

Chapter 2

The Neoliberal Blow to English Language Teaching: Deconstructing the *Teacher Academy* Program in Chile



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Abstract Imposed by force and shock during Pinochet's dictatorship, Chile became the first laboratory for radical free-market experiments. Neoliberalism policies in education have created a system of castes and socioeconomic segregation that is also present in the English language teaching. Drawing on Sen's Capability Approach, particularly the conceptualizations of capabilities (or opportunities and freedoms) and functionings (or valued beings and doings), this chapter aims to deconstruct the *Teacher Academy* (TA) program – a neoliberal professional development venture that entails the *re-education* of teachers from the public sector by their colleagues from elite private schools on how to teach the English language to public-school language learners. A series of electronic documents (newspaper articles, open letters, a video, and official documents from the Chilean Ministry of Education) were critically analyzed following a document analysis research approach. I argue here that the Teacher Academy program is problematic because it privatizes knowledge construction and perpetuates the neoliberal model rooted in Chile with the idea that what comes from the private arena is always better than what the public world can offer.

Keywords Neoliberal education · ELT · Chilean school system · Capabilities · Functionings

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Introduction

Neoliberalism is a political and economic system based on individual liberty and free market competition (Harvey, 2007). As such, neoliberalism promotes privatization, capital accumulation, and assumes that “governments cannot create economic growth or provide social welfare” (Bockman, 2013, p. 14). As a consequence, neoliberalism has permeated all fabrics of society through the dismantling of social safety nets – forcing individuals to become consumers of services offered by the private sector, such as education and health care- and restoring class power in the hands of the ruling elites (Harvey, 2007) causing increased economic inequality and social stratification.

Language education has also been impacted by the proliferation of neoliberal ideologies. Noteworthy is the case of the English language. English has become a powerful symbol of economic prosperity (Ennsner-Kananen et al., 2017), an imperative in second language curricula, “a highly valued cultural capital in (and gatekeeper to) education and employment markets” (Price, 2014, p. 571), and a commodity accessible to those who can pay (Matear, 2008). One example is the implementation of the *Teacher Academy* (TA) program by the Chilean Ministry of Education in 2019. The TA is a professional development venture that entails the *re-education* of public-school teachers by their colleagues from elite private schools on how to teach the English language to language learners in the public-school context.

In this chapter, I draw on economist Amartya Sen’s Capabilities Approach (CA) to deconstruct the Teacher Academy program. In particular, Sen’s (1999) CA is based on the fundamental principle of what individuals are able to *be* and *do* with the resources available to them. Therefore, it is paramount to examine the *freedoms* and *opportunities* they have to develop *capabilities* that would help them achieve the *functionings* they value (valued *doings* and *beings*). The main aims of this chapter are: (a) to critically examine how the Teacher Academy initiative perpetuates the neoliberal model and (b) to determine how the TA possibly affects public-school teachers of English in the two core dimensions of the CA, namely, capabilities (opportunities and freedoms) and functionings (valued doings and beings). To achieve these aims, a series of electronic documents (newspaper articles, open letters, a video, and official information from the Chilean Ministry of Education) were critically analyzed following a *document analysis* research approach.

For ease of reading and understanding of the Chilean context, this chapter begins with a recapitulation of the impact of market-driven neoliberal reforms in education in Chile. This is followed by an overview of the effect of neoliberalism in English language teaching (ELT) in the country. I then introduce the Teacher Academy program and Sen’s CA framework. Following this, I present the method used for data collection and analysis, and then discuss the deleterious impact of policies in ELT – such as the TA program -. I conclude with a call to study the effect of market-driven initiatives in the Global South in order to generate situated solutions for educators whose lives are still affected by neoliberalism.

Neoliberal Education in Chile

Imposed by force and shock (Klein, 2008) during Pinochet's dictatorship, Chile became the "first laboratory for radical free-market experiments" (Bresnahan, 2003, p. 3) in the world. The tentacles of neoliberalism have touched every single aspect of Chileans' lives through the privatization of health, education, pensions, and even water (Harvey, 2007).

The "Chilean educational system is one of the most extreme cases of the introduction of market-oriented reforms" (Valenzuela et al., 2013). Impacted by the set of transformations introduced in 1980, education in Chile has been characterized by the dramatic gap between high- and low-income students. Such reforms had three goals: (a) to decentralize the administration of schools from the Chilean Ministry of Education to local municipalities which – owing to their locations in upper- and low-income neighbourhoods, funding, and resources available – have contributed to exacerbating educational inequality (Aravena & Quiroga, 2016); (b) to privatize education through the creation of a voucher school choice system or *franchise schools* – owned by private investors who receive the same per-student subsidies as public schools, based on the number of children attending such schools (Elacqua et al., 2011); and (c) to implement school competition through the increased imposition of standardized tests and financial rewards based on test score results – motivating parents to move children to these schools – (McEwan et al., 2008).

