The process of becoming a teacher: narratives of Portuguese Language students at URCA

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Abstract
This study investigated the process of becoming a teacher through the narratives of Language and Portuguese students at URCA. The objective was to analyze the reasons why these young women become teachers. This exploratory qualitative study involved semi-structured interviews, and thematic analysis was used to interpret the data. The investigation revealed that experience with teaching practices influenced the choice of a teaching degree, and this identity construction is permeated by the incorporation of family and social actions. Other aspects identified included the difficulties faced and the improvements needed for the university, among which the lack of information, the overload of some teachers, and the absence of others in the course allocations stand out. Therefore, teaching may be a choice for some high school graduates, and problems identified within the scope of teaching degrees need to be discussed.
Keywords: Education. Teaching. Bachelor's Degree in Language and Portuguese.

O processo de tornar-se professora: narrativas de estudantes de Letras/Português da URCA

Resumo
Este estudo investigou o processo de tornar-se professora a partir de narrativas de estudantes de Letras/Português da URCA. O objetivo foi analisar as razões pelas quais as jovens se tornam professoras. Trata-se de uma pesquisa qualitativa exploratória, realizada por meio de entrevistas semiestruturadas, e como técnica para interpretar os dados produzidos utilizou-se a Análise Temática. A investigação revelou que a convivência com práticas ligadas ao trabalho docente influenciou a escolha pela licenciatura, e essa construção identitária está permeada pela incorporação de ações familiares e sociais. As dificuldades enfrentadas pelas universitárias e as melhorias necessárias para a universidade, as quais se sobressaem a falta de informações, a sobrecarga de alguns professores e a ausência de outros na lotação das disciplinas foram também achados da pesquisa. Dessa forma, a docência pode ser uma escolha por alguns egressos do Ensino Médio e problemas identificados no bojo das licenciaturas precisam ser discutidas.

Palavras-chave: Formação. Docência. Licenciatura em Letras Português.

1 Introduction

This research was grounded in narratives of students from the 3rd semester of the *Portuguese Language and Literature* program at the Regional University of Cariri (*Urca*)[1]– 2025.1 and was justified by the interest in analyzing the initial training of teachers, as well as understanding the reasons behind choosing a teaching degree. It was also motivated by the academic background of one of the researchers in this program.

According to a study conducted by the *Sindicato das Entidades Mantenedoras de Estabelecimentos de Ensino Superior no Estado de São Paulo* (Semesp)[2], published on September 29, 2022, Brazil may face a shortage of 235,000 teachers in Basic Education by the year 2040. In this sense, teaching degrees are increasingly threatened by the lack of people interested in teacher education. This is due to several factors, such as the devaluation of the profession, low salaries, the precarization of working conditions, and the insecurity affecting Brazilian public schools.

Thus, teaching degrees have become less sought after by young people graduating from High School. For change to occur, "[…] this situation requires political will along with the implementation of effective public policies in partnership with actors in the educational field, organized civil society, institutes, universities, and schools" (Lacerda, 2023, p. 2).

Given this scenario, the research question was: why choose a teaching degree and become a Portuguese language teacher? The general objective was to analyze the reasons why young women become teachers; and the specific objectives outlined were: to investigate which references the students had/have for teaching; to understand the

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[1] This campus is located in the Pimenta neighborhood, in the city of Crato-CE, an important city in the *Cariri* region of Ceará, located 420 km from the state capital, Fortaleza.

[2] Information extracted from: https://noticias.uol.com.br/ultimas-noticias/agencia-brasil/2022/09/29/em-2040-brasil-podera-ter-carencia-de-235-mil-professores-diz-estudo.htm. Accessed on August 10, 2025.

difficulties faced by the students; and to identify aspects that should be improved at the university.

The theoretical foundations that interlace with the analysis and interpretation of the data produced are based on Freire (2022), Cunha (2001), Bourdieu (2002), Larrosa (2002), Tardif (2020), Lacerda (2023), among others.

It is worth noting that this text is structured into four sections. The first is this introductory part, which presents the genesis of the study, its justification, the research question, and the objectives of the work carried out. The second section contains the methodology, including information about the approach, the method, the instrument used for constructing the research data, and the technique employed to analyze the data produced. Subsequently, the main investigative findings are discussed, and finally, the concluding section presents the final considerations, with reflective and conclusive remarks on the research, as well as indications for future directions arising from the study.

