

**FRIST FORMATION AND THE TEACHING CAREER:
SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF ENGLISH TEACHERS**

FORMAÇÃO INICIAL E A PROFISSÃO DOCENTE:
REPRESENTAÇÕES SOCIAIS DE PROFESSORES DE LÍNGUA INGLESA

LA FORMACIÓN INICIAL E LA PROFESIÓN DOCENTE:
REPRESENTACIONES SOCIALES DE LOS PROFESORES DE INGLÉS

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ABSTRACT:

This article aims to disseminate research on the initial education of English language teachers and the implications of this training for their professional careers. The study was conducted within an exploratory-qualitative framework, grounded in the theoretical and methodological perspective of Social Representations. The research encompassed twelve secondary schools in the city of Vitória da Conquista, Bahia, Brazil, involving a population of twenty-nine female teachers. Findings reveal that more than half of the participants perceive their own training as misaligned with the professional realities they encounter, demonstrating limited formative and educational effectiveness. The study also identified concerning omissions and shortcomings in pedagogical and professional practice, marked by gaps in educational-proficiency development and lapses in functional-conceptual coherence. The research concludes that initial teacher education in English must be more cohesive and consistent with professional demands, fully supporting teacher-learners in addressing future social and professional challenges. It calls for an improvement in initial training through a stronger integration of theory and practice, higher levels of professional competence, and a qualified, high-standard education. Such a program must constitute, in both principle and practice, an initial preparation that is efficient, effective, and meaningful.

Keywords: initial teacher education in modern languages; initial education and teaching career; social representations of English language teachers; professional development of English teachers; teacher professionalization in foreign language education.

RESUMO:

Este artigo objetiva difundir uma pesquisa sobre a formação inicial de professores de língua inglesa e as implicações dessa formação na carreira docente. A investigação sustentou-se, teórico-metodologicamente, como pesquisa exploratório-qualitativa realizada sob a égide das Representações Sociais. O universo pesquisado foi composto por 12 escolas do Ensino Médio na cidade de Vitória da Conquista, Bahia, Brasil com uma população de 29 professoras. Os resultados encontrados evidenciam que mais da metade dos sujeitos de pesquisa representa a

sua própria formação em dissonância com a realidade de trabalho vivenciada e com pouca efetividade formativo-educacional. Encontrou-se, ainda, omissões e carências didático-pedagógico-laboral preocupantes, com lacunas na eficiência educativo-profissional e com lapsos na eficácia e concepção formativo-funcional. Conclui-se que se faz imprescindível, ao professor de inglês, uma formação inicial mais coesa e coerente com a realidade, que possa, plenamente, amparar o professor-aprendente no atendimento das futuras demandas sócio/profissionais. Assim, reivindica-se da formação inicial melhoras na profissionalização teórico-prático, uma superior capacitação profissional, uma educação qualificada e de qualidade, que seja, de fato e de direito, uma formação iniciante eficiente, efetiva e eficaz.

Palavras-chave: formação inicial no curso de letras modernas; formação inicial e carreira docente; representações sociais do professor de língua inglesa; desenvolvimento docente do professor de inglês; profissionalização docente do professor de língua estrangeira.

RESUMEN:

Este artículo tiene como objetivo difundir una investigación sobre la Formación Inicial de profesores de lengua inglesa y las implicaciones de esta formación en la carrera docente. La investigación se sustentó teórica y metodológicamente como un estudio exploratorio-cualitativo realizado bajo la égida de las Representaciones Sociales. El universo investigado estuvo compuesto por 12 escuelas de educación secundaria en la ciudad de Vitória da Conquista, Bahía, Brasil, y la población del estudio estuvo conformada por 29 profesoras. Los resultados encontrados evidencian que más de la mitad de los sujetos de investigación perciben su propia formación en disonancia con la realidad laboral que experimentan y con poca efectividad formativo-educativa. Además, se identificaron omisiones y carencias preocupantes en los ámbitos didáctico-pedagógico y laboral, con brechas en la eficiencia educativo-profesional y con fallas en la eficacia y concepción formativo-funcional. Se concluye que es imprescindible una Formación Inicial más cohesionada y coherente con la realidad para los profesores de inglés, que pueda respaldar plenamente al docente-aprendiz en la atención de las futuras demandas socio-profesionales. Así, se reivindican mejoras en la profesionalización teórico-práctica, una capacitación profesional superior y una educación cualificada y de calidad, asegurando que la Formación Inicial sea verdaderamente eficiente, efectiva y eficaz.

Palabras clave: formación inicial en el curso de las letras modernas; formación inicial y carrera docente; representaciones sociales del profesor de inglés; desarrollo docente del profesor de inglés; profesionalización del profesor de lenguas extranjeras.

Introduction

This article, based on a master's research project, was guided by the following central question: How do the Social Representations of initial teacher education, constructed by graduates of Modern Languages programs (Bachelor's Degree in Education and certified to teach English as a Second Language – ESL), shape the process of developing knowledge and pedagogical practices? Accordingly, the study sought to determine whether high school English teachers in *Vitória da Conquista*, Bahia, Brazil, considered the four years of their undergraduate training (Bachelor of Arts in Modern Language and Literatures with a teaching license)

sufficient for assimilating the content taught by their training institution (State-certified Institution for teaching English as a Second Language – 6-12/middle and high school), as well as for developing the essential skills required for teaching and educational *praxis*. The investigation therefore focused on the Modern Languages degree (Degree in English as Foreign Language Education), the early years of teaching practice, the development of teacher professionalization, and the four key skills — reading, writing, speaking, listening, and understanding in English — referred to hereafter as the “foundational competencies.”

It is argued that teacher education centered exclusively on technical content is unlikely to foster the development of theoretical-practical and didactic-pedagogical knowledge structures, nor is it likely to enable teachers to critically reflect before, during, and after their pedagogical practice — an essential symbiosis in the act of teaching (Freire, 2021; Garcia, 2014; Silva Junior, 2023; Silva Junior; Barreto, 2023; 2024). However, it must be noted that when fundamental techniques and content are neither acquired nor mastered during initial training, teachers run the considerable risk of entering professional practice with “insecurity, ineptitude, and mediocrity,” unable to act, reflect, create, or respond competently and with grounded knowledge to didactic-pedagogical challenges encountered in real contexts (Garcia, 2014).

It should be clarified from the outset that this study did not aim to evaluate or measure the quality of teacher education programs *per se*. Rather, its goal was to shed light on the Social Representations articulated by teachers concerning their initial training and educational practices. It must be emphasized that, within the teaching-learning field, teachers must feel comfortable in the “robe” they wear in the classroom (Garcia, 2014). In other words, they must first acquire knowledge for themselves in order to teach others effectively (Silva Junior, 2021). To this end, teachers must remain aligned with the knowledge acquired during their initial training while simultaneously expanding and evolving their theoretical, practical, didactic, and methodological frameworks. Such development enables them to stand as autonomous individuals capable of independent thought and action, though always grounded in well-consolidated theoretical-practical learning (Garcia, 2014; Silva Junior; Barreto, 2021).