As a consequence, these reforms have fueled the erosion of the public-school system manifested by school closure and enrolment decline (Avalos & Valenzuela, 2016); social stratification has intensified (Alarcón, 2017); social integration, inclusion, and student mobility never happens and diversity is never seen as an asset (Sleeter et al., 2016). As such, "public schools have become ghettos specializing in low-income families" (González, 2017, p. 151).

This section lays the foundation for better understanding the current context of ELT in Chile, which will be discussed in the following section of this chapter.

Neoliberalism and ELT

The connection between English and neoliberalism is undisputable. In fact, English has become "the core social agent of the neoliberal project" (Holborow, 2012, p. 15) and a critical (and why not magical) tool to access the global world, alleviate poverty (Ali & Hamid, 2021) and achieve social mobility, professionalism, scholarships, and wealth (Enns-Kananen et al., 2017). In essence, ELT has become a powerful industry influencing language policy, curriculum design, the classroom practices of many teachers of English in the world (Sayer, 2019), language testing (Price, 2014) and material design (Copley, 2018). With no other option than to give in to the global pressure of undertaking ELT, countries in the Global South have implemented public initiatives based on the "English opens doors" discourse

(Matear, 2008, Sayer, 2019). However, rather than opening doors, English language learning has become a social class issue conditioned by the wealth and opportunities of language learners (Block, 2017).

ELT in Chile

As in many developing countries, in the last thirty years, English has gained considerable importance in the national curriculum as a result of Chile's economic growth in the 1990s and competitive global market pressures (Barahona, 2016; Glas, 2008). In 1999, the Chilean Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) established that only one second language would be taught in schools from grades 5 to 9, but with the market-driven conception of choice, schools opted for English (Antoine, 2017). Thus, this language became *the* tool that can help develop a workforce prepared for such economic ventures, a commodity, and “a language of prestige associated with the elite and social mobility” (Antoine, 2017, p. 206). The most detrimental effect of such policies and the injection of public funds into the improvement of ELT, was the end of linguistic diversity in the national curriculum. English overtook other second languages taught in schools, such as French, German or Italian. The consequent collateral damage was that teachers of those languages felt the need to go back to university to study English and upgrade their certification if they wanted to continue being part of the local workforce (Brunner, 2006).

The status of English varies according to the socioeconomic background of schools. For instance, private schools dispense more hours of English instruction per week (more than 10 h in schools with English intensive or bilingual programs), have better teaching and technological resources, use imported textbooks, and hire better qualified local teachers (Meckes & Bascopé, 2012) or native English-speaking teachers. Moreover, these schools certify their students' English level with international examinations and offer exchange programs in English-speaking countries (Matear, 2008). Conversely, in the public and semi-private sectors teachers and students use the books provided by the Ministry of Education, and learners have 4 h of English language instruction per week (Paez, 2012). As such, students cannot compete with their peers from high socioeconomic backgrounds.

Results in the national diagnostic tests conducted by MINEDUC since 2004 have evidenced a dramatic socioeconomic status gap in English proficiency. For example, as shown in Fig. 2.1, in the 2017 test applied to 7340 students from grade 11, 85% of the students who come from well-off families and study in the private sector have more opportunities to succeed in the test, compared to 9% of the students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds who receive their education in public schools (Agencia de la Calidad de la Educación, 2018).

Ministerial authorities have identified three variables that explain the low test results: (a) English teachers focus their lessons exclusively on grammar, teach English in Spanish, have low proficiency in the target language, and have no language proficiency certification; (b) students' motivation to learn the language is low,

Estudio Nacional Inglés

Resultados según grupo socioeconómico (GSE)Agencia de
Calidad de la
EducaciónExisten **grandes brechas de aprendizaje entre los estudiantes de GSE alto y bajo.**

Fig. 2.1 English proficiency national test: results based on SES (National Study of English. Results according to socioeconomic group (SEG). There are large learning gaps among students from high and low SEG. Percentage of students in levels basic and intermediate (A2 and B1). High: 85%; Mid-high: 54%; Middle: 39%; Mid-low: 14%; Low: 9%)
Taken from: Agencia de la Calidad de la Educación (2018)

they have little exposure to the language outside their language classrooms, and their language learning self-efficacy is inferior to that of students belonging to the private sector; and (c) parents from low-income backgrounds have low expectations of their children's language learning skills (Agencia de Calidad de la Educación, 2018). Figure 2.2 illustrates these issues.