2 Methodology

The methodological approach adopted was qualitative research. Instead of seeking numerical representativeness, the study privileged an interpretative understanding of the reality that emerges from the object investigated. According to Minayo (2024), qualitative research works with the universe of meanings, motives, aspirations, beliefs, values, and attitudes, composing a deeper space of relations, processes, and phenomena that cannot be reduced to the mere operationalization of variables. Regarding its objectives, this study was characterized as exploratory, since it: "[…] aims to provide greater familiarity with the problem, with a view to making it more explicit or to formulating hypotheses. It can be said that such research has as its main objective the refinement of ideas or the discovery of insights" (Gil, 2022, p. 41).

Concerning the procedures for data production, semistructured interviews were used—with inspiration taken from narrative interviewing. These interviews were organized based on a script of questions that addressed the research object and sought to meet the

proposed objectives. According to Manzini (2004, p. 2), "the script would serve not only to collect basic information, but also as a way for the researcher to organize the interaction process with the informant."

After mapping the profile of the undergraduate students—including the municipality in which they live and their age—the interview consisted of four questions addressing the following points: reasons for enrolling in a teaching degree in Portuguese Language and Literature; references for/in teaching; difficulties experienced during training; and aspects that need improvement at the university. The interviews were conducted during the 2025.1 semester, between January 15 and 20, 2025.

The participants were five Portuguese Language and Literature students from Urca, enrolled in the 3rd semester. Contact with the participants occurred via WhatsApp, through instant messaging. The narratives were sent as audio recordings, which were transcribed and analyzed. The decision to work with five participants is justified by the qualitative nature of the research, which is concerned primarily with careful analysis of the data produced rather than with the quantity of data. Thus, the number of students interviewed met the needs expressed in the research questions and objectives.

To preserve the students' identities, we asked them to choose a name by which they would be referenced. The participants are: Aurora, 22 years old, from Juazeiro do Norte-CE; Vox, 18 years old, also from Juazeiro do Norte-CE; Bela, 19 years old, from Crato-CE; Astra, 19 years old, from Tarrafas-CE; and Mione, 18 years old, from Tarrafas-CE[3].

As a technique to analyze the data produced, we used Thematic Analysis inspired by Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2014). This analytical procedure is associated with narrative interviewing, since the interview was developed through questions that welcomed the participants' narratives, leading us to choose this analytical technique.

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[3] All these municipalities belong to the *Cariri* region of Ceará, which is served by the Regional University of Cariri (Urca), the largest higher education institution in the region and responsible for the academic training of young people from all these municipalities.

For the analysis, the units of text—the students' responses—underwent a process of full-text reduction, paraphrasing, and identification of key words. From this process, it becomes possible to identify the theme that emerges from this understanding. The result "constitutes an interpretation of the interviews, combining the informants' relevance structures with those of the interviewer. The fusion of the researchers' and informants' horizons is something related to hermeneutics" (Jovchelovitch; Bauer, 2014, p. 107).

During the analysis, we grouped all narratives related to each question in order to organize the material produced. In Box 1, we illustrate these procedures with a narrative excerpt.

Box 1 – Procedure for Narrative Analysis

Literal transcript of the narrative	Paráfrases Sentenças sintéticas	Palavras-chave/Unidades de sentido
Because I have this liking for teaching and sharing knowledge. I also believe that education is one of the means that can be used to change society for the better (Aurora).	Teaching and sharing knowledge is a personal preference; believes in education as a means of social transformation.	Liking for teaching, sharing knowledge, social transformation. Education, teaching, transformation, social change.
Emerging theme: Education as a practice of social transformation		

Source: Prepared by the authors (2025)

According to the previous table, the left column shows the transcript of the narrative excerpt—the interviewee's response in full. The middle column presents the paraphrases that give rise to the sentences synthesizing the understanding of the narrative corpus. The right column contains the meaning units or keywords. Through this analytical process, the emerging theme is identified, which can be observed in the last line of the column.

