



Education Policy Analysis
Archives/Archivos Analíticos de Políticas
Educativas

ISSN: 1068-2341

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Challenges and Accomplishments of ELT at Primary Level in Chile: Towards the
Aspiration of Becoming a Bilingual Country
Education Policy Analysis Archives/Archivos Analíticos de Políticas Educativas, vol. 24,
2016, pp. 1-25
Arizona State University
Arizona, Estados Unidos

Available in: <http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=275043450123>

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SPECIAL ISSUE
**English Language Teaching in Public Primary Schools
in Latin America**

education policy analysis
archives

A peer-reviewed, independent,
open access, multilingual journal



Arizona State University

Volume 24 Number 82

August 1, 2016

ISSN 1068-2341

Challenges and Accomplishments of ELT at Primary Level in Chile: Towards the Aspiration of Becoming a Bilingual Country¹

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Citation: Barahona, M. (2016). Challenges and accomplishments of ELT at primary level in Chile: Towards the aspiration of becoming a bilingual country. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 24(82). <http://dx.doi.org/10.14507/epaa.24.2448> This article is part of EPAA/AAPE's Special Issue on *English Language Teaching in Public Primary Schools in Latin America*, Guest Edited by José Luis Ramírez-Romero and Peter Sayer.

Abstract: This paper explores the policy development supporting the implementation of English language teaching (ELT) in Chile at primary level over the last two decades. This policy—which made English instruction compulsory for all Chilean students from fifth grade—has had to deal with a series of significant challenges since its introduction. One key impediment has been the lack of qualified teachers of English at primary school level. In

¹ The research presented in this article was funded by a CONICYT grant PAI Project N° 82140007.

addition, in a crowded curriculum, English teaching has been often allocated inadequate number of hours to facilitate successful language acquisition. Further, suitable learning resources and support materials—especially designed for young learners—have often been limited. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the broader offering of English, particularly at the primary level, has had an important democratising effect. It has been somewhat effective in allowing children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds to access a global language and a potential world of opportunities previously only available to students attending wealthy private institutions. Data suggests that this policy has had some impact in establishing educational foundations for broader access to more advanced language learning for all students in Chile. However, equally it demonstrates further resources and support for teachers and teaching is essential to realise this potential.

Keywords: ELT policy; Chile; primary education.

Desafíos y logros de la enseñanza del Inglés en el nivel primario en Chile: La aspiración de convertirse en un país bilingüe

Resumen: Este artículo examina el desarrollo e implementación de políticas públicas en la enseñanza del Inglés en Chile en el nivel primario en las últimas dos décadas. Estas políticas, que han hecho obligatoria la instrucción de Inglés para todos los estudiantes chilenos desde 5° grado, ha tenido que enfrentar una serie de retos importantes desde su introducción. Uno de los impedimentos clave ha sido la falta de profesores/as de Inglés calificados para enseñar en en la escuela primaria. Además, en un currículo nacional sobrecargado, se ha asignado un número insuficiente de horas para la enseñanza del inglés. Asimismo, los recursos de aprendizaje y materiales de apoyo, especialmente diseñados para los niños, han sido limitados. A pesar de estas dificultades, se puede argumentar que la oferta más amplia de Inglés, sobre todo en el nivel primario, ha tenido un importante efecto democratizador. Algunos estudios han demostrado un impacto positivo posibilitando a los niños de niveles socioeconómicos más bajos acceder a una lengua global y a un mundo de posibilidades que anteriormente sólo estaba disponible para los estudiantes de instituciones privadas. El análisis discutido en este trabajo sugiere que las políticas públicas en relación con la enseñanza del inglés a nivel primario ha tenido algún impacto positivo en el establecimiento de los fundamentos educativos para el acceso más amplio al aprendizaje de inglés más avanzado para todos los estudiantes en Chile. Sin embargo, igualmente se demuestra que es necesario incrementar los recursos y el apoyo a los profesores y a la enseñanza del inglés a nivel primario para que la implementación sea más efectiva.

Palabras claves: Chile, ELT, nivel primario

Desafios e realizações do ELT em nível primário no Chile: Rumo a aspiração de se tornar um país bilíngue

Resumo: Este artigo explora o desenvolvimento de políticas de apoio a implementação de ensino da língua Inglesa (ELT) no Chile em nível primário ao longo das duas últimas décadas. Essa política—que fez o Inglês obrigatório para todos os estudantes Chilenos de quinta série—teve que lidar com uma série de desafios significativos desde sua introdução. Um impedimento-chave tem sido a falta de professores de Inglês qualificados ao nível de escola primária. Além disso, em um currículo cheio, o ensino de Inglês tem sido muitas vezes atribuído um número insuficiente de horas para facilitar a aquisição de linguagem bem sucedida. No mais, recursos de aprendizagem adequados e materiais de apoio—especialmente designado para jovens aprendizes—têm sido muitas vezes limitado. No entanto, pode-se argumentar que a oferta mais ampla de Inglês, especialmente no nível primário, teve um efeito

democratizante importante. Tem sido eficazes em permitir que as crianças de meios socioeconomicos mais desfavorecidos tenham acesso a uma língua global e um mundo de oportunidades anteriormente disponíveis apenas para alunos que frequentam instituições particulares. Os dados sugerem que esta política teve algum impacto em estabelecer fundações educacionais para ampliar o acesso a aprendizagem de línguas para todos os estudantes no Chile. No entanto, é igualmente demonstrado mais recursos e apoio para professores e o ensino é essencial para realizar esse potencial.

Palavras-chave: política ELT, Chile, educação primária

Introduction

The objective of this article is to consider the policy framework that has supported the evolution of ELT at the primary school level in Chile over the last two decades. It will also analyse the contemporary state of ELT policy, particularly as it relates to the public school system and consider the core challenges these key national policies—and English language curriculum—are continuing to respond to as the process of educational reform continues. The analysis of the policies of ELT at primary level in Chile is framed by a historical analysis of the developing goals of ELT in Chile over time, with a focus on its primary orientations. In addition, an examination of the evolution of the national curriculum for elementary level will be offered, centred on the core rationale for the facilitating *English Opens Doors* program. The impact of the ELT policies in the last 20 years are also discussed in the light of standardised tests' results and its effectiveness in the classrooms.

In order to ground this analysis, it is useful to first explore the broad framework of the Chilean educational system in order to understand the complex environment in which ELT confronts in the public education system.

Chilean Educational System: A Historical Overview

The contemporary Chilean education system is the outcome of a series of political and economic measures implemented over the last 30 years.² Under the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, a neoliberal economy supported by an authoritarian political system, imposed market de-regularisation, trade liberalisation, political decentralisation, social expenditure reductions, as well as the broad scale privatisation of health, pensions, and education (Matear, 2006; Rodriguez-Remedi, 2008). As a consequence, the view of freedom of choice as a consumer became dominant in the public discourse and educational policies (Barahona, 2015; Matear, 2006).