On this point, I argue that the abysmal gap in the national English test between students from private- and public-school backgrounds is simplistically seen as a *people's problem*. That is, it is alienated from wider social and socioeconomic issues, which is characteristic of neoliberally-rooted contexts in which individuals are deemed as “unattached, self-responsible” (Pendenza & Lamattina, 2019, p. 100) players within a society.

To alleviate this social divide, MINEDUC created the English Opens Doors Program (EODP). The EODP entailed the redesign of a new national curriculum for second language education; the creation and distribution of new instructional material; the development of pre- and in-service teacher training in English language and ELT methodology (Matear, 2008) and Summer and Winter camps for public school students; and the creation of the National Volunteer Center (NVC) – aiming to place native speakers of English as teachers in public schools – and the Redes de Inglés (RDI) or local networks of teachers throughout the country in charge of local mentors who organize opportunities for collaboration and professional development (MINEDUC, 2020a).



Fig. 2.2 Variables associated with the test results (Variables associated with educational results. Schools and teachers: Teaching hours, certification, teacher speaks English in class. Students: Level of exposure [to the language] outside of the school context, self-efficacy in English. Expectations of parents and caregivers)

Taken from: Agencia de la Calidad de la Educación (2018)

Even though the reception of such initiatives has been well received by local teachers, four aspects have been criticized: (a) the insufficient number of activities organized for language learners in the public sector; (b) the overemphasis on standardization and test scores; (c) the gap between language policies and classroom implementation (Glas, 2013); and (d) the fact that quality of English language instruction and access have become a commodity for those who can pay (Matear, 2008) – that is, rather than opening doors, the EODP has kept them closed to students from marginalized educational contexts.

The accounts in the literature about the second language policies and initiatives from MINEDUC tend to be descriptive in nature and report the analysis of already established national ELT initiatives. Here, I intend to critically deconstruct the most recent program developed in ELT – the Teacher Academy- through the Capability Approach lens.

The Teacher Academy Program

In 2019, MINEDUC, with the support of the British Council, launched through a nationwide media fanfare the *English in English* program (MINEDUC, 2019). The aims of the program are twofold: to improve the speaking skills of public-school students from grades 5 and 6, and to achieve an A1 level based on the standards prescribed in the Common European Framework for language reference

(MINEDUC, 2020a). Among the pool of initiatives designed to implement the “English in English” program is the TA, a professional development program designed to help public-school teachers acquire skills and “good teaching practices” to better their classroom practice and to help students have a conversation in the target language (MINEDUC, 2019). The TA provides 28 h of training on lesson planning, differentiated learning, assessment, language interaction, and project-based learning (MINEDUC, 2020b).

In the initial stage, forty-three English teachers from elite private schools provided training and a group of 19 mentors accompanied public-school teachers to ensure that the newly acquired classroom practices were implemented. The ultimate goal of the TA is to train 600 teachers registered in a ministerial network of English teachers who will benefit 48,000 students with their innovative and improved teaching strategies (MINEDUC, 2020a). Owing to the COVID-19 contingency the TA was fully imparted online through webinars and some of the training involved a series of synchronous and asynchronous activities, such as autonomous work, participation in forums, and practical homework and tasks supervised by the British Council.

Sen’s Capability Approach Framework

Sen’s Capability Approach (CA) framework has been widely used to address concerns about social justice in various fields such as economics, human development, and education. Basically, the CA is based on the fundamental principle that beyond socioeconomic resources, the most important thing is to consider what individuals are able to *be* (e.g., healthy, well-nourished, educated) and *do* (e.g., study, vote, participate, travel). Hence, attention should be paid to the *freedoms* and *opportunities* people have to formulate *capabilities* or *valued doings and beings*, and thus convert resources into *functionings* they value (Sen, 1999). In other words, *capabilities* entail real opportunities and freedoms to achieve *functionings*, and *functionings* represent the achievement itself or the doings and beings one has reason to value (Sen, 2009).

Another core principle in the CA is individuals’ *freedom(s)* to *do* and *be* what is important in their lives. Sen’s conceptualization of freedom transcends the individualistic product-oriented understanding of freedom offered by the neoliberal ideology (Pålsson, 2004). While the neoliberal model conceives the individual as a free consumer, Sen sees individuals as doers and participants, free to lead the lives they value (Laruffa, 2018, 2019) and to “determine what we want, what we value, and ultimately what we decide to choose” (Sen, 2009, p. 232). Nonetheless, freedom – or opportunities to become social individuals and fully achieve important doings and beings – can be constrained by *unfreedoms*, or the deprivations that restrain social lives and participation in society (Sen, 1999). Indeed, such constraints – “institutions, policies, laws, social norms” (Robeyns, 2017, p. 65) – play a critical

role in shaping the capabilities or opportunities of individuals to be and do what they deem valuable in life.