In line with this purpose, and drawing inspiration from the Structural Approach to Social Representations, this study employed a questionnaire designed to elicit information on three main socio-representational dimensions: i) initial teacher training, ii) first experiences in teaching practice, and the iii) four foundational competencies (Bomfim, 2017). To organize and interpret these data, inspiration from Content Analysis was used as a methodological reference to structure, systematize, and tabulate the field results (Crusoé, 2014). It is worth noting,

however, that despite inspiration drawn from the Structural Approach, the study adopted a Sociogenic/Processual Approach (Moscovici, 2012; Jodelet, 2001) to analyze and interpret these socio-affective and socio-cognitive dimensions.

Instruments for data collection, treatment, and analysis

Moscovici (2012) argues that the psychosocial being, while seeking answers to personal inquiries, simultaneously processes information and behaves according to communicative and situational circumstances. This process involves **anchoring**— the labeling of new ideas in relation to preexisting, familiar labels — and **objectification**— the materialization of a labeled idea into a recent and previously unknown object — within the framework of Social Representation. In this sense, the sociogenic/processual approach is systematized through the study of Social Representations from the interpretative and conceptual perspective of *objectification* (the transformation of figurative ideas into concrete entities). This makes representation suitable for transmission through language and communication, as it involves the apprehension and comprehension of the figurative core of the socio-representation. The figurative core constitutes the imagistic nucleus of Social Representation — both socio-affective and socio-cognitive — expressed by individuals through a *selective construction* of “new/distinct ideas”, these are integrated with preexisting knowledge, *schematic*, and ultimately *naturalized* by the subject within the social group, where they become socially accepted and shared representations (Moscovici, 2012; Jodelet, 2001; Alves-Mazzotti, 2008).

This approach, deeply mediated by language, is intrinsically psychological and socio-interactionist. It is manifested through the adoption of socio-affective and socio-cognitive identities that individuals articulate in their daily lives as forms of knowledge equivalent to common-sense reasoning. From this perspective, the sociogenic/processual approach was employed to understand English teachers’ representations of professionalization; in other words, how Social Representations concerning the socio-object of teaching were created, assimilated, developed, and socially communicated by individuals within their professional group (Moscovici, 2012; Jodelet, 2001). It is reaffirmed that the present study, grounded in Moscovici’s initial propositions, is a **qualitative investigation** that seeks to apprehend, analyze, and interpret Social Representations through processes of acquisition and conception, drawing on Jodelet’s (2001) sociogenic/processual framework.

Nevertheless, questionnaires were designed with inspiration from Abric’s (2001) Structural Approach. Several methodological mechanisms proposed by this scholar were employed to identify Social Representations in discursive and social contexts, focusing on their

four central functions: (1) epistemic — the ability to understand and interpret reality; (2) identity—recognition and belonging within a group; (3) orientation—the prescription of behaviors and social practices; and (4) justification — the legitimation of practices and behaviors. The study also sought to identify the **Central Core**, the component most resistant to change within a Social Representation, or at least to approximate this nucleus by examining the **Peripheral Elements** — representative artifacts that are more fragile, flexible, and subject to transformation, and which orbit the Central Core.

Within the Structural Approach, it is the Central Core that confers meaning to the representation. The Peripheral Elements, connected to the representational nucleus, provide fluidity and dynamism, while simultaneously protecting the constituted representations. Furthermore, Peripheral Elements have three main functions: (a) concretization, which materializes Social Representations into reality; (b) regulation, which standardizes existing representations while moderating the transformation of new and old ones; and (c) defense, which safeguards the peripherally connected ideals and the essential content of the Central Core from abrupt shifts (Abric, 2001). By analyzing the hierarchy and proximity of Peripheral Elements to the Central Core, it becomes possible to identify the represented object and define its socially constructed meaning within the group. Based on this framework, an online questionnaire — hosted on Google Forms — was designed to achieve the following research objectives.

The first objective of the online questionnaire was to examine **Content I** — *related to the Modern Languages degree program* — with the aim of identifying the foundations, knowledge, and competencies offered and developed by the training institution. The second objective was to examine **Content II** — *related to the beginning of teaching practice and the process of professionalization* — with the aim of identifying which aspects of initial training were developed, assimilated, and consolidated by the graduates, as well as which were demanded of English teachers at the start of their professional careers. The third objective was to examine **Content III** — *related to the four foundational proficiencies in English* — in order to assess the role of initial teacher education in developing teachers' ability to read, write, speak, listen, and comprehend in English.

It is important to note that the analysis and tabulation of results were designed to highlight the principle of “quality within quantity,” drawing on a methodological framework inspired by Bardin’s (1977, p. 42) *Content Analysis*, as cited in Crusoé (2014, p. 60, emphasis added):

“[...] content analysis is defined as: a set of techniques for analyzing communications with the aim of obtaining, through systematic and objective procedures for describing message content, indicators (*quantitative or otherwise*) that allow for inference of knowledge concerning the conditions of production/reception (inferred variables) of these messages.”

As Amado (2009), cited in Crusoe (2014, p. 43–46), notes, applying Content Analysis to field data enables purposeful social action through social interaction, while acknowledging that such purposes are constructed within networks of functional interdependence shaped by group dynamics and organizational structures. Moreover, this approach allows the researcher to consider the triad of **researcher, field, and theory**, thereby supporting informed inferences about the findings within the field.

Accordingly, the Bardin-inspired methodology of Content Analysis proceeded as follows: the feedback from questionnaires was grouped into analytical sections, then categorized qualitatively according to the sociogenic/processual dimensions of Social Representations (Silva Junior; Barreto, 2024). Next, the feedback was further organized by identifying the most recurrent words, which became strong candidates for constituting the representational nucleus, while surrounding words emerged as potential Peripheral Elements orbiting this possible Central Core (Silva Junior; Barreto, 2024).

Research Universe, Population, and Sample

The Educational Technology Center/*Núcleo de Tecnologia Educacional* (NTE-20) identified 20 public high schools in Vitória da Conquista as potential research sites. However, during field visits, it became necessary to exclude some institutions from the research portfolio. Specifically, the *Centro Integrado de Educação Navarro de Brito*, *Colégio Polivalente de Vitória da Conquista*, *Colégio Estadual Rafael Spínola Neto*, and the *Centro Juvenil de Ciência e Cultura* were undergoing a merger, in which English language teachers were assigned collectively across this cluster of schools. For the purposes of this study, they were therefore considered as a single institution, here referred to as *Centro Integrado de Educação Navarro de Brito*.