3 Results and Discussion

Choosing a profession is not an easy task. It is associated with several factors, among which one may cite aptitude, employment and financial advantages, opportunities, influences, among others. Thus, during the interview, we sought to understand the reasons behind the participants' choices. In this sense, the first interview question consisted of understanding why they enrolled in a teaching degree.

The responses were: "*Because I have this liking for teaching and sharing knowledge. I also believe that* **education is one of the means that can be used to change society** *for the better*[4]" (Aurora, verbal information, our emphasis).

"*I have always had a passion for reading and writing, and from an* **early age I was sure that I wanted the Letras program**, *so it was something I felt a strong desire for— passion and certainty in choosing the program*" (Bela, verbal information, our emphasis).

> *"I chose the teaching degree because, since I was very young, I was always influenced by teachers; I was raised among teachers. So I combined that with my desire* **to change lives through knowledge**—*to share knowledge with people and change their lives"* (Vox, verbal information, our emphasis).

> *"I chose the teaching degree because I believe in the* **importance of education for transforming lives**. *In addition, there are many teachers in my family, and this influenced me a lot. I grew up admiring their work and* **the impact they had on the education of others**, *and this awakened in me the desire to follow the same path"* (Astra, verbal information, our emphasis).

> *"I chose to enroll in the teaching degree because it was where I* **best fit in according to my interests**. *[…] I was inspired by my mother, who is a teacher, and* **I was raised in this teacher's household**. *So it is almost impossible for that inspiration not to have an impact. […] and I decided to enter the Letras teaching degree because I have always enjoyed literature very much; I have always been deeply involved with books and stories, because in* **my home it was always like that—full of books and stories"** (Mione, verbal information, our emphasis).

Through Thematic Analysis, the following emerging categories were identified in the narratives analyzed: vocation/passion for teaching (Aurora, Bela, Mione);

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[4] Narrative excerpt used in the Box that illustrates the narrative analysis procedure.

family/teacher influence (Vox, Astra, Mione); education as social transformation (Aurora, Astra, Vox); and an interest in literature/reading (Bela, Mione).

In Aurora's response, "[…] *I believe that education is one of the means that can be used to change society* […]"; in Vox's statement, "[…] *wanting to change lives through knowledge* […]"; and in Astra's observation, "[…] *because I believe in the importance of education for transforming lives* […]," conceptions of a transformative education become evident—one capable of reaching people through academic training and, later on, through the practice of teaching. The transcribed accounts point to an educational process understood as an instrument of social change, linked to the possibility of transforming personal trajectories, expanding autonomy, and strengthening individuals' capacity for choice. As Freire (2022) states, "When we live the authenticity required by the practice of teaching–learning, we participate in a complete experience—directive, political, ideological, gnosiological, pedagogical, aesthetic, and ethical—in which beauty must walk hand in hand with decency and seriousness (Freire, 2022, p. 26).

In line with the quotation, one can see the understanding that the act of teaching–learning is neither a neutral activity nor a merely technical one, but an exercise that involves the human experience in its totality by integrating political, ideological, gnosiological, pedagogical, as well as aesthetic and ethical dimensions. Thus, there is coherence between the students' statements and Freire's ideas regarding the possibility of personal and social transformation through education.

Bela and Mione have very similar responses. Both narrate that one of the factors that attracted them to choosing the teaching degree was reading; contact with books motivated their interest in becoming trained teachers. Mione also reports that the fact of having been raised in a "*teacher's household*" influenced her professional decision, and her narrative approaches that of Astra, "[…] *in my family there are many teachers and this influenced me a lot; I grew up admiring their work* […]" and that of Vox, "[…] *I have always been influenced by teachers; I was raised among teachers*."

From the accounts of Mione, Astra, and Vox, the influence of family trajectories and social contexts becomes evident. Growing up in a "*teacher's household*," having "*many*

teachers in the family," or being "*raised among teachers*" implies having, from an early age, experiences tied to the values, practices, and representations of the teaching profession. According to Bourdieu (2002), this phenomenon is understood through the concept of *habitus*, given that experiences constructed within the family sphere directly influence life choices and possibilities. To understand this concept, one must consider that:

> The *habitus*, a product of history, produces practices—individual and collective—and therefore history, in accordance with the schemes engendered by history; it ensures the active presence of past experiences which, deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought, and action, tend—more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms—to guarantee the conformity of practices and their constancy over time (Bourdieu, 2002, p. 82).