Moreover, in the CA, education is key to development. Sen (1992) understands education as one of ‘a relatively small number of centrally important beings and doings that are crucial to well-being’ (p. 44). However, beyond the right to equal opportunities in education, what matters is “the capability to function as participants in equal-opportunity educational processes and outcomes” (Unterhalter & Walker, 2007, p. 240). Hence, the CA offers an alternative and analytical paradigm ‘for thinking beyond access to education and for considering the potential for individual freedoms both in and through education’ (Sarojini, 2012, p. 276) and enables us to reflect on how to “evaluate policies and other changes according to the impact on people’s capabilities as well as their actual functionings” (Robeyns, 2017, p. 47).

With this in mind, this chapter draws on the CA to examine how the *Teacher Academy* program perpetuates the neoliberal market-driven model in education in Chile and how it possibly affects public-school teachers’ opportunities and freedoms to develop valuable capabilities and functionings.

Method

In the present chapter, I use document analysis as a method and a first approximation to critically examine the *Teacher Academy* program implemented by the Chilean Ministry of Education in 2019. Document analysis is “a form of qualitative research” (Gross, 2018, p. 2) that entails “a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents – both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material” (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). According to Bowen (2009) “like any other analytical methods in qualitative research, document analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge” (p. 27). In addition, through this procedure, it is possible to understand the context, background and historical roots of the issues under investigation. In the context of this study, document analysis shed light on the conceptualization of the TA and its implementation.

Data Collection

According to Bowen (2009), the analysis of documents is not about “lining up a series of excerpts from printed material, rather it is a process of evaluating documents in such a way that empirical knowledge is produced and understanding is developed” (p. 33-34). Here, a series of printed, electronic and Internet-transmitted documents (Bowen, 2009) dating from 2019 to 2021 – when the TA was launched and implemented – were selected for this study. Seventeen ($n=17$) data sources were analyzed in-depth that were organized into three main groups: (a) Government:

governmental documents, online news, promotional videos, online calls to participate in the TA; teachers' testimonials, (b) Media: online newspaper news; private school's participation in the TA, and (c) Academics: open letters, university news. Table 2.1 showcases the documents that were reviewed for the purposes of this study.

Data Analysis

I used Sen's Capability Approach to critically examine how the TA perpetuates the neoliberal model and how it possibly affects public-school teachers' capabilities and functionings. This process involved six steps: (1) first, an overall examination of the documents was carried out; (2) while reading through the texts for "thorough examination" (Bowen, 2009, p. 32) I made tentative notes of how the elements of capabilities and functionings manifested; (3) content analysis was conducted and the information was organized into themes related to the context, rationale, description, implementation, and critical perspectives of/on the TA program and their relation to Sen's notions of opportunities and freedoms (capabilities) and valued doings and beings (functionings); (4) patterns and connections between the themes were identified in the data; (5) a coding protocol was developed to identify emergent subthemes (6) finally, for ease of data reporting, names were given to the themes and subthemes (e.g, capabilities and *in*-capabilities). In addition, the data was cross-analyzed with N-Vivo 11.

Findings

Two main categories were identified after approaching the data through the lens of the CA: (a); Private capabilities versus public *in*-capabilities and (b) Problematic functionings. These categories showcase the market-driven neoliberal backbone that sustains the educational system in Chile, particularly the inequalities in ELT. A description of the categories, definitions and sample quotes taken from the diverse documents analyzed are presented below. Table 2.2 summarizes the key findings in this study and the subcategories that emerged from the document data.

Private Capabilities Versus Public *In*-capabilities

From Sen's perspective, *capabilities* constitute the real freedoms and opportunities of individuals to achieve functionings or what they value in life (Robeyns, 2017). This section revolves around MINEDUC's decision to consider the ELT knowledge and capabilities of teachers in elite private schools as valid and valuable over