Additionally, the *Centro Estadual de Educação Profissional em Saúde Adélia Teixeira* was in the process of being closed; the *Centro Regional de Ensino Médio com Intermediação Tecnológica de Vitória da Conquista* and the *Colégio Estadual Kleber Pacheco de Oliveira* were already closed; and both the *Colégio Estadual do Campo da Cabeceira da Jibóia* and the

Colégio Estadual do Campo José Gonçalves were excluded from the study because NTE-20 did not provide their addresses and they did not respond to researchers' email inquiries.

Consequently, the schools that effectively participated in the study are listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1 — High schools surveyed in Vitória da Conquista

School	Number of English Language Teachers
<i>Centro Integrado de Educação Navarro de Brito</i>	6
<i>Colégio Estadual Abdias Menezes</i>	3
<i>Colégio Estadual Anísio Teixeira</i>	2
<i>Colégio Estadual Don Clímério de Almeida Andrade</i>	2
<i>Colégio da Polícia Militar – CPM Eraldo Tinoco</i>	2
<i>Colégio Estadual José da Sá Nunes</i>	3
<i>Colégio Estadual Professora Heleusa Figueira Câmara</i>	1
<i>Colégio Estadual Padre Luiz Soares Palmeira</i>	3
<i>Centro Territorial de Educação Profissional</i>	2
<i>Colégio Estadual Adelmário Pinheiro</i>	2
<i>Instituto de Educação Euclides Dantas</i>	1
<i>Colégio Estadual Camilo de Jesus Lima</i>	2
Total	12 schools
	Total

Source: Authors' elaboration based on NTE-20 data (2022).

Based on Table 1, the research universe comprised 29 English language teachers distributed across 12 high schools in Vitória da Conquista. The questionnaire remained open for a period of three months. Ultimately, the response rate reached 72.41% of the universe. Thus, the effective research population consisted of 21 English language teachers who voluntarily completed the online questionnaire.

Section A — Teacher Profile

Section A, which contained broader and more general questions, was designed to outline a generic profile of the research participants. It included categorical and classificatory questions related to gender, age group, income, educational attainment, marital status, and professional engagement in different spheres of education. These data are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2 — Profile of Participants

Criterion	Description	Nº	%
Gender	Female	21	100%
	Male	–	–
	Non-binary	–	–
	Prefer not to disclose	–	–
Age group	Under 20 years	–	–
	21–30 years	1	4.8%
	31–40 years	6	22.7%
	41–50 years	12	57.1%
	51–60 years	2	9.05%
	Over 61 years	–	–
Marital status	Stable relationship	14	66.07%

Criterion	Description	Nº	%
	Single	4	19%
	Separated or divorced	2	9.05%
	Not declared	1	4.8%
Educational level	<i>Lato Sensu</i> specialization (completed)	8	38.1%
	<i>Lato Sensu</i> specialization (incomplete)	3	14.3%
	<i>Stricto Sensu</i> postgraduate (Master's degree)	6	22.7%
	<i>Stricto Sensu</i> postgraduate (Master's, incomplete)	3	14.3%
	<i>Stricto Sensu</i> postgraduate (Doctorate)	1	4.8%
Salary range (reference: R\$ 1,212.00/month, minimum wage)	Between 2.1 and 3	11	52.4%
	Between 3.1 and 4	4	19%
	Between 4.1 and 5	3	14.3%
	Above 5	2	9.05%
	Not declared	1	4.8%
Concurrent teaching activities	Elementary education	9	42.9%
	Language courses and private tutoring	6	22.7%
	Higher education	2	9.05%
	Youth and Adult Education/ <i>Educação de Jovens e Adultos</i> (EJA)	1	4.8%
Undergraduate degree location	Vitória da Conquista — BA	12	57.1%
	Other locations	9	42.9%

Source: Authors' elaboration based on field research (2022).

Based on Table 2, it can be affirmed that none of the teachers remained solely with their initial undergraduate degree. As Nunes (2019, p. 22) highlights, initial teacher education constitutes a “*passaporte de ingresso para docência*/passport for entry into teaching.” Continuing education, therefore, is understood as a means of permanence, knowledge renewal, and continuous professional development throughout one's teaching career. According to Silva Junior (2021) and Silva Junior and Barreto (2024), professionalization plays a crucial role in keeping professionals updated in fields that demand constant knowledge renewal. Similarly, Nunes (2011) emphasizes that continuing education is a *sine qua non* condition for educators, whose primary role is to foster knowledge and promote teaching and learning processes.

It is also worth noting that the historical struggles of teachers to secure the implementation of policies aimed at valuing the teaching profession — policies established since the Federal Constitution of 1988 (Brazil, 1988), the National Education Guidelines and Framework Law of 1996 (Brazil, 1996), and the National Education Plan/*Plano Nacional de Educação* (PNE), enacted by Law No. 13.005/2014 (Brazil, 2014) — are reflected in teachers' salaries. As indicated in Table 2, the remuneration of English language teachers tends to be directly associated with their academic qualifications.

Further discussing the national minimum wage policy for teachers — first proposed in 2008 and approved in 2011, with the explicit aim of reducing salary discrepancies among equivalent positions — Nunes (2019) argues that teachers require not only high-quality training but also professional recognition and remuneration that ensures a dignified and sustainable

livelihood. The PNE sets forth specific goals to strengthen continuing education in Basic Education: by 2024, more than 50% of teachers should hold a postgraduate degree (Goal 16); teacher salaries should be made comparable to those of other professionals with similar academic qualifications (Goal 17); and structured career plans should be ensured (Goal 18) (Brazil, 2014).

When combining the two highest salary ranges (52.04% and 19%), which together represent 15 teachers, it becomes evident that nearly three-quarters of the research participants (71.04%) earn more than four minimum wages. Cross-referencing salary and academic qualifications (eight specialists, six master's degree holders, and one doctoral graduate), we find that the same 15 teachers earn between R\$ 4,848 and R\$ 6,060 or more — very likely those who pursued further qualifications through continuing education.

Nonetheless, although the PNE guarantees an average monthly income, many teachers face double or even triple workloads. This situation raises critical concerns about excessive working hours, which often extend far beyond what is considered “normal.” While in many cases this workload is voluntarily assumed by teachers for financial reasons, in the long term it may have detrimental consequences for their professional and personal lives. These include negative impacts on physical and mental health, compromised professional performance, and an overall decline in quality of life (Cardoso Júnior; Cardoso; Nunes, 2021; 2022).

Finally, returning to the analysis of Table 2, scholars such as Silva, Brito, and Nunes (2019); Silva and Nunes (2019); and Teixeira and Nunes (2016; 2019a; 2019b; 2019c) have examined the intersections between teacher education (both initial and continuing), working conditions, and professional recognition. They argue that these dimensions are interdependent and emphasize the importance of a cross-sectional analysis of the data to avoid hasty or reductionist conclusions.