Pinochet's reform of the education system promoted the reduction of the role of the state and decentralisation. As a result, the school system was segregated ending in three types of schools: municipal government funded schools, voucher schools subsidised by the government (with parents' co-payment), and fee-paying private schools (Matear, 2006). Decentralisation had a huge impact on funding as municipal governments had to provide a schooling system using their own funds. Thus, wealthier municipalities were better resourced

² It is important to note that an education reform is being discussed in congress and some parts have already been passed and in process of implementation. The effects of this reform will take place progressively in the near and mid future. The main change in the schooling system relates to the role of the state in the public arena especially in voucher schools and municipal schools that will not be run by municipalities anymore.

and equipped to administer schools more effectively than the poorer municipalities. However, all municipalities faced the challenge of administering schools without the necessary expertise and support to provide Chileans with quality education. This led to the impoverishment of the public school system and as a consequence, educational achievements were low.

Another major impact of the decentralisation of the school system was the introduction of voucher schools. These schools were run by private institutions, received funds from the state and could charge parents a fee. This resulted in the proliferation of for-profit school in an unregulated system. Chilean parents became clients as one way to aspire for better educational levels showing a steady increase of student enrolment in this type of institution over municipal schools. By 1997, student enrolments had increased by more than 40 per cent in the voucher schools over the municipal ones (World Bank, 2001). In 2014, the enrolment of students in municipal schools reached only 35% (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2015).

Regarding educational achievements, several studies have evidenced that poor results at school are a factor associated with socio-economic background and that the level of attainment at primary and secondary school impacts, in turn, on the preparedness for entry into higher education, regardless of the type of schools- municipal or voucher (Brunner, 1997; Matear, 2006; Rojas, Zapata, & Herrada, 2013). Thus, Pinochet's reform institutionalised stratification and inequality in access to quality education (McEwan, Urquiola, & Vargas, 2008). In this context, there has been a tendency marked by poor children attending under-resourced and low performing schools perpetuating inequality and lack of access to quality education (Verger, Bonal, & Zancajo, 2016).

Democratic governments after 1990 have made efforts to reform the inherited educational system and have made education a more prominent aspect in the political agenda. The main focus of the reforms have considered "the need for a modern education system in a democratic society to overcome inequalities; to promote greater social justice and equity; and to strengthen Chile's entry into a global economy through investment in skills, knowledge and technology" (Matear, 2006, p. 38).

In recent years, Chile has been identified as one of the countries with the highest income inequality reflected across social structure including education (OECD, 2015). Thus, it is not surprising that current president of Chile, Michelle Bachelet commenced her second government term (2014-2018) with the promise of implementing major educational reform to address structural inequity and the effective educational segregation existing in the country. This attempted to address the stratification of schools has remained untouched until now. In 2015, the government sent a comprehensive educational reform bill to the Chilean Congress that comprised a series of substantial measures to democratise access to high quality education from primary to higher education levels. The policy objective of this reform were clear; to address the legacy of dictatorship-era actions which has resulted in serious variations in educational quality, primarily related to the socio-economic status of students. The bill, passed in late 2015, will end for-profit schools and forbid any type of discrimination against any state-funded schools. From 2016, voucher schools will have to be owned by non-profit corporations and current co-payments that parents are currently required to pay will be discontinued.

During 2015, immediate measures were introduced as part of the educational reform to give effect to this policy intent: ending for-profit schools (who'd previously received state subsidies), the progressive end of co-payment of parents in state funded schools and the termination of any type of segregation and discrimination at public schools. In addition, significant funding increases were allocated to strengthen the run down public school system, which has suffered under the differing economic circumstances of different local councils who

had been given responsibility for public schools during the dictatorship. In the case of municipal schools, the parliament is currently discussing a bill to create a new intermediate entity: national office of public education (*Dirección Nacional de Educación Pública*) that would be the link between the Ministry of Education and schools. This new entity would be in charge of 67 local services that would not only be in charge of running the public schools in terms of administration, but they would also support professional development and educational achievements. It is expected that municipalities will progressively hand in the administration of schools to this new structure. The impact and effects of this new organisation to promote equity will be seen in the mid future.

What will be exactly the effects of these major educational reforms is yet to emerge, however they do represent a significant policy re-orientation that will be watched closely. Although there are high expectations for major changes, there is also a powerful history of structural segregation of students centred on socio-economic inequities that may be difficult to disrupt. Reflecting this reality, it is expected that most of these dramatic policy changes implemented by Bachelet administration will only really take clear form over next decade.

ELT Policy in Chile

All Chilean schools—public or private—are required to deliver national curriculum at primary and secondary levels. Historically, the national curriculum for primary education has included subjects such as Spanish, social sciences, natural sciences, physical education and arts. Foreign languages as part of the curriculum of primary education were exclusively confined to private schools until very recently (especially in those schools related to migrant communities, e.g. *Deutsche Schule*, *Scuola Italiana* etc). However, in 1996 as part of the new focus of the democratic governments to promote higher levels of equity, English language became a compulsory subject from fifth to twelfth grade (Barahona, 2015). Prior to this, English was only an optional element of secondary education curriculum in the public system (i.e. voucher school and municipal schools). Yet, despite this national directive, the inclusion of English at elementary level has only gradually become a reality across the country over the last decade.

The introduction of English as part of the compulsory curriculum in Chile was a core component of the first national educational reform marking the transition to democratic governance and the modernisation of the state. This reform was early initiative to increase the economic and social opportunities of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds to access more powerful forms of education. One of the major drivers of the reform process was to increase the hours of the school day, meaning that more hours were available for areas that showed some levels of deficit achievement—or for the inclusion of new subjects, such as English. Another major change implemented by this early educational reform was the introduction of a more developed curriculum framework.

The new curriculum was organised according to *objetivos fundamentales* (fundamental objectives) and *contenidos mínimos* (minimum contents) by grade and subject (Ministerio de Educación, 1996). The *objetivos fundamentales* referred to learning outcomes that were considered the basic achievements student learning should be orientated toward. The *contenidos mínimos* referred to a basic set of contents that should be covered in specific level and subject. Thus, the curricular matrix consisted of the articulation of *objetivos fundamentales and contenidos mínimos* per year and subject, and a set of *objetivos transversales*, (across the curriculum objectives) learning outcomes referred to values and attitudes that were to be developed across the curriculum. Critically—for the first time—the foundations of this curriculum framework were built on a demonstrably constructivist view of teaching and learning. There was also a specific emphasis

on allowing schools the freedom to develop their own localised forms of curriculum. This was based on the prevailing idea of freedom of choice engendered earlier during the 1990s.

In the next section I will analyse the historical development of the English curriculum since 1996. This examination reveals the intentions of the ELT policy in these past two decades.