The narrative accounts and the concept of *habitus* explain that living alongside practices associated with teaching influenced the choice of the teaching profession and the construction of an identity shaped by the incorporation of family and social actions. In this way, internalized dispositions are formed that guide and motivate one's choices.

For the question, a development of the interview prompt, "for what reason did you choose the Portuguese Language and Literature program?", Bela and Mione had already presented some of the reasons for their choice in their previous narratives. Mione added that, in addition to her fascination with and closeness to literature and stories, once she entered the program and came into contact with the field of language studies, she became even more certain that she was in the right program: "*When you are in High School and choose Letras, you have no idea how beautiful the language is, how complex the language is, and how interesting the study of general linguistics, phonetics, and phonology can be.*" (Mione, verbal information).

> "*I chose Portuguese Language and Literature not only because it is our language, but because I consider it an area of utmost importance both for our personal growth and for developing more critical thinking, as well as being a field of study in constant transformation*" (Aurora, verbal information).

> "*I chose Portuguese Language and Literature because, specifically in High School, I developed a passion for grammar and its rules. I am also passionate about classics of Brazilian literature and have always found it easy to understand the*

Portuguese language. So, since I already wanted to pursue a teaching degree, I chose the field of Portuguese Language and Literature" (Vox, verbal information).

"*I chose Portuguese Language and Literature because I have always felt affinity with the subject, and I was enchanted by the way Language and Literature connect us to the world. This field is rich and fascinating. My wish is to be able to teach in a way that makes others fall in love with it as well, just as I did. I see language teaching as a powerful tool for forming critical citizens*" (Astra, verbal information).

Linked to this analysis and to the narrative excerpts, the following thematic categories were organized: enchantment with language and its fields of study (Mione, Vox, Astra); social and formative importance of language (Aurora, Astra); literature as passion and influence (Vox, Astra); motivation to teach and inspire (Astra).

Through the analysis of the narrative excerpts, the idea emerges that choosing the Portuguese Language and Literature teaching degree is associated with two main movements: a personal and affective one—enchantment with the language, passion for grammar and literature, affinity with the discipline; and a social and transformative one—the perception of language as a means of personal development, critical formation, and social impact through teaching. In this sense, the students choose the program not only out of individual interest but also out of an awareness of the relevance that language and literature hold in the critical formation of individuals.

It becomes evident that the idea of experience takes shape in the narratives. In dialogue with these statements, Larrosa (2002, p. 21) expresses that "experience is what happens to us, what befalls us, what touches us." Thus, it is understood that the decision to pursue the degree is interwoven with singular life experiences. This is confirmed in the excerpts: "[…] *how beautiful the language is, how complex the language is* […]" (Mione, verbal information); "[…] *specifically in High School, I developed a passion for grammar and its rules. I am also passionate about classics of Brazilian literature* […]" (Vox, verbal information); "[…] *I have always felt affinity with the subject, and I was enchanted by the way Language and Literature connect us to the world; this field is rich and fascinating* […]" (Astra, verbal information). In this way, when narrating their choices, the future teachers

transform lived experiences into formative experiences that give meaning to the teaching identity in the making.

Next, we discuss the responses given to the question "What are your references in/for teaching?" The interviewees reinforce family influence as a source of inspiration and as a positive professional model, with the family serving as an incentive for studying and as a transmitter of values, and with family members who are teachers strengthening the idea of *habitus* previously referenced. However, they also emphasize the contribution of other teachers in this process of inspiration and reference: *"**I had many teachers in High School in the field of languages who were a great inspiration to me**, who always motivated me a lot—the Literature teacher and the English teacher; both completed their teaching degrees at Urca"* (Bela, verbal information, our emphasis). *"**My references for teaching include the teachers in my own family** who have always inspired me with their work and dedication, who devote themselves to teaching as a form of social value"* (Astra, verbal information, our emphasis).