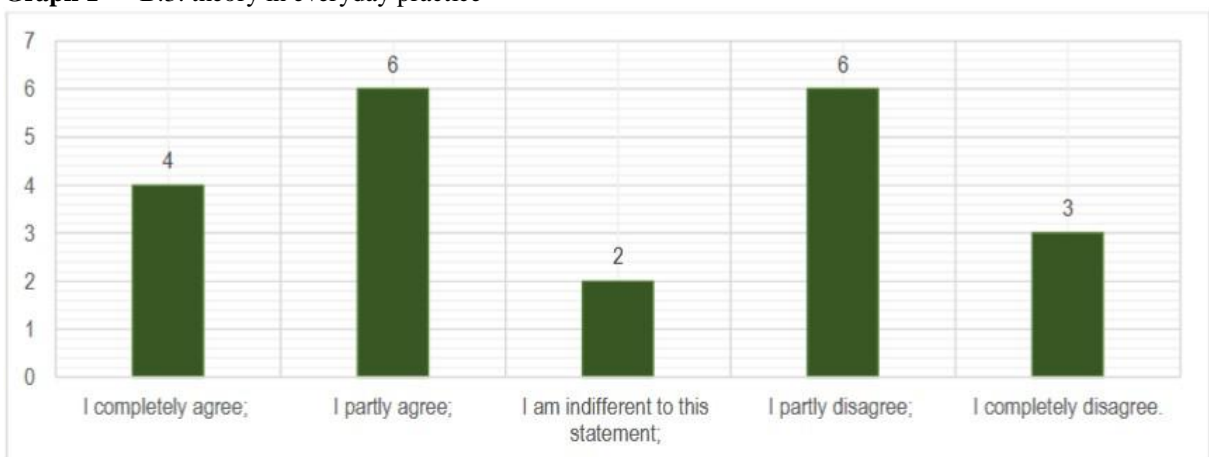
Section B—Social Representations in relation to the undergraduate degree

Section B examines **Content I**. Item B.1 asked English teachers whether the technical, didactic, and pedagogical knowledge provided during their initial teacher education — particularly the theoretical content delivered by the Teacher Education Institution — was consistent and satisfactory. Item B.2 addressed the same training, but focusing on the practical content, inquiring whether the development of such *know-how* was both consistent and sufficient.

In response to Item B.1, eight teachers (38.1%) evaluated the theoretical content as sufficient and “consistent”; another eight (38.1%) deemed it only “sufficient in some aspects”; three (14.3%) judged it “insufficient in some aspects.” No one chose “insufficient in many aspects,” although two teachers (9.5%) stated that the content was “insufficient and inconsistent.” With regard to Item B.2, eight teachers (38.1%) judged the practical knowledge to be sufficient and “consistent”; seven (33.3%) responded “sufficient in some aspects”; two (9.5%) considered it “insufficient in some aspects”; three (14.3%) selected “insufficient in many aspects”; and one teacher (4.8%) evaluated it as “insufficient and inconsistent.”

Taken together, both theoretical (B.1) and practical (B.2) aspects of the teacher education program reveal a pattern of stability: approximately 38.1% of respondents reported that the knowledge acquired was sufficient and “concise.” Nevertheless, this percentage falls short of representing even half of the participating teachers. Importantly, the program’s initial training scored significantly below the minimum average grade of 7.0 (seven out of ten), which is required by the Teacher Education Institution for certification in English language teaching in Brazil — this score would roughly correspond to a C or C+ in the U.S. grading system. Even more concerning is the finding that 19.1% of participants marked the option “insufficient and inconsistent” across both theoretical and practical dimensions (B.1 and B.2), as shown in Graph 1.

Graph 1 — B.3: theory in everyday practice



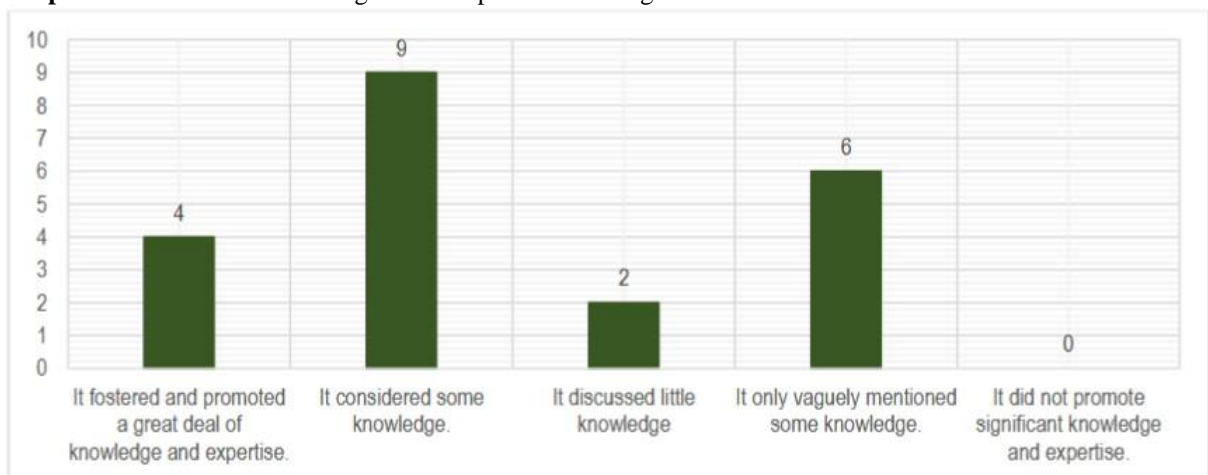
Source: Authors’ elaboration based on field research (2022).

Item B.3 investigated the extent to which teachers agreed with the statement: “My initial teacher education, within the Modern Languages program, meets the demands placed on English teachers by the job market, schools, students, and the daily practice of teaching.” Only four teachers (19%) stated “I completely agree,” reinforcing the findings from Items B.1 and B.2 and suggesting that the training was fragile and unsatisfactory relative to its stated

objectives. Six teachers (28.6%) answered “I partially agree” or “I partially disagree,” while two expressed indifference. Three teachers (14.3%) declared “I completely disagree,” clearly indicating a negative perception of the training received.

Item B.4 explored whether the initial teacher education program considered and encouraged specific cultural and linguistic aspects of English, such as regional varieties, idiomatic expressions, formal and informal registers, slang, communicative behaviors, and the cultural diversity of English-speaking communities. Only 19% of teachers affirmed that the program “fostered and promoted substantial knowledge and skills”; 42.9% reported it “considered some knowledge”; 9.5% stated it “minimally discussed such knowledge”; and 28.6% answered that it “only vaguely mentioned certain knowledge,” as illustrated in Graph 2.

Graph 2 — B.4: varied knowledge and competencies in English



Source: Authors' elaboration based on field research (2022).