English Curriculum: Moving from the 20th to the 21st Century

The policy framework and associated curriculum defined for English by the Chilean Ministry of Education has been subject to several reviews since its introduction over two decades ago. The most significant changes in terms of policy, especially at primary level, have resulted from reviews mounted in 1996, 2009, and most recently in 2012. These policy changes have had a major impact: encouraging the introduction of English as a subject at primary level, the normalising of English as part of the national curriculum from elementary level and the increased significance of English across the broader school system. As a consequence, in contemporary schooling English has a relatively high profile as a subject, creating both higher expectations of language development and heightening the aspirations of all students to learn English (regardless of socioeconomic background). Table 1 presents a comparative summary of ELT curricular approaches of ELT (Ministerio de Educación, 1996, 2009b, 2012a).

As shown in Table 1, the first educational policy reform in the 1990s affecting English curriculum aimed at developing receptive skills (listening and reading) (Ministerio de Educación, 1996). The English curriculum directed that 40% of the English curriculum should be devoted to reading comprehension, 40% should be devoted to listening comprehension and 20% to writing and speaking (Ministerio de Educación, 1996, 2009a). The basis for this approach was justified by assertions that English for Chileans was a tool that allowed people to access information and knowledge. The emphasis on receptive skills would allow people to access the global economy and information network (McKay, 2003). This emphasis left behind the previous curriculum that expressed a more limited perspective, centred on the knowledge of linguistic items in the foreign language.

Table 1
 Comparative summary of ELT Curricular approaches at primary level in Chile

| Element | 1996 | 2009 | 2012 |
|--|---|--|--|
| The aim of ELT curriculum for primary level is... | To provide students with a tool for work giving them access to the technical, technological, commercial, cultural academic world, i.e. provide students with basic linguistic competence that allows them to read and listen comprehensively and that becomes the base for future learning. | To provide students with a tool that allows them to access information, knowledge and technologies. It is also expected that students appreciate other ways of thinking, lifestyles and traditions. | That students learn the language and use it as a tool to manage simple communicative situations and mainly to access new knowledge and learning to respond to global communication demands through media and technologies. |
| Focus | Receptive skills: reading and writing | Communication, development of 4 skills, special emphasis on receptive skills and vocabulary acquisition. | Communication, development of 4 skills. Adoption of Communicative Language teaching approach. |
| Attitudes-values | Not specified in the curriculum for ELT. Values and attitudes were part of <i>Objetivos Transversales</i> , goals that should be achieved across the whole school curriculum. | Specific objectives are introduced regarding values and attitudes. Discover and know other cultures and value cultural diversity. At the same time, recognise and value the basis of national identity in a globalised and interdependent world. | Values and attitudes are explicitly stated following 2009 adjustment regarding appreciation of other cultures and traditions. Values such as respect and tolerance are introduced. Academic rigour is also added as a value to achieve the goals of the subject. |
| Use of Spanish | A communication tool to demonstrate understanding of audio and written texts. | A communication tool to be used in the classroom to demonstrate understanding of audio and written texts. A methodological resource that could enrich the interaction in the classroom. | Grammar is not the focus of learning, but a content that contributes to achievement of communicative goals. Grammar is not isolated from understanding and expression, but an element that supports communication and real use of the language. |
| Role of vocabulary | Submitted to understanding of audio or written texts- topics of semantic fields are provided. | Vocabulary acquisition is highlighted in the curricular guidance. Specific number of words per grade and topics are defined. | Vocabulary acquisition is considered an essential component for understanding texts. The curricular framework includes isolated words as well as common phrases and expressions that may support understanding and communication in the foreign language. |

Table 1 cont'd

Comparative summary of ELT Curricular approaches at primary level in Chile

| Element | 1996 | 2009 | 2012 |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|--|
| | | | It also places importance on the development of fluency. By the end of 6th grade, students are expected to manage at least 500 words in English. |
| Role of Grammar | It is specified as syntactic contents that are subject to an effective communication between the reader, his/her experiences, the text and the context. Syntactic contents should be taught in a spiral form, starting from simple structures to more complex ones, introducing them gradually. | Not an object of learning, nor of assessment. It is considered a content that supports understanding and production of language. Grammar should be taught implicitly, embedded in texts. | Emphasis of communication over linguistic knowledge of the English language. Consistent with previous curricular guidance. |
| Progression/evaluation | Not specified | <i>Mapas de progreso</i> (progress maps: divided into reading and 7 levels of achievement) SIMCE test ³ was introduced from 2010 | Progressive structure of learning outcomes SIMCE Test |
| Alignment to CEFRL | Not specified | A2= 8 th grade B1=12 th grade | A1=4 th grade A2=8 th Grade B1= 12 th grade |
| Organisation of curriculum | <i>Objetivos fundamentales</i> (aims)- per grade which integrated development of language skills. <i>Contenidos Mínimos</i> (contents) as semantic fields are included. Syntactic contents are not specified. | <i>Objetivos fundamentales</i> per grade every two years. They include specific goals for each skill and one specifically relates to vocabulary acquisition. There is the inclusion of one <i>objetivos fundamentales</i> that specifies values and attitudes to develop. And <i>contenidos mínimos</i> and development of skills. | Learning outcomes, divided into components (language skills): <hr/> Listening Reading Speaking Writing |

³ *Sistema de Medición de la Calidad de la Educación* (Education Quality Measurement System, SIMCE) is a battery of tests used in Chile to measure certain aspects of school curricula. SIMCE Inglés corresponds to a standardised test applied every other year to eleventh grade students.

The emphasis on receptive skills is clearly observed on the aims that the policy stated for learning English from fifth to eighth grade:

At the end of eighth grade, students will be able to read comprehensively texts (authentic or adapted) related to audiovisual culture and technology, and they will also be able to discriminate sounds and words from these texts appropriate to their age and interests. Syntactic contents are presented in order to achieve effective communication. Therefore, grammatical contents should be developed spirally with the gradual introduction of structures- from basic to more complex (Ministerio de Educación, 1996) .

The 1996 curricular framework was organised according to *objetivos fundamentales* and *contenidos mínimos* for each grade. The underpinnings behind this curricular matrix was to take distance from an encyclopaedic forms of knowledge and to more specifically focus on development of competences and skills that allow students to solve problems and be able to function in the modern world. The minimum set of content and goals would also provide freedom to schools so that they could expand on these goals and contents according to their specific contexts. In the case of fifth grade, the *objetivos fundamentales* were:

To read and understand the meaning of isolated words, short phrases related to the semantic field linking sound and the written word.

To understand aurally commands and instructions and questions related to instructional language in the context of the classroom.

To discriminate aurally sounds words and sentences related to the semantic field corresponding to the level. (Ministerio de Educación, 1996)

Regarding the *contenidos mínimos*, they referred to semantic fields (topics) considered to be appropriate for students' age and interests such as: *Classroom Language, Life at Home, The School, Food and Health and Commands and Instructions*. Syntactic contents were not specified. The framework emphasised that syntactic structures to be included should be those that could contribute to the development of reading and listening skills.