> "*One of my references is my sister; she graduated from the Regional University of Cariri, Urca. Today she is a Geography teacher, has already completed a master's degree, and I am very proud of her growth—she is a major reference for me*" (Aurora, verbal information).

> "*There are some people who have passed through my life who are references for me in teaching. I will always be inspired by the love they have for the profession, by the knowledge and intelligence they possess and have passed on to me. First, **my teacher from the 2nd year of High School**, Maria Juliana Magalhães—she was the one who awakened in me the desire to study Portuguese Language and Literature. I already knew I wanted to pursue a teaching degree but did not know which one, and she lit that desire in me. Also Rosane Ribeiro de Melo Lobo, Jaiane Nayara Ribeiro, and Jardel Ribeiro*" (Vox, verbal information, our emphasis).

> "***My references for teaching are my mother, a Portuguese Language teacher** who also holds a Master's degree in Education and always wants to study more. This motivates us a lot—both me and my sister. […]. Besides my mother, there are other teachers. **My High School teachers** made a total difference in my life. […] and when I was deciding whether to pursue a teaching degree, they were very important to my choice, because I always asked what they thought about the teaching degree, and they helped me choose teaching. **In the program, I met new professors** who became inspirations, such as Thiago Gil, Edmar, and Flávio Queiroz (in memoriam)*" (Mione, verbal information, our emphasis).

Thus, based on the narratives, the following categories emerge from the transcribed accounts: family references (Aurora, Astra, and Mione); High School teachers (Vox, Bela, Mione); and university professors (Mione).

In addition to family members, the participants highlight High School teachers as important influences on their choice of the teaching degree. The inspiration is not limited to content but extends to attitudes. Based on the analysis, these teachers appear as significant professional models: "*I will always be inspired by the love they have for the profession, by the knowledge and intelligence they possess and passed on to me. First, my teacher from the 2nd year of High School* […]" (Vox, verbal information); "*I had many teachers in High School in the field of languages who were a great inspiration to me, who always motivated me a lot* […]" (Bela, verbal information); "[…] *My High School teachers made a total difference in my life […] they helped me choose teaching* […]" (Mione, verbal information).

These perceptions align with the concept of the "Good Teacher." In studies conducted by Cunha (2001), the good teacher is formed not only through content transmission but also through example and meaningful relationships with students. In this sense, the teachers remembered by the interviewees played an important role in the academic and formative paths they have followed.

In addition to High School teachers, university professors were also cited as references that reaffirmed the students' choices: "[…] *In the program, I met new professors who became inspirations* […]" (Mione, verbal information). Based on these accounts, it is clear that the students are in the teaching degree because they consciously chose it and justify this preference in a well-articulated and confident manner.

The research also sought to investigate possible difficulties that may arise along this formative path, since, even when students have chosen what they wish to study, various factors may contribute to the emergence of challenges. In this sense, they answered the question "Have you faced any difficulties in the program? Which ones?"

Aurora states that she does not consider herself to have faced difficulties in the program. Bela, in agreement with Aurora, emphasizes that she has not yet encountered

obstacles in the teaching degree. According to her, the adaptation process was very smooth and the professors are very good. The other participants, however, point to some obstacles that need to be overcome: "*The difficulties I have faced and will face are in the Literature courses, because there are many of them in our curriculum and, as I have already mentioned, I have more affinity with grammar, so I believe they require more effort*" (Vox, verbal information).

> "*I have faced some difficulties in the program; one of them is the lack of pedagogical practice during the training. Since I already work in the classroom, I notice that the theory presented in the program does not always reflect the reality of practice, which is much more challenging. In addition, emotional issues are also challenging, such as dealing with academic pressure, balancing studies with work, and handling the demands of the program*" (Astra, verbal information).

> "*In college itself I do not have difficulties; I get apprehensive about what is new, about the courses that will come, but it is normal to be afraid of the unknown. My greatest difficulty is living far from my city and my family—spending long periods without being able to see them. Because of exams, assignments, and the demands of the program, I end up being somewhat absent from their lives*" (Mione, verbal information).

In summary, these narratives reveal three main thematic categories: Academic (content and courses): Vox; Professional (theory vs. pedagogical practice): Astra; Emotional (family distance, role balancing): Astra and Mione.