On the one hand, Graph 2 shows that none of the high school teachers in Vitória da Conquista selected the option “did not promote meaningful knowledge and skills,” indicating that their initial training, at some level, did foster such competencies. However, it is noteworthy that six teachers reported their initial training only superficially addressed these topics. Interestingly, the two largest response categories — nine teachers affirming that their training “considered some knowledge” and six stating it “only vaguely mentioned” such knowledge — contrast with the more balanced responses observed in Items B.1 and B.2.

It is worth underscoring, to avoid the impression that this analysis focuses exclusively on negative outcomes, that out of the 21 participants, only four reported their initial training as having fostered and promoted distinct and satisfactory knowledge of English. Nonetheless, while positive aspects certainly exist, the areas of deficit — representatively more significant — require more urgent attention in teacher preparation.

In defining its analytical approach, the study employed Items B.5.1 and B.5.2, which drew upon the technique of **sentence completion**, inspired by the **Free Association Questionnaire** developed by Abric (2001) and his team at Aix-Marseille University. This method, also known as the Free Word Association Test, is grounded in two main criteria: the order in which words are evoked and the frequency with which they are associated with the object under study (Abric, 1994, as cited in Bomfim, 2017; Silva Junior; Barreto, 2024). Participants were asked to list, in ascending order, five words representing the object in question. The first three typically form the **Central Core** of the social representation, sustaining its structure, while the remaining words constitute the **Peripheral Elements** (Abric, 2001; Bomfim, Correia; Azevedo, 2023; Silva Junior; Barreto, 2024).

Cross-referencing the frequency and order of word evocation enables researchers to identify the relative importance of ideas associated with the object of study. Accordingly, Items B.5 (and, later, C.5) invited participants to spontaneously provide a word or short phrase describing their initial teacher education experience. This allowed the researchers to identify the most recurrent representations (Abric, 2001). Using a methodology inspired by **Content Analysis**, the responses were then categorized as research feedback, as outlined below. In Item B.5.1, participants completed the sentence: *“I qualify/consider the content and knowledge acquired during my initial teacher education as...”* The responses included: **Positive feedback**: “essential,” “indispensable for my training,” “fundamental,” “excellent,” “highly important,” “competent.” **Neutral feedback**: “basic,” “adequate,” “sufficient,” “modest.” **Negative feedback**: “insufficient,” “incomplete,” “insufficient for my practice.”

The distribution of responses was as follows: 11 positive feedbacks (52.38%), with emphasis on terms such as “essential,” “indispensable,” and “important”; 4 neutral (19.4%), highlighting words like “basic” and “sufficient”; and 6 negative (28.57%), the latter consistently converging around the terms “insufficient” and “incomplete.” In Item B.5.2, participants completed the sentence: *“As an English language teacher, I consider my initial training as a whole to have been...”* The responses were as follows: **Positive feedback**: “essential,” “fundamental,” “important,” “advanced,” “modern,” “consistent,” “satisfactory.” **Neutral feedback**: “good,” “regular,” “traditional,” “elementary,” “sufficient.” **Negative feedback**: “deficient,” “incomplete,” “insufficient,” “unsatisfactory,” “precarious,” “condensed.”

Here, the distribution was more balanced: 8 positive feedbacks (38.09%), emphasizing terms such as “fundamental,” “important,” and “modern”; 5 neutral (23.8%), including “regular,” “traditional,” and “sufficient”; and 8 negative (38.09%), in which words such as “deficient,” “insufficient,” and “precarious” prevailed.

Unlike Item B.5.1, which focused on knowledge and content, Item B.5.2 invited a holistic evaluation of the program. Notably, two responses that had been positive in B.5.1 shifted to negative in B.5.2, while one became neutral. Taken together, these analyses suggest that, while high school English teachers in Vitória da Conquista often perceive their initial education as important, essential, and indispensable, they also simultaneously characterize it as insufficient, deficient, and incomplete.

Section C — Social Representations knowledge required for teaching

Section C investigated **Content II** — the Social Representations concerning the knowledge required for the professional practice of teaching, contrasting them with the knowledge base acquired by graduates of the Modern Languages program. The objective was to capture perceptions about the early stages and the development of professionalization in teaching. Questions C.1, C.2, C.3, and C.4 addressed pedagogical, subject-specific, and general knowledge. Teachers' responses were consolidated and are illustrated in Graph 3.

Graph 3 — C.1: teachers' first encounters with professional teaching practice



Source: Authors' elaboration based on field research (2022).

With the same percentage of 23.8%, but expressing opposing viewpoints, five teachers stated that, although they encountered some difficulties at the beginning of their teaching careers in English, they did not attribute these challenges to shortcomings in their initial teacher education. Conversely, another five teachers reported that their early difficulties were directly linked to insufficient preparation provided by that training. With 19% each, four teachers indicated that they did not face significant obstacles at the beginning of their careers, crediting

this success to solid preparation during their initial training, while another four believed that their challenges or successes were not necessarily related to the education they had received. Although a neutral response option was available (“Don’t know or prefer not to answer”), two teachers (9.5%) selected this alternative — the highest proportion for this option in item C.1. At 4.8%, only one teacher reported: *“No. Although I did face some difficulties at the beginning of my English teaching career, I do not attribute them to shortcomings in my initial training.”*

The researchers’ critical-reflective emphasis falls on the two most representative responses to Question C.1, both yielding the same percentage. On one hand, the answer affirming that the Modern Languages program was indeed sufficient to support good teaching practice and professionalization in English teaching, suggesting that any minor difficulties at the beginning were likely attributable to factors beyond the scope of initial training. On the other hand, the opposing alternative — with the same proportion — asserted that the program was not sufficient to provide a sound foundation for English teaching, nor to sustain adequate professional development, adding that the significant difficulties encountered were directly related to a lack of preparation in initial training. The ambiguity observed in Section B (B.5.1 and B.5.2) resurfaces here in Section C, again with similarly equivocal contours.

Questions C.2, C.3, and C.4 examined whether, at the start of their careers and throughout professional development, teachers found their initial education sufficient to meet the demands of teaching practice. Question C.2 focused on didactic-pedagogical knowledge and teaching-learning processes; C.3 addressed technical-pedagogical and grammatical knowledge of the English language; and C.4 referred to general cultural and linguistic aspects of English.

For C.2, concerning pedagogical knowledge, five teachers (23.8%) stated that their initial training “fully met” the demands of teaching practice at the outset of their careers. Ten (47.6%) responded that it “partially met” expectations; four (19%) acknowledged that it “met, but was insufficient in some areas.” Only one teacher (4.8%) claimed it was “insufficient in many areas,” and another reported that it “did not meet” expectations.

For C.4, regarding general knowledge, eight teachers (38.8%) reported that training “partially met” demands, while seven (33.3%) indicated that it “met, but was insufficient in some areas,” representing a 75% increase compared with C.2 and C.3. The remaining percentages were stable: four teachers (19%) said training “fully met” expectations, while two (4.8% each) deemed it “insufficient in many areas” or “did not meet” them at all.