In order to achieve the aims and goals proposed by this reform, a minimum of two periods of 45 minutes per week were set as part of the national curriculum from 5th to 8th grade for English language learning in public schools. Textbooks, adapted to meet the goals of the national curriculum, were edited and provided by the MINEDUC to students and teachers from municipal and voucher schools. Although, the law was issued in 1996, its full implementation and enforcement was postponed in different instances and only in 2010 it has been effective across the country in urban and rural areas (Ministerio de Educación, 2005, 2008). The main factor for the deferral was related to the lack of qualified teachers of English in the country, especially in the rural areas (Abrahams & Silva Rios, 2016; Paez & Contreras, 2014).

Curricular Frameworks for the Teaching of English in Chile, 2009-2012

In 2009, an important policy adjustment was made to the ELT framework as a result of the review and alignment of *objetivos fundamentales* and *contenidos mínimos*. This general review of the framework intended to improve the sequence and progression of contents and outcomes. This review emphasised the development of skills and provided curricular guidance for each subject. In

this way the framework would provide stronger bases for its implementation. It is important to note that the 2009 adjustment was part of the development of a curricular policy that corresponded to a cyclical understanding of the prescribed curriculum with the actual implementation (Ministerio de Educación, 2009a). Different stakeholders' opinions were considered as a key point of data in the 2009 adjustment. This, for the first time in recent history, involved seeking the perspectives of school teachers.

The curricular reforms in 2009 was the result of social pressures that built following widespread student protests in 2006 which pushed the discussion and later proclamation of a new education law (Ley General de Educación [LGE]). Although under the LGE law the decentralised form of the school system remained unchanged, the structure of the school system was addressed. The LGE conceived primary education from 1st to 6th grade, and secondary education from 7th to 12th grade. However, its enforcement and implementation would only take place in 2017, as schools needed time to restructure themselves, especially those elementary schools that historically have offered educational levels from kindergarten to 8th grade.

The 2009 reforms also had a direct impact on the English curriculum, with its core contents and learning outcomes being further refined. It was recognised that the emphasis on receptive skills (listening and reading) was not enough to make Chilean citizens competent in the global market. Consequently, the 2009 curricular adjustment introduced a new level of expectation regarding the productive skills of speaking and writing. This adjustment delineated objectives and contents and put an equal expectation for the development of the four language skills. The contents and objectives of the new adjustment were aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL). The Ministry decided to use CEFRL as a way to support the English curriculum to well-known international standards and follow a trend that other countries in South America and Asia, such as Colombia, China and Taiwan adopted. In line with this, contents and objectives are aligned with the CEFRL framework. According to this, the standards expected were that year 8 school students would achieve a proficiency level of English equivalent to A2, year 12 students would aim at to B1 (intermediate) and teachers to B2 from the CEFRL (Council for Cultural Co-operation, 2001). These standards were announced in 2004 as desired goals to be achieved, but in 2009 the curricula adjustments made these standards explicit and they were aligned with the national Chilean curriculum.

One interesting aspect of the new curriculum was the emphasis of lexicon acquisition apart from the development of skills. There was the expectation that the number of words expected to be learnt by students, and related strategies and techniques for teachers to develop the acquisition of the new lexicon. This decision seemed to be founded on the assumption that the English language in Chile is widely used to access information and knowledge from academic literature and media (Munoz, 2010).

Another meaningful inclusion in the curricular guidance was the recognition of the role of the mother tongue in learning English. The Ministry explicitly stated that when the reform started that the use of Spanish was vastly used and promoted as a means to demonstrate the understanding of English texts in the classroom (Ministerio de Educación, 2009a).

However, as the adjustment considered the development of the receptive and productive skills collectively, the role of the mother tongue should change. Thus, the 2009 curriculum advocated for the use of Spanish in the English classroom only as a resource. Teachers should use Spanish as another methodological tool that promotes learning, but English should be used as much as possible. This is coherent with the implementation of Communicative language teaching approach, a tendency that has been followed internationally especially in regions such as Asia and Latin America.

The 2009 curricular adjustment provided with foundations for s beyond a mere instrumental goal. The curricular guidance provided teachers and stakeholders with important underpinnings to focus ELT on the development of skills through meaningful tasks and collaborative learning. It provided with updated syllabus for secondary education. However, the updated syllabus for elementary levels (5th & 6th grade) were only issued in 2012 and the optional proposal from 1st to 4th grade in 2013.

Although the 2009 curricular bases represented a coherent development of the previous guidelines, it was still orientated to the development of language skills measured by the attainment of standards regardless of children's cognitive and affective development (Garcia & Mardones, 2012). It is expected that in the future ELT policy considers broader educational goals.

The 2012 Curricular Framework

The new curricular framework of 2012 originated as part of the further implementation of the 2009 policy and other later evolution in ministry thinking about the nature of effective English curricula. Another factor that pushed the elaboration of 2012 framework was the introduction of a new structure in the school system as part of the education law -LGE. This entity corresponds to the quality assurance agency (*Agencia de Calidad*). This agency was formed to assure quality among schools. The first task of the agency was to develop standards based on the current curriculum to establish evaluation process of students' educational achievements to assure quality of schools. The creation of this agency was also part of social pressure and the earlier 2006 students' protests as well as those erupting in 2011, which demanded an enlarged role of the state in managing the work of the Chilean education system.

The 2012 curricular framework deferred from the 2009 adjustment in three major areas. The curriculum matrix of OF-CM and OT was replaced by learning outcomes and OT-values and attitudes to develop across subjects (OT- includes values, attitudes moral, and spiritual dimensions). This presupposed a major change in the curricular model as it expects an increase in students' learning achievements. A new curricular tool to evaluate learning outcomes progression was also introduced.

The 2009 adjustment provided guidance and theoretical underpinnings for ELT. This served as the foundation for the 2012 curricular framework for ELT at primary level. The 2012 curriculum framework for ELT at primary level emphasised that learning English can be one way to provide Chileans with a communication tool to access a wide range of information and technologies to be better equipped to function in current society (Ministerio de Educación, 2012a). Interestingly, the curricular framework explicitly stated that learning English can also be beneficial to understand and value the mother tongue and local culture, together with development of cognitive skills.

The 2012 curricular framework (which still exists in the contemporary framework) intends that primary students develop the four skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) through meaningful authentic tasks that make them gain confidence to face learning English at school (Ministerio de Educación, 2012a). It is also intended that students could develop cognitive skills that allow them to learn this new language in their classrooms. In order to achieve these goals, the curricular framework adopts theoretical underpinnings from communicative language teaching approach, task-based approach, natural approach and cooperative language learning.

The 2012 curricular framework also emphasises the inclusion of literary and non-literary tests such as emails and advertisements as authentic materials to be used in the classroom. This is especially related to the development of writing skill as one way to access the contemporary world through the use of technologies. Learning strategies are explicitly included in the framework as an important learning goal, considering that some learning strategies would enhance students' learning

more effectively. Vocabulary acquisition is also seen as key to develop students' communicative competence. Here it is important to note that the framework not only considers isolated words or phrases, but also chunks and commonly used expressions. The role of grammar is seen as one element that supports communication, but it is not the focus of learning, as grammar accuracy in itself would not allow students to communicate efficiently.