We observe that the narrative excerpts highlight different dimensions of the difficulties faced by the students in their academic trajectories. Vox points to challenges related to content and disciplinary training, recognizing her limited affinity with Literature— a recurring curricular component in the program's structure—which directly affects her performance and formative path. Astra, in turn, identifies the gap between theory and pedagogical practice as an obstacle, especially because she already works in the classroom, a context in which she perceives a reality significantly different from the theoretical approaches addressed in her courses. In Mione's response, the affective and social dimension stands out, as she reports the distance from her family and the emotional impacts of this separation. Astra also mentions emotional issues that intensify feelings of insecurity when facing academic pressures. Although many of these factors extend beyond

the strictly academic sphere, they are experienced as difficulties that directly affect the university experience.

This analysis shows that teacher education is not limited to cognitive mastery but also encompasses emotional and contextual dimensions, which shape the experiences of the students and future teachers. In line with Tardif (2020, p. 36), teaching knowledge can be understood "as a plural form of knowledge, composed of a more or less coherent amalgam of knowledge originating from professional training and from disciplinary, curricular, and experiential knowledge." In this sense, all forms of knowledge must be validated for the construction of professional training, including emotional knowledge, since "an emotional component inevitably manifests itself when dealing with human beings" (Tardif, 2020, p. 130).

The final interview question sought to hear the students' opinions regarding the following: "In relation to the university, which aspects need improvement?" The responses provided were:

"[…] *it is the issue of information, because many students enter without knowing what the program offers and what their responsibilities are as university students. Much of the information we learn comes from senior students. One example is the matter of elective courses—I didn't know there were electives, and it was the senior students who told me; then I had to go around asking what it was, how it worked, how to enroll. I think this should be communicated, just like the matter of complementary hours; I think this should be explained at the beginning. So an important point for improvement would be this issue of clarification*" (Aurora, verbal information).

"*With regard to the university, I believe that in our program what needs improvement is teacher allocation; there are many courses without instructors and many professors who are overworked with too many hours, too many credits, and too many classes*" (Vox, verbal information).

"*What needs improvement is the structure of the college and, mainly, the issue of professors, because being without a professor is very complicated and delays us a lot. Although our program has most of its professors, there are other programs with very few instructors*" (Bela, verbal information).

"*The university has many points that could be improved. The infrastructure, for example, needs more attention—such as a more complete library and adequate study spaces. Another aspect is safety, both on campus and in the surrounding areas, which is a constant concern for us students. I also see the need for*

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accessible psychological support and greater integration between theory and practice" (Astra, verbal information).

"*Aspects that need improvement at the university: teacher allocation, because although my program is not as affected, I have already been impacted by the lack of instructors. I was unable to take the Morphology course in the 2nd semester, and this will affect my future course plan because I will have to withdraw from something else in order to take it. I ended up not completing the entire semester—not because of my own fault, but because of the absence of allocated professors. This should change, because there are instructors waiting to be hired who passed the public exam, as well as those approved in the temporary hiring process. There are programs with many uncovered courses, there are no classrooms available, and these issues strongly affect students' professional training. There should also be renovations to the building, because besides being an old structure, more classrooms should be built so that they can meet the needs of the programs—since these programs are offered, students should at least have a classroom available for their courses. Another problem is the lack of information*" (Mione, verbal information).

This analysis and the narrative excerpts converge into the following thematic categories: communication and access to information (Aurora and Mione); faculty allocation and overload (Vox, Bela, and Mione); physical structure and operational conditions (Bela, Astra, and Mione); student support and well-being (Astra).

Guided by thematic analysis, the main categories identified fall within the field of communication and access to information. According to Aurora's account, "[…] *many students enter without knowing what the program offers and what their responsibilities are as university students* […]" and further: "[…] *I didn't know there were electives, and it was the senior students who informed me* […]", "[…] *the matter of complementary hours […] should be explained at the beginning.*" Mione reinforces this category by stating that "*another problem is the lack of information.*" In this sense, according to the students, there is a lack of institutional clarity, which generates insecurity in the formative process.

