricula of each course, and indeed, encompass a broader goal in the scope of educational, professional, and citizen formation, achieved through the experiences of these students with the internal and external community, it can be said that this is a fundamental factor in strengthening the inseparability between Teaching, Research, and Extension.

For the external community, the benefit that the project presents in terms of accessibility and inclusion also contributed to instilling in the collective consciousness that strengthening the autonomy of people with disabilities is essential for creating an inclusive culture.
REFERENCES