Coherent with the 2009 curricular framework, the 2012 curricular bases are aligned with CEFRL⁴ following international tendencies and standardisation pressures. Thus, it is expected that 8th grade students achieve A2 level and 12th year students B1. The alignment of the national curriculum for English to CEFRL corresponds to an international trend implemented in countries from the region, and also gives it consistency of ELT with other contexts. However, it raises questions as if the adoption of the CEFRL was a decision based on finding easier ways to measure and test students' achievements through international standardised tests as it is currently happening now with SIMCE. Standardised tests have been introduced since 2010 to measure these standards. However, results are still far from expectations as will be discussed later.

The curricular framework is organised according to the four language skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing. Each of these includes learning objectives and attitudes to be developed. The *objetivos fundamentales* and *contenidos mínimos* were transformed into learning outcomes to articulate evaluation and assessment processes in a more effective way. This change is meaningful as the learning cycle is considered as a whole. However, this can also be the consequence of the testing system on the curriculum. As this curricular policy introduced observable indicators of learning which could be used for the bases of standardised tests.

The 2012 curricular framework also increased per week teaching time by one period (45 minutes) for English. This meant that three periods per week of the elementary curriculum was now to be devoted to learning English in 5th and 6th grade at public schools. Although schools could design their own curriculum based on the national curriculum, most schools have not gone down this path. Schools have tended to homogenise instead of diversifying their curriculum, and offer different school pressures. This has been a response to do well in standard tests.

Curricular Framework for Younger Learners (Grade 1-4): An Aspiration of Becoming a Bilingual Country

Although the curricular framework of 2012 confirmed that English is a compulsory subject in the national curriculum from 5th grade to 12th grade, Sebastián Piñera's government⁵ encouraged the introduction of the English subject from 1st grade. In order to do so, the Ministry commenced providing textbooks to students and teachers of subsidised and municipal schools that subscribed the introduction of the foreign language into their curriculum. Developing social aspirations of becoming a developed and bilingual country supported by the view of English as a commodity to access economic development has supported the introduction of English from 1st grade. Indeed, it is believed that in 2015 more than 4000 (subsidised and municipal) schools had started teaching English from 1st grade.

In 2013, the Ministry of Education issued special curricular guidance to support schools that voluntarily adopted this introduction of English from 1st grade. This presented the benefits of starting learning English from an early age, drawing on evidence suggesting that younger children would tend to learn a foreign language more efficiently than at later stage (especially after puberty).

⁴ Common European Framework for Languages, CEFRL.

⁵ Sebastián Piñera was the president of Chile from 2010 to 2014.

The benefits relate to the supposedly greater capacity of children to acquire the sounds of a foreign language, less anxiety in completing language learning tasks and more time for learning the language. However, nothing is observed about the conditions in which the foreign language was learnt in the cases presented in the document. Another conspicuous issue is that the ESL contexts referred to in predominant learning materials are very different from those existing in South America, such as the European framework (Sayer, 2015).

The proposal for younger learners is broadly coherent with the 2012 framework, being organised according to learning outcomes and skills. In this reconsideration, the aim of learning English from 1st to 4th grade is framed as needing to:

contribute to students' acquisition of basic communicative skills in English. It is expected that English is learnt in context through the use of meaningful tasks that encourage spontaneity and natural use of English developing four skills and development of fluency and pronunciation. At the same time, it is intended that students develop a positive attitude towards learning the foreign language and get motivated to continue learning the language in the following years, and appreciate knowledge of other cultures and contexts through the language (Ministerio de Educación, 2012b).

Furthermore, the proposal makes it explicit that the development of four skills should be manifested in students demonstration of understanding of words, simple phrases, being able to identify key ideas of a short text; understanding and following instructions; interacting with the language, being able to give personal information and communicating with other people in English. The curricular proposal also emphasises the idea that these goals are almost equivalent to level A1 from CEFRL. The proposal suggests three periods (2.15 hrs.) per week to English in the public schools.

The proposal also confirms the theoretical underpinnings that support the 2012 curricular framework clearly stating the adoption of a communicative approach for ELT. It also corroborates some other key ideas that are the basis of the curricular framework:

- Emphasis on understanding, highlighting the relevance of vocabulary and the use of material to support vocabulary acquisition. This drawn from the natural approach, especially on some ideas by Krashen (1985) and his comprehensible input.
- Relevance of the interactive nature of a language. Based on ideas from Cooperative - Language Learning, the proposal suggests that students develop their communicative competence through participation in different interactive situations.
- View of the English language as a means of communication to communicate ideas and Access information, instead of being an object of study in itself. This is drawn from Content-Based Instruction.
- Meaningful tasks for students as the basic teaching unit. This is drawn from the Task based language teaching, especially from David Nunan's perspectives (2004). According to this proposal, a task corresponds to the work carried out during the lesson that involves students through situations that prioritize communication of meaning rather than the explicit study of structures. So that students understand and interact using the language or produce it.

- Stress free and kinaesthetic activities that promote and facilitate language learning. Based on ideas from the Total Physical Response approach, the proposal suggests the use of movement in the English classes for giving and following commands or other simple activities.
- Drawn on ideas from a 'whole language' perspective, this proposal suggests that learning a foreign language should be seen as a whole integrating skills to construct meaning rather than separating its parts. This is seen especially relevant for this level (1st to 4th grade) as students are learning how to read and write in their own mother tongue.

As outlined here, the aim for learning English from 1st to 4th grade seems ambitious and decontextualized from the difficult realities of the contemporary Chilean classroom. The lack of qualified English teachers at a primary school level has also proved a critical impediment to implementing ELT policy across the country. Although the number of teachers has increased, there is still a considerable deficit in the number of English teachers for this level (Paez & Contreras, 2014). Although in the mid 2000, there was an explosion of new English language teacher education programs, most of these were orientated to preparing teachers of English for secondary education (as they still remain).

The English Opens Doors Program: The Path to the Promised Bilingual Land?

A government program called English Opens Doors (EODP) has especially supported the introduction and implementation of ELT across the public system in the last two decades in Chile. EODP was created in 2003 and took form in 2004 (Ministerio de Educación, 2004). This is the only government program that especially supports a school subject. EODP aims at improving the teaching and learning of English across the public system making English accessible to all Chilean citizens. In doing so, since 2004 EODP has organised different types of initiatives, which are summarised in Table 2.

The wide range of activities implemented by the EODP clearly reflects an agenda to lift the level of English across the school system. It is important to note that special efforts have been made to provide primary teachers with CPD activities to support their work. This was especially significant at the beginning of the 2000s when the reform was starting and there was a lack of qualified teachers to teach English at primary level. At that time EODP initiatives specially focused to provide teachers with courses to improve their level of English and then in 2007 a special diploma of ELT for Young learners (700 hours) was designed to state funded school teachers (Paez & Contreras, 2014). This diploma has been offered almost every year since then in different region across the country.