Table 2.1 Sample of documents and data examined: English in English program

Government	Data examined
Document type	Context of and rationale for the Teacher Academy initiative Description of the program
Plan Nacional de Ingles "English in English" https://www.mineduc.cl/plan-english-in-english/	Program description and objectives Program activities and participation procedures Program instructors Program modules
Teachers' academy + Acompañamiento https://ingles.mineduc.cl/teachers-academy/	
Se invita a docentes a participar de Teachers' Academy 2020 en modalidad online https://ingles.mineduc.cl/2020/04/09/se-invita-a-docentes-a-participar-de-teachers-academy-2020-en-modalidad-online/	
Se abre nueva convocatoria de capacitación Teachers' Academy en modalidad online https://ingles.mineduc.cl/2020/08/11/se-abre-nueva-convocatoria-de-capacitacion-teachers-academy-en-modalidad-online/	
Docentes de inglés se capacitan en taller Teachers' Academy, del Programa Ingles Abre Puertas https://valparaiso.mineduc.cl/2019/02/19/docentes-de-ingles-se-capacitan-en-jornada-teachers-academy-del-mineduc/	
Mas de 600 docentes de ingles se capacitan exitosamente en Teachers; Academy 2019 (Programa Ingles Abre Puertas Mineduc) https://ingles.mineduc.cl/2020/01/24/mas-de-600-docentes-de-ingles-se-capacitan-exitosamente-en-teachers-academy-2019/?fbclid=IwAR0WnBM2kZda3fyxqJYP3k_1GwQAdSOjQRJ7JD0mSkizKc8G4EnCnzmiFE	
Con gran éxito finaliza el Teachers' Academy del MINEDUC https://temucotelevision.cl/web/2019/04/22/con-gran-exito-finaliza-el-teachers-academy-del-mineduc/	Program description Possible impact of the program Stages of the program
Preparan a docentes para que clases de inglés se hagan en ese idioma https://educrea.cl/preparan-a-docentes-para-que-clases-de-ingles-se-hagan-en-ese-idioma/	
Docentes que participaron de Teachers' Academy 2019 entregan su testimonio (Programa Ingles Abre Puertas Mineduc) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZJQMPQ5L4kM	Description of the program Experts' and teachers' opinions Benefits of the TA Teachers' testimonials
Docentes que reciben acompañamiento en aula entregan sus testimonios (Programa Ingles Abre Puertas Mineduc) https://ingles.mineduc.cl/2020/07/28/docentes-que-reciben-acompanamiento-en-aula-entregan-sus-testimonios/	
The English Opens Doors Program and the British Council open applications for the Mentor Development Course 2021 (Programa Ingles Abre Puertas Mineduc) https://ingles.mineduc.cl/2021/02/22/the-english-opens-doors-program-and-the-british-council-open-applications-for-the-mentor-development-course-2021/	TA's mentoring program Definition of a mentor

Media	Description of the program Experts and teacher's opinions Authorities' opinions
<p>In English, please: MINEDUC busca que docentes municipales de inglés solo enseñen hablando el idioma https://www.biobiochile.cl/noticias/nacional/chile/2019/02/06/in-english-please-mineduc-busca-que-profesores-municipales-de-ingles-solo-ensenen-usando-el-idioma.shtml</p> <p>Preparan a docentes para que clases de inglés se hagan en ese idioma https://www.latercera.com/nacional/noticia/preparan-docentes-clases-ingles-se-hagan-ese-idioma/513985/</p> <p>Profesoras Santiago College capacitaron a docentes de colegios municipales en inglés http://www.scollege.cl/index.php/es/noticias/1408-profesoras-sc-capacitaron-a-docentes-de-colegios-municipales-en-ingles?fbclid=IwAR0tGYDboJ24b3zG1sKFAmuks2zHeCKE8k40YGzqitA5mjFxNoWEzPFszKE</p>	
Academics	
<p>Carta Abierta al Programa Ingles Abre Puertas con respecto a English in English (RICELT – Red de Investigación Chilena en ELT, 2019)</p> <p>Profesores de Pedagogía en Inglés de UAH cuestionan plan English in English de Mineduc https://educacion.uahurtado.cl/noticias/profesores-de-pedagogia-en-ingles-de-uah-cuestionan-plan-english-in-english-de-mineduc/</p> <p>Profesores de inglés de la U. de Santiago critican el Plan “English in English” del MINEDUC (https://portal.usach.cl/news/profesores-ingles-la-u-santiago-critican-plan-english-english-de-mineduc)</p>	Context and critical perspectives on the program Suggestions

Table 2.2 Findings: Categories and subcategories

Category	Subcategories
Private capabilities versus public <i>in</i> -capabilities	Private capabilities
	Public <i>in</i> -capabilities
Problematic functionings	Decontextualized functionings
	Unearthed functionings

public-school teacher know-how. Two levels were identified: private capabilities and public *in*-capabilities.