In summary, the data from items C.1 to C.4 reflect diverse perceptions about the adequacy of initial teacher education for English teachers, highlighting both its contributions

and limitations. The findings reveal that certain demands of teaching practice exposed unexpected unpreparedness among novice English teachers, evidencing gaps in their initial training. The responses in Section C suggest that initial training partially addressed the demands of early teaching practice but left theoretical and practical gaps, showing that not all aspects of the teaching profession were adequately developed during the program compared to the realities of classroom practice.

Items C.5.1 and C.5.2 were designed based on Abric's (2001) **Word Association Questionnaire** and the **Structural Approach to Social Representations**. This methodology posits that the central core of a social representation provides meaning, while peripheral elements ensure adaptability and resistance to change (Abric, 2001). The salience and representativeness of ideas for the group are determined by analyzing the frequency and order of word evocation (Abric, 1994, cited in Bomfim, 2017). Accordingly, questions C.5 were developed to spontaneously elicit words or phrases from teachers about the knowledge and content required in teaching, thereby identifying possible Social Representations of teacher education (Silva Junior; Barreto, 2024).

For item C.5.1, teachers were asked to complete the phrase: *“Considering my initial training, at the beginning of my professionalization and teaching career I was required to...”*. Responses of **conformity** included: *“act appropriately,” “meet demands,” “demonstrate mastery,” “show confidence in content knowledge,” “draw on prior knowledge,” “apply didactic and technical knowledge,” “know how to teach,”* and *“plan and dedicate myself.”* Responses of **non-conformity** included: *“apply knowledge not included in my training,” “put into practice what was never learned,” “demonstrate knowledge beyond my training,” “take an English course,” “study at a private language school,” “possess knowledge equivalent to a native speaker,” “speak like a native,” “be fluent in English, which I was not,” “display limited pedagogical but strong technical knowledge,” “just speak English,” “exhibit a ‘traditional attitude’ more than pedagogical competence,” “draw on experience,”* and *“rely on my first job experience.”*

Researchers categorized these into two groups — conformity and non-conformity. The analysis yielded eight responses (38%) in agreement with the adequacy of initial training, highlighting terms such as “meeting demands,” “mastery of knowledge,” and “technical-pedagogical competence.” In contrast, thirteen responses (62%) reflected disagreement, emphasizing issues such as “unaddressed knowledge,” “unrealistic expectations of fluency,” and “demands for technical expertise.” The findings show that more than half of English teachers graduating from the Modern Languages program in Vitória da Conquista considered

their initial training insufficient for secondary-level teaching. The high rate of dissatisfaction underscores a mismatch between academic preparation and the practical demands of education.

For item C.5.2, teachers were asked to complete the phrase: “*Considering my initial training, at the beginning of my professionalization and teaching career I was able to...*”. **Positive responses** included: “*apply pedagogical practices that greatly enhanced student learning,*” “*implement good practices,*” “*provide meaningful instruction,*” “*commit to teaching and learning,*” “*ensure teaching quality,*” “*achieve excellence in English teaching,*” “*do good work,*” and “*perform very well.*” **Neutral responses** included: “*deliver reasonable work,*” “*do a job,*” “*offer reasonable practice,*” “*perform adequately,*” “*teach responsibly within the limits of my training,*” “*exercise my teaching role,*” “*fulfill my duties significantly,*” and “*carry out my role as educator, though hindered by structural barriers.*” **Negative responses** included: “*embromation*” (a mock-English neologism meaning “pretending” or “faking”), “*deliver mediocre work, only improved through continued education,*” “*advance only after taking a private course,*” “*cover the basics, improved later with further training,*” and “*rely too much on traditionalism, resisting innovative practices.*”

Negative feedback merits particular attention, as some teachers candidly described their early professional performance as “mediocre.” The response “*embromation*” is especially illustrative: by coining this hybrid English-Portuguese term, one teacher acknowledged adopting deceptive practices at the beginning of her career, failing to fulfill her educational responsibilities — behaviors stemming from deficiencies in initial training.

The analysis of item C.5.2 revealed eight positive responses (38.09%), emphasizing “pedagogical practice,” “teaching-learning,” and “quality of work”; an equal number of neutral responses, stressing “reasonable work,” “responsible practice,” and “fulfillment of teaching duties”; and five negative responses (23.8%), pointing to “mediocre work,” “need for additional training,” and “tension between traditionalism and innovation.”

Taken together, the results of C.5.1 and C.5.2 show that teachers perceive a clear mismatch between the knowledge acquired during initial training and the demands of teaching practice, with fluency gaps and lack of technical experience emerging as central concerns. While some initially highlighted positive outcomes such as good pedagogy and content mastery, subsequent responses revealed increasing dissatisfaction, underscoring unaddressed content, insufficient language proficiency, mediocre technical performance, and the necessity of supplementary training.

It is worth noting that, according to Brazilian Law 9,394/1996, the purpose of Continuing Teacher Education is to build upon knowledge already acquired. This is reflected

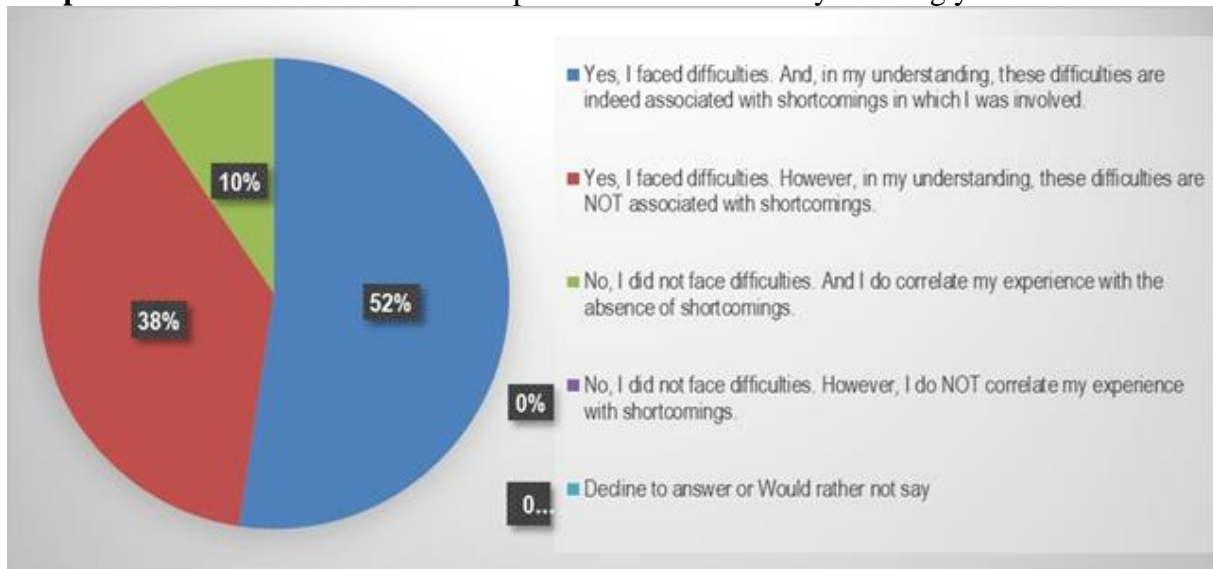
in the Common National Curriculum/*Base Nacional Comum* (BNC) as a guide for Continuing Professional Development (Brazil, 2015, 2019). By contrast, the BNC for undergraduate courses/initial training serves as a basis for the first undergraduate program. This is defined in Resolution CNE/CP no. 2/2019, which outlines the curriculum guidelines for initial teacher education at the professional level (Brazil, 2015, 2019). Thus, the two serve distinct purposes. However, according to the perceptions analyzed in Content II, the participants regarded continuing education as a substitute for — rather than a complement to — their initial training, particularly as foundational pedagogical content had not been fully assimilated during their degree program.