Recent studies such as Glas's (2013) suggests that school English teachers view the impact of the EODP as positive as it has elevated the status of English as a subject and of English teachers, especially in public and subsidized schools. Teachers also highlighted the positive impact of professional development initiatives for in-service teachers. This was not only because these programs have been opportunities for them to refresh their English, but because they have been able to gain new methodological skills to teach the new curriculum and strengthen their collective

Table 2
EOD-Activities-2004-2015 Adapted from Inostroza (2015)

| Areas | Activities | Beneficiaries |
|--|---|---|
| Curriculum-Assessment | Diagnosis of language proficiency | School students |
| | Standards of language proficiency aligned with the national curriculum | Pre-service teachers |
| | Standards for language teachers | Teachers |
| | EODP initiatives aligned with the national curriculum | |
| Continuous professional development for Teachers (CPD) | Support for Teachers' networks across the country | In-service teachers from (state-funded schools) |
| | Short English language and methodology courses | |
| | English Summer Town and English Winter Retreat | |
| | In collaboration with the national program for teacher training (CPEIP), and some accredited universities EODP has provided diplomas of teaching English to young learners to professionals (translators and secondary language teachers) | |
| | In collaboration with the British Council, EODPs since 2013 have worked with teachers on exploratory action research projects | |
| Support for schools | Winter/summer camps: Full immersion in English through a week camps for Chilean public secondary school students to practise English through interactive activities including role-playing exercises, group projects, and competitive games. | State funded schools |
| | Debate, public speaking and spelling bee competitions: debate competitions for high school students, public speaking competitions for students in year 7 and year 8, and spelling bee competitions for students in year 5 and year 6 | |
| | National Volunteer program: in collaboration with the United Nations Development Program | |
| | 2,100 English-speaking volunteers have been assigned to schools in every region of Chile, including the islands of Rapa Nui, Chiloe, and more. Over 650 municipal and state-subsidised private establishments have benefited from the program. | |
| Scholarships | Since 2006 final stage pre-service teachers from Chilean accredited universities can apply for a scholarship to undertake studies for a semester in an English speaking country (in 2015, 120 applicants were selected, 50 were rejected). | Pre-service teachers |

Table 2 cont'd
EOD-Activities-2004-2015 Adapted from Inostroza (2015)

| Areas | Activities | Beneficiaries |
|--|--|---------------------------------------|
| Continuous professional development for teacher educators | Since 2012, the EODP with the collaboration of the British Council have organised and provided different opportunities for professional development to teacher educators, especially characterised by seminars and workshops delivered by international experts. | Language teacher Teacher educators |
| FEP (<i>programa de fortalecimiento de la educación pública</i>) | In 2015 as part of Bachelet's effort to strengthen public educational system, the EODP engineered new efforts to especially support 300 schools per year during the rest of her period. EODP in collaboration with regional representatives and school principals selected a number of vulnerable schools per region to especially support different activities for both teachers and students to enhance the learning and teaching of English in those schools. The activities comprise a wide range of opportunities for CPD for teachers and activities for students to improve their English. Schools signed an agreement with the EODP committing to work collaboratively to achieve better outcomes. | 300 schools per year |

identity as Chilean teachers of English. Teachers' views on the impact of the EOD programme on students' activities are just as positive. However, they also report that the range of the activities offered by the programme (such as the debate tournaments) is limited (Glas, 2013).

Although EOD has promoted the teaching and learning of English, it also has been subject to some criticism (Castro, 2011). One of the primary concerns is the distance between central policies and local implementation, together with overstandardisation by EODP (Barahona, 2015; Glas, 2008). Teachers have reported that the implementation of the curriculum requires sustainable, continuous and systemic support (Glas, 2013; Inostroza, 2015).

The Impact of ELT Policy in Chile

As has been outlined, major policy and related curricular changes have occurred in the Chilean educational system over the last 20 years. Critically, these changes have had a significant impact on how English has been taught across Chilean schools. Further, more recently by the *English Open Doors* program has sought to support the implementation of the reform for expanding English language capability across the country. However there has been some evidence that has emerged about the impact of these various policy approaches on the levels of student acquisition of English in Chilean schools. In 2004, a diagnostic test was applied to 11 000 students (from 8th and 12th grade) from 299 schools across the country. The results revealed relatively low levels of English proficiency, with only 5% of Year 12 and 1% of Year 8 students achieved an 'autonomous' level (A2) (Ministerio de Educación, 2004b). These results also confirmed the gap between private and state-funded schools, with students from private schools achieving higher scores (Rodríguez Garcés, 2015). Significantly, these diagnostic results served as a basis for the EODP to design initiatives to improve and strengthen learning and teaching English in the school system.

In 2010, a standardised test (SIMCE ingles)—based on the *TOEIC Bridge (Test of English for International Communication)*—was formally introduced and applied to 65,535 11th grade students from 601 schools across the country. The results confirmed the previous 2004 diagnostic measure. Most Chilean high school students ended their secondary education with a low level of proficiency in English. Only 11% of Chilean teenagers reached level A2 (elementary) from the CEFRL. Most students scored below an elementary level of proficiency. More alarmingly, SIMCE 2010 results also demonstrated that students with lower levels of proficiency came from more deprived socioeconomic levels. Students who scored higher continued being the ones attending private and bilingual schools (Glas, 2013; Rodríguez Garcés, 2015).

In 2012, 186,385 11th grade students from 2,688 schools sat for the SIMCE ingles 2012⁶ (Agencia de la Calidad de la Educación, 2013). Unfortunately, the results were not significantly different from the previous measure. Most students (82%) did not meet the standards (A2). The 2012 results also confirmed the tendency of better results being correlated to a higher socioeconomic status. The results also revealed that factors such as number of teaching hours, early introduction of formal classes of English and teachers with a level of English higher than B1 could have a positive impact on students' learning.

The 2014 SIMCE English results were released recently showing insignificant changes (Agencia de la Calidad de la Educación, 2015). 154,097 Year 11 students from 2656 schools across the country sat for 2014 SIMCE English covering more than 90% of the student population. The 2014 results demonstrated a weak tendency of improvement, with more than 50% of Chilean students still failing to meet the minimum mandated standards of language proficiency.

Table 3
Comparative SIMCE Results 2012-2014 Based on CEFRL

| | | |
|-----------------|-------|-------|
| B1 | 8% | 12.6% |
| A2 | 10% | 12% |
| A1 | 26.8% | 22.3% |
| Below A1 | 55.4% | 53.2% |

Historically, results from 2004 until now confirm that only a third of Chilean students can communicate in English at an elementary level (such as for travelling or study purposes) after eight years of English lessons. These results are even more disheartening when considering state funded schools and students coming from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Only 10% of students from deprived households could have been considered to have met the standards. Thus, policy approaches have tended to sustain rather than address the stratification and inequity in schools through English language learning. English as a compulsory school subject at schools has not guaranteed equity and access to a globalised world. As observed in Table 4 below, the tendency continues being marked by higher socioeconomic backgrounds and better achievements.