Private Capabilities

Inspired by the poor results of public-school students in the 2017 national English test described in Sect. 2.3.1, ministerial authorities envisioned the “English in English” program as the opportunity to narrow down the socioeconomic- gap test result (Programa Ingles Abre Puertas Mineduc, 2020). To execute such a program, it was paramount for MINEDUC to train English teachers from public schools. As such, the implementation of the TA was located in and in the charge of elite bilingual schools of “high academic excellence who organized workshops grouped under three categories: student-centered learning, project-based learning, and oral skills” (Plan Nacional de Ingles “English in English”, 2019). Indeed, the TA is conceived as a “public-private alliance” where the teaching capabilities of private-school teachers trickle-down to their public-school peers. A principal from a private school elaborated in an interview:

We are an educational institution that has bilingualism in English. This fact opens doors to our students. That is why we made the commitment to help MINEDUC with the English Opens Doors Program. We did it thinking that we have an advantage in this area, we can share our experience with municipal schools. We can connect these two worlds: as a host school with our techniques and our strategies and them [public-school teachers] with their experiences and methodologies. (Valparaiso-MINEDUC, February 19, 2019)

This excerpt illustrates the core neoliberal value of the TA: that the teaching capabilities of private institutions are the solution to public deficiencies or *in*-capabilities. Therefore, the functionings identified by the Chilean government – low test results and socioeconomic gap in English language learning – are better in the hands of capable private know-how, manifested also by the high self-esteem of private institutions to do and be good in the public arena.

Nevertheless, the TA generated an important debate in the academic world. Even though academics valued the connection between members of the private and public spheres, the program was deemed to be decontextualized because of elite private schools’ lack of knowledge of “the diversity of the wide spectrum of public schools” (USACH al Día, June 19, 2019). Moreover, academics considered that (a) “the classroom practices used in private educational institutions are not transferable to

public-school contexts with high levels of vulnerability” (RICELT, June 13, 2019); (b) the transferability of such strategies “sends the message that a vulnerable [school] context should aspire and copy what is done in a privileged school” (La Tercera, February 19, 2019); and (c) the TA can be *frustrating* for English teachers in public schools who feel they have to level up their students to private-school standards.

Public *In-capabilities*

This category is constituted by the data related to the context of and rationale for the implementation of the TA. As alluded to in Sect. 2.3.1, part of the low-language proficiency problem is the responsibility of public-school teachers who do not use English in class and “make inadequate use of grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary, and have poor fluency skills” (Plan Nacional de Ingles “English in English”, 2019). As such, the TA helps teachers improve their linguistic and teaching *in-capabilities* “thanks to the contribution” of private school’s capabilities and “thanks to the given methodological tools that are more effective for the teaching of English” (MINEDUC, March 13, 2020a) which, in the long run, ameliorate the “quality of public education” (La Tercera, February 3, 2019).

The main flaw of the TA is that its short-sighted *remedial* implementation does not address the *unfreedoms* or big social concerns lived by teachers in public schools. Specifically, the pressure imposed on public-school teachers to teach “English lessons in English” (Plan Nacional de Ingles “English in English”, 2019) to achieve an A1 level in their students was criticized by academics who thought these goals center “primarily on the linguistic aspect of language learning leaving aside contextual, social and socioeconomic issues related to the process of language learning” (RICELT, June 13, 2019). Teachers work in a “complex, vulnerable and weakened public-school system, which is socioeconomically segregated” (Facultad de Educación Universidad Alberto Hurtado, June 21, 2019). Thus, academics made a call for MINEDUC to prioritize its efforts and address deeply-rooted issues that intensify public-school teachers’ *in-capabilities* such as “decreasing the number of students per class, reconsidering the number of weekly hours of English instruction in the curriculum, and improving facilities and access to technology” (USACH al Día, June 19, 2019). Even though professional development initiatives are valued among academics, other pivotal concerns are not tackled by the TA, such as unpaid time to plan lessons, few opportunities for collegial collaborative work, no consideration of learners as protagonists of the language-learning process, and lack of participation of other members of the school communities (e.g., parents, principals, researchers, etc.). In essence, if programs such as the TA are to succeed, they should not be *hasty* and *unreflective* (USACH al Día, June 19, 2019) and alien to social issues affecting education in Chile.

Problematic Functionings

In the CA, the *functionings* represent the doings and beings that individuals value and are able to achieve in life (Sen, 1999). This category is constituted by the data related to the valued functionings that sustain the TA. Two levels were identified in this category: decontextualized functionings and unearthed functionings.

Decontextualized Functionings

The implementation of the TA is conceived as the tool that helps ministerial authorities achieve two paramount functionings: (a) to improve the “speaking skills and the curricular mandate to achieve level A1 according to the Common European Framework for Language Reference” (MINEDUC, March 13, 2020a) and (b) to help language learners have “access to higher education, the labor market, and research” and to interact “with different actors [from education, the job market and research] in an immediate and effective way” (Plan Nacional de Ingles “English in English”, 2019). On this issue, a group of academics considered that

communicating in English with international standards is far from the reality of public schools where students do not have the same language learning opportunities as their peers in the private sector who have more hours of English instruction, family support, international certification, study abroad programs in English speaking countries, access to technology, etc. (RICELT, June 13, 2019).