Thus, it becomes clear that organization and clarity of information at the university are essential for teacher education to proceed without major setbacks. Otherwise, without clear information about the curriculum, courses, electives, complementary hours, or institutional expectations, the students in the teaching degree face insecurity and fragility in their initial training. "The organizational and management structures of the school and

the university educate and teach, powerfully influencing the learning processes of students and teachers" (Libâneo, 2010, p. 45).

Faculty allocation and overload appear as a recurring issue in the narratives of three students: "[…] *many uncovered courses and many professors who are overloaded*" (Vox, verbal information); "[…] being without a professor is very complicated and delays us a lot" (Bela, verbal information); "[…] *I missed the Morphology course in the 2nd semester […]. I ended up not completing the entire semester, not because of my own fault, but because of the lack of allocated professors*" (Mione, verbal information), as well as "[…] *there are programs with many uncovered courses*" (Mione, verbal information). In this regard, this problem compromises the curricular continuity of the programs, affects the formative trajectory of students, and weakens the work of professors who are already overloaded.

In these analyses, the precarization of teaching work becomes evident, characterized by overload and by the absence of adequate faculty allocation. This problem directly affects the mental and physical health of professors and the formative quality of students. Oliveira (2004, p. 1138), when researching the precarization and flexibilization of teaching work, states that:

> The changes that have occurred in labor and employment relations have recently been characterized by the threat of a phenomenon considered by some authors as a precarization of labor relations. Such a movement, however, is not limited to the relations intrinsic to the work process, but concerns primarily employment relations, presenting an attempt to flexibilize and even deregulate labor legislation (Oliveira, 2004, p. 1138).

Another category that emerges from the recurrence of narrative excerpts refers to the physical structure and the operational conditions of the university. This can be observed in the following fragments: "[…] the issue of the college's structure" (Bela, verbal information); "[…] *the infrastructure, for example, needs more attention, such as a more complete library and adequate study space*" (Astra, verbal information); "*There are programs […] with no classrooms […] in addition to being an old structure, more classrooms should be built*" (Mione, verbal information). Structural and material

deficiencies point to the physical precariousness of the institution, revealing the need for investments in infrastructure.

Another aspect that requires attention is student support and well-being. Consider the following excerpts: "[…] *safety both on campus and in the surrounding areas, which is a constant concern*" and "[…] *the need for accessible psychological support*" (Astra, verbal information). Although structural issues are a problem that demands attention, one of the students reports the need for safety and psychological support, indicating the importance of well-being and the lack of it at certain moments.

It is necessary—and urgent—to turn our attention to these issues, since they interfere with the initial teacher education process in public universities throughout the country, especially in the current national context in which there is the possibility of a future shortage of teachers.

"We cannot stand idly by in the face of a possible teacher shortage; we need to fight for a society that values the profession so that young people will aspire to become teachers […]" (Lacerda, 2023, p. 2). Such appreciation will contribute to fostering and/or strengthening public policies that may reduce the problems inherent to the teaching profession and, above all, those that affect public universities, which compromise the quality of initial teacher education.

4 Final considerations

This study emerged from the research question: "Why choose a teaching degree and become a Portuguese Language teacher?" Based on this question, the central objective of the research was to analyze the reasons that lead young people to choose a teaching degree as their field of study, more specifically the Portuguese Language and Literature program. As a development of this general objective, the specific objectives were to investigate which references the students had/have for teaching, to identify the difficulties faced by them, and to highlight aspects that need improvement at the university.

Guided by this question and by the objectives presented, the qualitative investigation revealed that, although teaching degrees have increasingly been devalued, some High School graduates still choose the teaching profession, and this choice is justified mainly by family, social, and school influences.

Another aspect identified in the analyzed narratives was the set of challenges that the students pointed out, such as the absence or insufficiency of information, the precarization of teaching work related to workload overload, the lack of professors for certain courses, deficient infrastructure, insufficient physical resources, and the need for greater safety and emotional support.

Based on the elements highlighted, we conclude that there is a need for greater support for the Higher Education institution in order to ensure a higher-quality initial teacher education process, which includes investing in Basic Education. To the extent that there is greater appreciation for the teaching profession and investment in initial teacher training, there is a real possibility of ensuring quality education and avoiding the projected shortage in the Brazilian teaching profession.

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