⁶ 2012 *SIMCE Ingles* test was designed by Cambridge ESOL Examination adjusting the format and contents of the test to the national curriculum aligned with the CEFRL.. However, the focus continued being only on reading and listening skills.

Table 4
Results According to Schools' Socioeconomic Status

| Socioeconomic Status | CEFRL | | | |
|----------------------|-------|-------|-------|----------|
| | B1 | A2 | A1 | BELOW A1 |
| Low | 0.3% | 1.2% | 9.9% | 88.6% |
| Mid-Low | 2.0% | 5.3% | 19.0% | 73.8% |
| Middle | 8.1% | 15.1% | 32.5% | 44.4% |
| Mid-High | 22.3% | 26.1% | 31.8% | 19.8% |
| High | 62.3% | 21.0% | 12.6% | 4.1% |

Beyond Test Results: Impact of the ELT Policy in the Chilean Classroom

Recently emerging calls have come in Chile for the need to further research and analyse how English is being taught in Chilean schools (Aliaga, Inostroza, Rebolledo, Romero, & Tabali, 2015). This is especially the case in relation to teaching English to young learners in public schools. Fortunately, in the last five years seminal studies have been published (Gonzalez & Toledo, 2016; Inostroza, 2013, 2015; Quidel, Arévalo, Ñancuqueo, & Ortiz, 2014; Rojas et al., 2013; Tabali, 2012) to elucidate issues about teachers' profile and the impact of the implementation of ELT policy at primary level in the country.

Rojas et al.'s study (2013) using data from the National Teacher Evaluation System characterised public school teachers of English according to their demographic, academic background and teaching strategies. This study considered data (teachers' portfolio) from around 4000 teachers working at municipal schools from 2008 to 2011 in primary and secondary level (Rojas et al., 2013). According to this study, most English teachers are women, a third of them work in more than one schools and teach in average to 32 students per class. In terms of their qualifications, 45,2% of teachers of English at elementary level are not qualified to teach English at that level. As also reported by the Ministry of Education, the vast majority of teachers in the public system hold a qualification to teach English at the secondary level (Paez & Contreras, 2014). The remaining teachers were primarily primary school teachers without the English specialization (with or without command of English) or professionals such as translators or interpreters. It is also important to note that higher percentages of unqualified teachers appear more prominently in rural areas than in urban areas. Unfortunately, the tendency of a higher number of secondary teachers over those at the primary level does not seem to be likely to change in the near future as most of the English teacher education programs across the country are orientated to educate English teachers at the secondary level (Paez & Contreras, 2014).

Regarding teachers' performance, Rojas et al.'s study (2013) provides relevant analysis as lesson recordings were examined using key criteria from the ELT policy. A crucial issue for the implementation of the communicative language teaching approach is the fluent use of English in the classroom, this report has revealed that more than 90% of teachers present a lack of an adequate use of English or misunderstand grammatical structures, mispronounce words, misuse vocabulary or are not sufficiently fluent to effectively teach. Another criteria analysed was students' participation and interaction during the lesson. Only a third of the lessons examined revealed high levels of students' participation and interaction through group work or other related activities that promote students' active engagement in learning English. This aspect has also been corroborated by other studies that

have analysed the use of group work in the English lessons (Inostroza, 2013, 2015; McKay, 2003; Tabali, 2012). McKay (2003) claimed that teachers of English at that time used group work only sometimes and that in most cases it was a challenge because of the large number of students per class (45), especially in public schools. Inostroza (2015) demonstrated that group work is the least used teaching strategy in Chilean elementary EFL classrooms. Data were collected from EFL teachers working in the public sector (grade 1-4) through an online questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, classroom observation, and group interviews with children aged 9. Teachers in that study reported a preference towards whole class grouping and pair work. The reasons for this preferred of strategies referred to lack of planning time and preparation for group work activities, issues related to classroom discipline and misbehaviour and insufficient time for covering contents from the prescribed curriculum. Inostroza's study (2015) also included children's perceptions on their English lessons. They preferred activities that involved movement with an active role, as well as those that provided collaborative and cooperative classroom opportunities.

Tabali's study (2012) on two teachers of English teaching young learners (1st grade to 4th grade) and the strategies used to teach speaking skills also confirms that young learners enjoy group work and active participation in the English lessons. It is important to note that English is not compulsory until 5th grade; however, the schools participated voluntarily in a private project that sponsored the teaching of English from kindergarden. This project encouraged teaching English from kindergarden using only English in class with a focus on communication. Although in the classes observed, a wide range of different activities were observed (songs, chanting, TPR, and games), the most common strategy was drilling and making and answering questions with not much variation from year to year (year 3 or year 6) or teacher. Teachers and students reported to be satisfied with the levels of engagement and achievement and supported the introduction of English in the first years of schooling.

Quidel et al's study (2014) also reported a relatively positive effect of ELT in the early years of learning. This study examined the impact of English learning during childhood. The participants were 8th grade students from four public schools with high rates of vulnerability in a southern city of Chile, Temuco. Some participants had started English from 1st grade and others from 5th grade. This demarcation allowed the examination of differences between the groups and if these differences were related to the earlier start of English learning at schools. Although this study was not able reach conclusive findings about the benefits of earlier engagement with English, the outcomes did suggest that the introduction of English at primary level was partially effective needed providing a foundation for future learning. However, for this learning potential to be fully realised, it needed to be supported by improved resources and enhanced teaching strategies.

Impact of ELT in Rural Areas

The studies reviewed so far have shed light of the impact of ELT policy only in the urban classrooms. However, there are more than 3,000 schools with multiple levels or courses (at least two levels from 1° to 6° grade of primary school) within the same classroom in rural areas across Chile (Moreno, 2007). This represents a challenge to English teachers, as they have to deal in a typical classroom setting with different needs of students within the same level. Although the national curriculum is expected to be implemented across the country, some variations have been included in the rural areas. As noted earlier, in rural areas there are a high percentage of teachers without appropriate qualifications to teach English at the primary school level. One way to compensate for this deficiency was taken by the MINEDUC, who offered an audiovisual tool called *It's my Turn!* in rural schools. The *It's my Turn* pack includes a series of DVDs with the lessons, a guide that explains how to use the program, workbooks for learners, a teacher's book, a CD-room with songs and chants, a

bilingual notebook dictionary, and an assessment notebook. It is intended that teachers would become students of English at the same time as using the tool with their students (Lizasoain & Becchi, 2014). MINEDUC has provided each school with a kit for each student, and teachers, and a computer and data show to show the videos contained in the pack.