The evidence presented so far points to serious shortcomings in initial teacher education (the primary and essential stage), forcing teachers to seek supplementary training that functions as a disguised continuation of initial education (undergraduate program). In this sense, when teachers, due to gaps in their academic preparation, must return to the classroom as “student teacher” in search of the “fundamental light” necessary to exercise their profession, this cannot properly be called Continuing Education (Nunes, 2019). Similarly, when English teachers are compelled to attend private language schools to fill gaps left by their undergraduate training and secure the basic pedagogical and methodological competencies required, this is not Continuing Education — but rather the belated completion of initial training.

Section D — Social Representations of four foundational proficiencies

Section D addresses the initial training of English language teachers, with a focus on clarifying issues related to **Content III** — the four foundational proficiencies in English: reading, writing, speaking, listening, and comprehension. Item D.1 examined whether, during the early years of teaching, the participants faced difficulties and whether such challenges were associated with gaps in mastering these proficiencies. Of the five response options provided, only three proved relevant to the 21 participating teachers, as illustrated in Graph 4 below.

Graph 4 — D.1: the four foundational proficiencies in the early teaching years



Source: Authors' elaboration based on field research (2022).

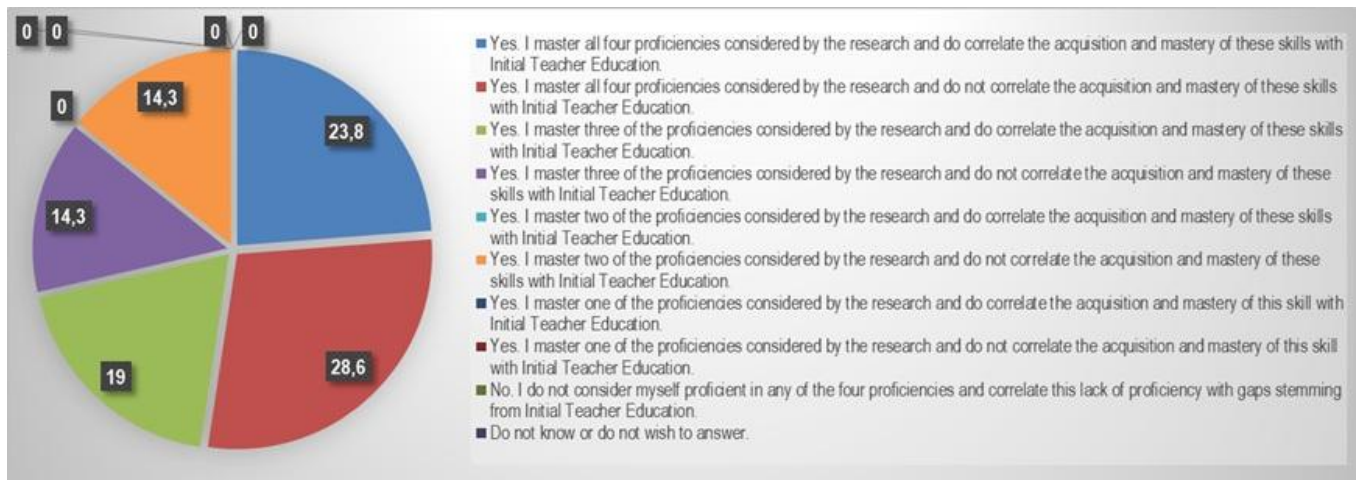
More than half of the responses (11 teachers, or 52.4%) reported that they indeed faced difficulties, explicitly linking them to insufficient mastery of the four proficiencies. In contrast, 8 respondents (38.1%) acknowledged difficulties but did not associate them with deficiencies in these core skills. Meanwhile, 2 teachers (9.5%) stated that they did not experience difficulties and attributed this successful experience precisely to their sufficient and effective mastery of the four proficiencies.

When we combine the two groups whose responses linked success or failure to either mastery or lack thereof in the four proficiencies, the result mirrors the percentage obtained in Item C.5.1: 62% of the answers underscored that knowing how to teach is crucial, but it necessarily presupposes the prior learning and mastery of technical content. Furthermore, when we bring together the two major groups who reported having experienced difficulties in the early years of teaching and professional development, the need emerges to reconsider, from both didactic and pedagogical perspectives, the strategies once employed for developing theoretical knowledge, teaching practices, and formative internships within initial teacher education programs.

Approximately 90% of the teachers surveyed reported difficulties during their first years of teaching. This finding underscores the urgent need for increased investment in programs such as the Institutional Program for Teaching Initiation Scholarships/*Programa Institucional de Bolsa de Iniciação à Docência* (PIBID) and Pedagogical Residency/*Residência Pedagógica* (RP) within Modern Languages/English programs.

As argued by Nunes (2011, 2019), knowledge is essential for teachers; we further contend that the ability to *apply* such knowledge — the “know-how” — is an indispensable condition for English teachers to achieve professional growth and foster effective teaching and learning.

Graph 5 — D.2: mastery of the four foundational proficiencies



Source: Authors' elaboration based on field research (2022).

Item D.2 (Graph 5) investigated whether teachers acquired the four core skills during their initial training. Among respondents, 28.6% reported possessing these competencies, though without attributing them to their academic training; 23.8% acknowledged the influence of initial training on developing these skills. Additionally, 19% reported mastery of three of the four skills, attributing this achievement to their initial training. Conversely, 14.3% claimed mastery of three skills and another 14.3% reported only two, yet both groups denied any contribution from their initial training. In sum, 57.14% of participants did not consider their initial training responsible for the development of these core competencies, reflecting widespread perceptions of inadequacy and insufficiency in their preparation for professional practice. In other words, more than half of the teachers represented their initial training as deficient and incapable of equipping them with the essential technical proficiencies required for teaching.