Here, the discrepancy between the language learning valued functionings established by MINEDUC and the reality of disadvantaged students in the public sector is clear. Moreover, it reveals the intention to level the language learning of public-school students with their peers belonging to the elite. What is more, the training received through the TA is seen as the *valued doing* that “allows [teachers] to improve the learning of English and achieve what the [ministerial] plans and programs indicate” (Valparaiso-MINEDUC, February 19, 2019). To achieve this objective, public-school teachers “are given strategies to be aligned as a network of teachers” (La Tercera, February 19, 2019). This alignment between curricular mandates, what teachers learn in the TA, and the replication of private-generated teaching strategies in public schools is deemed problematic for academics who believe that teachers should be given “academic flexibility, be respected as professionals, and granted higher levels of autonomy” (Facultad de Educación Universidad Alberto Hurtado, June 21, 2019). Therefore, the valued functionings of the Chilean Ministry of Education are detrimental to the development of capabilities – freedoms and opportunities – of teachers to adapt the curriculum to their situated educational needs.

Unearthed Functionings

This category is constituted by the data gathered from online teachers' testimonials related to the benefits and gains of the TA. Primarily, public-school teachers appreciate the support received from mentors trained by the British Council. For instance, one teacher noted: "the monitoring has been useful and helpful" ... In the meetings with my mentor, we analyze and reflect about the work we're doing" (Programa Ingles Abre Puertas Mineduc, 2020). Another teacher indicates that he enrolled in the TA because he wanted to "exchange experiences with peers to identify individual needs". He also finds the mentorship valuable because it "enriches their repertoire of teaching and learning resources, gives room to experimentation, guides lesson planning" (Programa Ingles Abre Puertas Mineduc, 2020). On this last point, if the valued functionings of mentors are unearthed, it is possible to find that MINEDUC has a particular perception of their work. As such, a TA mentor is conceived as "an expert who shares knowledge, advice, and wisdom with less experienced professionals" who is also "outstanding", "responsible" and "flexible" (Programa Ingles Abre Puertas Mineduc, 2021). In other words, the mentor has the capabilities, expertise, and knowledge to create teaching opportunities for public-school teachers.

Moreover, the TA was considered a valuable *source* of "tools", "feedback", and "strategies" that teachers receive and later "implement" in their language classrooms to "improve" their classroom practices. Elite schools also celebrated the initiative because it represented "a great collaborative learning opportunity, where our teachers could "transmit" innovative teaching practices and strategies to teachers from municipal schools" (SC, 2019). The notion of the *given* identified in the testimonials is interesting. Seen from Sen's perspective, the program provides them with a fixed package of opportunities and resources to be replicated in their classrooms. As such, the TA hinders teachers to convert such opportunities and resources into situated teaching functionings they value for their teaching contexts.

Furthermore, attached to this model is a system of rewards. Those teachers with "good performance and commitment" receive a certification and can "apply to scholarships abroad" (Plan Nacional de Inglés "English in English", 2019). On this point, academics from RICELT consider that the program "fosters competition among teachers by giving access to short-term prizes that do not entail improvement to the working conditions of public schools" (RICELT, June 13, 2019). This brings to light the market-driven neoliberal core of the TA illustrated by the benefits offered by the private sector and the competitive nature of the program.

Discussion

Aware of the effect of market-driven policies in education in Chile, I drew on Sen's (1999) Capability Approach to critically examine how the TA perpetuates the neoliberal model and how it possibly affects public-school teachers' capabilities and functionings. In fact, Sen offers a different analytical paradigm to understand that beyond access to teacher training, the TA perpetuates the neoliberal model manifested in the limitations of the opportunities and freedoms of public-school teachers to achieve valuable teaching functionings (Robeyns, 2017).

The documents analyzed shed light on the reality of ELT in contexts where neoliberalism is the norm. A key finding in this study is that the TA is built on the premise that English is a language with enough power to improve the quality of public education in Chile. The exclusive use of English in Chilean public classrooms and the development of speaking skills that lead to conversing in the target language are the springboard to succeeding in education (Ali & Hamid, 2021, Price, 2014), accessing the job market, and climbing the social ladder (Ennsner-Kananen et al., 2017). As such, this market-driven functioning valued by MINEDUC sends two messages: (a) that public-school teachers are *in-capable* to teach the language, thus, they need to be re-educated by capable peers from the private sector undermining their opportunities and freedoms to choose the pedagogy they see fit for their educational contexts (Sen, 1999) and (b) bilingual elite schools – due to their high academic excellence in the national English language test – have the capabilities to determine what good language teaching is and what the best teaching strategies and methods are to be applied in school contexts that are far from privileged. In essence, from the perspective of Sen's CA, capabilities are shifted by the system through the implementation of policies such as the TA (Robeyns, 2017), hence, the TA restrains public-school teacher's opportunities and freedoms to take part in an equal-opportunity educational ELT training process (Unterhalter & Walker, 2007), and to determine what they want, value, and “decide to choose” (Sen, 2009, p. 232).