A study of Lizasoain and Bechhi (2014) studied the effectiveness of the introduction of *It's my Turn* in three multi-leveled classes in rural areas in the south of Chile in 2012. The study involved 35 rural students in 5th and 6th grades, who attended school with children in lower grades. They were all taught English through the 5th grade kit of *It's my Turn!* The study applied a survey to students on their motivations towards learning English and their ICT skills, with a series of pre and post-tests also delivered after each lesson using the tool. The tests included open questions, matching, and multiple-choice items, among other elicitation techniques measuring the effectiveness of the tool. Teachers reported that they felt uneasy using the tool because they did not understand English enough and they did not feel confident using the technology required. Another reason reported as the cause for not using *It's my Turn* was the insufficient number of kits for the students. Results of this study suggested that most students in the three schools liked English and enjoyed learning it. However, importantly a third of students expressed either that they did not enjoy their learning experience or found it difficult. Regarding pre- and post-tests, it was clear that the classes had a positive impact on the three schools as they learned vocabulary and basic structures of English. This study suggested that a tool like *It's my Turn* could prove an effective tool for teaching EFL in the rural areas of Chile.

However, there are other variables that need to be considered in the rural areas. A study by Arriagada (2015) examined the strategies that teachers in five rural multigrade schools in the south of Chile employed to teach English. In each class, there were between 2 to 16 students from different levels (1st to 6th grade). The data were collected through observation of classes and interviews to teachers. This examination is relevant since it provides important elements to consider in the rural context. In the study, the five participating teachers held a qualification as primary teachers, though their proficiency of English varied. Three of them had completed a self-funded English course of 400 hours and another teacher had undertaken an English graduate program (though had not been able to finish the course). Another teacher had not undertaken any course in English or further studies in English. None of the teachers had undertaken any specialization diploma on teaching English to young learners. Regarding the use of English in the classroom, the use of English was not apparent; the teacher and students rarely spoke it. The tool, *It's my Turn*, was only used by one of the teachers in the recorded lesson. However, all teachers reported in the interviews that they had used it. Few specific strategies to teach English were observed in the lessons. The activities used by these teachers comprised such learning activities as pronunciation drills, instruction in Spanish, providing examples in L2, asking for opinions in L1, filling in the gaps, greetings, oral presentations, instructions in L2 (only one teacher) and reading aloud in L2. This reflects they are using strategies that derive from their intuitive practice. The supporting tools used by the teachers were the whiteboard and handouts. It was also observed that in all classes observed there was a teacher centred approach, with most of the discourse initiated in all cases by the teacher.

Implications of Implementing ELT Policy in Chile: Questions of the Future

So, how bilingual are Chileans now as a result of two decades of English in schools? EODP proclaimed that by 2018 secondary students would be able to achieve a functional level of proficiency (B2). Yet the 2014 results—and the various empirical accounts of Chilean classrooms reported here and elsewhere—demonstrate that there is still a considerable way to meet those expectations. On the positive side of the ledger, the expansion of English at the primary level in the

public school system has certainly meant that not only elite groups have been afforded the opportunity to be proficient in the English language, with students from all socioeconomic backgrounds now having potential access to the lingua franca of a globalising world. This outcome could have broader implications for enhancing social equity in Chile into the future. However, in order to make this aspiration a reality, a number of issues have to be confronted to ensure the experiences of the past are recognised and necessary responses in the short and longer term are put in place. Such responses are necessary both at the macro level, as well as inside classrooms themselves.

The evolution of the national English curriculum has orientated teaching and learning toward more eclectic and contextually based form, with principled centred curricular guidance designed to ensure students are provided with a genuine tool for communication. In this sense, the national curriculum has increasingly acknowledged the relevance of the development of four language skills and lexicon acquisition. The policy has progressively encouraged the adoption of a more communicative language-based classroom, in which students and teachers actually interact using English. This transformation has reflected the contemporary understanding of ELT with a defined and framed communicative purpose. This trend also encouraged an earlier start of English learning within the Chilean school system (Sayer, 2015). Although English is not a compulsory subject in the first cycle of primary education (grade 1 to grade 4), it is becoming more and more an expectation. This was accelerated by the 2012 decision regarding curricular guidance and textbooks being made broadly available for schools choosing to commence English teaching in the first grade of primary school.

Nevertheless, the implementation of a communicative curriculum in the Chilean classrooms has faced a number of significant challenges. As analysed earlier, the ongoing lack of suitably qualified English teachers at the primary level—in tandem with the unsatisfactory level of proficiency in English amongst teachers—have created significant hindrances to student learning. There are also other factors that have equally impacted on the learning process. As outlined in earlier discussion, there appears to be a defined correlation between higher socioeconomic status of students and higher levels of proficiencies in English. This has resulted in students from privileged economic backgrounds (with inevitably higher levels of cultural capital) can achieve higher levels of proficiency in English independent of other educational factors. Of course, this correlation is not exclusively related to students' performance in English, but a tendency across all subjects, starkly demonstrating the negative educational consequences of continuing high levels of social inequity in the country.

Another factor that has challenged the implementation of the ELT policy has been the persistence of large class sizes (30+ students) in public schools. In reality, it is unsurprising to find classes of up to 45 students in Chilean public schools. As reported by Inostroza (2015), practical issues such as lack of classroom space or insufficient resources for group work activities become barriers that impede students' interaction in English learning. Other problems stemming from such large classes include some very practical limitations: little time for students to express themselves in English, insufficient opportunities to monitor and assess students' progress and breakdowns in classroom discipline. Although such pedagogical strategies as group work activities and collaborative interaction among peers are crucial to develop communicative skills in English, these are highly challenging to implement in such learning environments. Thus, these critical pedagogical issues need to be recognised and addressed if genuine progress in delivering effective learning is to be achieved.

In addition, as with some many nations, Chile struggles under the unintended consequences of broad scale student testing. For instance, the SIMCE Ingles only tests student proficiency in reading and listening skills. This means that although the national curriculum promotes the development of four skills, only two of them are being measured by the standardised test. As a

result, teachers tend to focus on listening and reading over speaking and writing (as was reported in the studies introduced earlier). This is an undesired consequence of standardised testing, and something that necessitates further reconsideration if broader language skills development is to be achieved.

So in the light of the analysis offered here, it is reasonable to assert that Chilean ELT policy is in need of further reconsideration and reform. Such reform must encounter core issues of English language teaching, such as is it feasible in the current form of English curriculum appropriate for the learning environments it is being deployed, what are high stakes tests doing to pedagogical approaches, and fundamentally given the resources being expended, is English meeting the core social objectives expected of it?

The inclusion of English in the Chilean educational model was always prompted by economic considerations for the future rather than an aspiration to enhance education and social equity. As a consequence, the rising pressures of global economic integration seem to have often led to language policy being rushed in form, and therefore not effective in implementation. This has inevitably meant a serious imbalance between policy expectations and what could be actually achieved within localised teaching contexts. The evidence would suggest that this has often led to a negative impact on learners' performance (Inostroza, 2015). Lamentably, the lack of appreciation of the challenges inherent in the classroom environment has meant most often teachers have been targeted as being primarily responsible for the failure of results emerging from English language policy, rather than this growing divide between policy expectation and practical application in complex, difficult and under-resourced language learning environments.

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