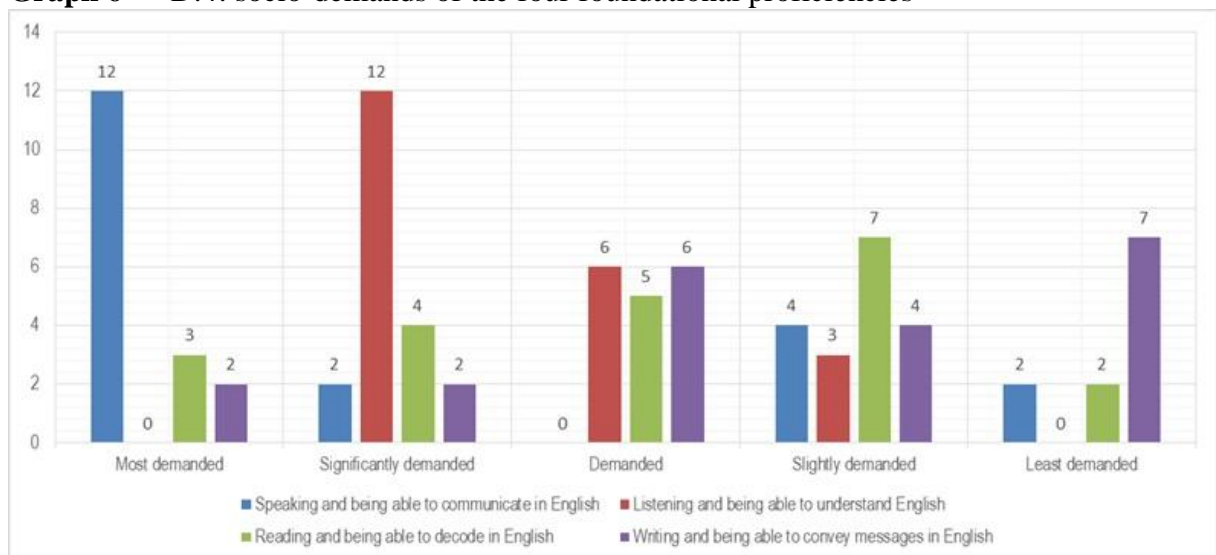
Item D.3 examined which technical skills teachers currently master and their respective levels of proficiency. For reading in English, 4 teachers reported high proficiency, 10 significant proficiency, 6 moderate proficiency, and only 1 limited proficiency. In writing, only 2 reported high proficiency, 10 significant proficiency, 8 moderate, and 1 limited. In speaking, merely 2 teachers reported high proficiency, 8 significant, 5 moderate, and 5 limited. Notably, one teacher added the response “almost none,” signaling a critical lack of confidence and ability to

communicate in English. A similar response appeared regarding listening comprehension, with one teacher acknowledging severely limited skills in understanding spoken English. Nevertheless, in this latter skill, 4 teachers reported high proficiency, 8 significant, and 8 moderate. Importantly, none indicated limited proficiency in this category.

Analysis of Item D.3 reveals that only a small number of teachers (four) feel fully confident across all four core English proficiencies. Moreover, a clear discrepancy emerges between reading and writing, which display higher proficiency levels, and speaking and listening, which reflect greater insecurity. This disparity is particularly concerning, given that the ultimate goal of language learning is communication.

The item D.4 (Graph 6) asked teachers about the socio-professional importance of mastering the four proficiencies, as well as whether they perceived any socio-pedagogical or labor-market hierarchy among them.

Graph 6 — D.4: socio-demands of the four foundational proficiencies



Source: Authors' elaboration based on field research (2022).

Speaking was considered the most demanded skill: 12 teachers reported it as the most socially required competency; 2 regarded it as significantly required; 4 as moderately required; and 2 as the least required. Listening and comprehension also stood out, with 12 respondents citing them as either the most required or significantly required, while 6 reported them as moderately required and 3 as minimally required. Thus, speaking and listening — directly tied to oral communication — emerged with less representational variability and were identified by 57.14% of respondents as the most socially demanded skills for English teachers.

Reading, however, was deemed less essential: 7 teachers classified it as minimally required; 5 as moderately required; 4 as significantly required; 3 as the most required; and 2 as

the least required. Writing was considered the least relevant overall: 7 teachers stated it was the least required, 6 labeled it as moderately required, and 4 perceived it as minimally required. Taken together, reading and writing oscillated between minimally and least required skills, with 33.33% of teachers regarding them as socially less demanded competencies.

In Item D.5, teachers were asked to reflect on their initial training, positioning themselves as learners engaged in the professionalization process proposed by their Teacher Education Institution. The analysis considered the training context, the acquisition of core proficiencies, and the support provided for professional development in higher education. They were asked whether their perceived successes or failures in acquiring the proficiencies derived primarily from their own academic performance as students or from the teaching and methodologies employed by the institution.

For Item D.5, four teachers (19%) declared the Teacher Education Institution solely responsible for their professional successes or failures. This percentage rose to 33.1% (8 respondents) when including those who attributed responsibility primarily — though not exclusively — to the institution. In contrast, 28.6% (6 teachers) remained neutral, opting not to attribute responsibility to either side. Meanwhile, 3 teachers (14.3%) assumed full personal responsibility for their own educational outcomes, without shifting any share of accountability to the institution.

When responses are polarized — excluding the neutral group and clustering the others into two broad categories — two distinct poles emerge: 80% of responses attribute responsibility for successes or failures in initial training to the Teacher Education Institution, while only 20% assign it solely to themselves as students in the Modern Languages program. Thus, respondents collectively signal a stronger attribution of responsibility for their professional preparation — whether successful or not — to their Teacher Education Institution.

Conclusion

This study examined the Social Representations of initial teacher education and professional practice among high school English teachers in Vitória da Conquista, Bahia, as well as the implications of such training for the construction of theoretical, practical, and pedagogical knowledge within the teaching profession. The research sought to understand how teachers perceive, evaluate, and represent the acquisition of foundational disciplinary content during their four-year undergraduate course/initial training; the acquisition of foundational

disciplinary content; the development of the four core skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening in English); the cultivation of teaching competencies; the process of professionalization; and the challenges of entering the teaching career.

The analysis of the data indicates that the initial training of English teachers remains below the expected standards. Initial teacher education must go beyond mere certification for the labor market; it should ensure a professionalization process that integrates theory, practice, and mastery of subject matter. To achieve this, it is essential that Teacher Education Institutions provide effective support to preservice teachers, enabling them to acquire and consolidate the competencies required for successful teaching practice.

In addition to strengthening essential subject-specific knowledge, initial training should emphasize didactic and pedagogical techniques, skills, and strategies — elements that sustain the teacher's professional growth and effectiveness in future educational practice. Ultimately, the goal is for the initial education of English teachers to be efficient, effective, and impactful — that is, to embody both high-quality and well-qualified teacher preparation.

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