Another key finding draws attention to the gains of the TA. Teachers seem to be grateful of the support and feedback received from their mentors and the repertoire of resources obtained. However, the neoliberal foundation of the program is manifested by a system of competition and reward (certificates and scholarships) for teachers who complete the training (Harvey, 2007), the understanding of mentors as wise experts who share and transmit teaching knowledge and experience, and the implementation of given sources and tools that would help teachers improve their teaching to level up public-school learners to private standards (Sayer, 2019). As such, the TA enhances the trickle-down mentality of teachers, hampers their capabilities to become valuable sources of knowledge who can convert opportunities into valued ELT teachings, and perpetuates the idea that public ELT know-how is less valuable than the private (Bockman, 2013).

Finally, the valued ELT functionings established by MINEDUC – English in English class, universal A1 language proficiency based on international standards, implementation of the national curriculum – achieved through the TA are alienated

from the social and socioeconomic concerns and capabilities of the public-school world. This point draws attention to the little consideration of the disadvantaged language-learning position of public-school students and teachers in comparison to their peers from elite private schools who have access to study-abroad exchange programs and quality English language instruction in a privileged learning environment (Matear, 2008). These unfreedoms imposed by the system magnify the deeply-rooted inequalities of the Chilean school system and ELT and continue to perpetuate the neoliberal depredation, destruction and deformation of the already fragile fabric of public schools.

Conclusion

The results of this study corroborate the market-driven premise that the private world of education has much more to offer public-school teachers and students. Indeed, the ELT freedoms to teach a certain group become more valued, coherent and strong, and thus the ELT freedoms of public-school teachers are hindered by minority elite groups who are in a position of educational power. What is more, public-school teachers, with their poor grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency skills, and teaching methods, are perceived as the main cause of the English language learning failure of the public-school system. Rather than empowering teachers to (co-)construct and create suitable teaching practices for their educational contexts, they are perceived as recipients of *good teaching* that cascades from the elite world. This *given* knowledge is seen as a *rebirth* of teachers without any consideration of the language teaching background knowledge constructed and accumulated after years of instruction in disadvantaged school contexts.

Nonetheless, I *do* join teachers and academics in acknowledging MINEDUC's effort to improve English language learning and initiatives to reach out to students in the public sector to access quality language instruction. However, I believe that for such initiatives to succeed four conditions must be met. First, nationwide initiatives should be developed in consultation with various members of the educational community, namely students, teachers, and parents (i.e., central community members directly involved in the day-to-day teaching and learning of English in schools) and academics and researchers (i.e., periphery community members involved in the day-to-day teaching and learning of English in school contexts) (Wenger, 1998). Second, top-down ELT public policies – managed by the elite in this case – would benefit greatly from the grassroots perspectives, learning and knowledge created in the public sector in order to co-create critical professional development opportunities that are significant and situated. Third, continuous teacher education initiatives can become more meaningful if designed from a *post-method* perspective (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). Rather than giving public-school teachers a prescribed ELT toolkit to reimplement in their schools, with a post-method lens, language teachers are presented with opportunities to analyze and reflect critically on their language teaching and learning conditions and the application of modes of teaching

provided in professional development courses. At the same time, they are empowered to theorize and determine what methods and strategies are effective in particular contexts and realities. Finally, systematic evaluation of such initiatives should be carried out, as well as research that examines their implementation in school contexts and documents the language teaching and learning experiences of teachers and students.

This study is not free from limitations. This document analysis study is a first approximation to look at the TA from a critical standpoint. Furthermore, as the TA is a recently-launched initiative, retrievability of documents from diverse sources was challenging. For example, in the case of news articles, some sources overlapped because they referenced each other. Moreover, depth in the description of the TA was also limited. Ministerial documents and online information about the program are brief, and therefore this study presents limited perspectives and points of view. This points to future directions for further research: how do public-school teachers feel about the TA? How do such teachers and their students feel about the implementation of top-down teaching that cascades from elite private schools? How do ministerial authorities and private-school teachers perceive training peers for a reality that is unknown to them? How do teachers balance their opportunities and freedoms to teach English with the imposition to teach the curriculum and their learnings in the TA? Finally, I wrote this paper to share the complexity of the Chilean school system and the detrimental impact of market-driven neoliberal policies in ELT in the Global South, hoping to shine some light on government program design and the need to look at professional development initiatives more critically.

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