

## School and social educational vulnerability in Chile: experiences and preparedness of novice teachers of English

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



# School and social educational vulnerability in Chile: experiences and preparedness of novice teachers of English

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## ABSTRACT

Drawing on Sen's notion of social justice in the Capability Approach, this paper examines the experiences of a group of novice teachers from English teacher education programmes working in marginalised schools in Chile. Through open-ended surveys and interviews, I investigated how new teachers navigate their first teaching years in contexts of educational vulnerability, how they perceive their teacher education programs and preparation to work in such school contexts, and how they balance the interplay between unfreedoms and the exercise of freedoms to teach students at social risk. The findings reveal the impact of contextless English teacher education programs and how these trigger future teacher motivation to develop a deeper understanding of educational vulnerability and their freedom to move away from language teaching issues to accommodate their teaching based on their care and commitment to their students. This paper closes by making a call for the importance of a grassroots approach in the development of English teacher education programs designed *with* members of marginalised communities.

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## KEYWORDS

Novice teacher of English; social justice; educational vulnerability; English teacher education programs; Capability Approach

## Introduction

There has been little examination of the experiences of novice teachers of English in educational contexts (Farrell, 2016), particularly, in contexts with deeply-rooted inequality in Latin America. In this paper, I report on the social justice (SJ) experiences of novice teachers (NTs) in contexts of educational vulnerability and on their perception of how their English teaching education programs (ETEPs) have prepared them to work in social conditions where SJ is undermined. Drawing on Sen's Capability Approach (CA; Sen, 1999), specifically the notions of (un)freedom, capabilities, and valued beings and doings, I seek to answer how NTs -teachers with one to five years of teaching experience -: (a) navigate the first years in the profession in marginalised schools after graduating from ETEPs; (b) perceive their preparedness to work in educational social injustice contexts; and (c) balance the interplay between unfreedoms and the exercise of freedom to teach and care to become proactive members in their school contexts who understand social justice in educational vulnerability.

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## The Chilean school system: inequality and social stratification

NTs in Chile start their career in an educational system marked by contentious socio-economic issues rooted in the neoliberal reforms imposed under Pinochet's dictatorship. These reforms, based on decentralisation and privatisation, created an institutionalised pyramid system of educational castes enhanced by school competition and parental freedom to choose schools resulting in segregation, an exacerbated gap in access to education between socioeconomically high- and low-income students, and an eroded public-school system affected by enrolment decline and school closure (Zancajo, 2019).

In this context, marginalised public schools depict environments of family and street violence, abandonment, drug consumption, high dropout rate, and parents lacking educational resources 'to transmit to their family members the norms and cultural capital valued by schools' (Espinoza et al., 2011, p. 35). Unprepared by their teaching education programs, teachers struggle with this arduous reality (Espínola et al., 2017), lack 'strategies to motivate pupils' (Sleeter et al., 2016, p. 180), often rely on punishment and disqualification to control behaviour, and have low academic expectations and a dim opinion of pupils and their families (Sleeter et al., 2016). Teachers are also challenged by: (a) institutional demands to fully cover the curriculum, (b) inappropriate and irrelevant instructional material to students' social background, conditions, and lives (Muñoz et al., 2013), and (c) precarious working conditions (Cornejo, 2009). As a result of this abysmal social stratification, 'public schools have become ghettos specializing in low-income families' (Gonzalez, 2017, p. 151), where social integration, inclusion, and mobility do not happen and diversity is not an asset (Sleeter et al., 2016).

## English language teaching in Chile

Chile's economic growth in the 1990s and its place in a competitive global market, increased the importance of ELT in the Chilean educational system. English is taught from grades 5 to 12 and it has become 'a language of prestige associated with the elite and social mobility' (Antoine, 2017, p. 206). However, access to quality instruction is ruled by the socioeconomic background of students. For example, students from private schools have 10 or more hours of English per week (as opposed to four hours in public schools), have access to technological resources, internationally-published textbooks, and better qualified teachers, obtain international English proficiency certification, and go on exchange programs abroad (Matear, 2008). Conversely, students in the public sector use books provided by the government, their teachers lack certification and have low English language proficiency (Agencia de la Calidad de la Educación, 2018). To narrow the gap, the Ministry of Education created the English Open Doors Programme (EODP) that primarily entailed the redesign of a new second language curriculum, distribution of ELT instructional material, and organisation of pre-and in-service teacher training programs.

Despite these measures, ELT in marginalised school contexts is still a challenge. Students can barely follow instructions, cannot understand basic vocabulary or infer meaning from context as a result of their cognitive, physical, affective and social needs (Yilorm et al., 2019). As such, teachers feel unable to fulfil curricular language demands

when working in schools where ‘critical incidents’ are the norm (i.e., affective-behavioural problems, physical and verbal aggression, destruction of school property; Yilorm & Acosta, 2016).

Becoming an English teacher takes four to five years. During years one and two, emphasis is given to English language, linguistics, phonetics and grammar. Later, future teachers take courses in psychology, philosophy, evaluation, and ELT methodology plus the incorporation of pre- and professional practicums (Barahona, 2016). Hence, due to an ‘overriding concern for linguistic forms’ (Veliz & Veliz-Campos, 2019, p. 59), it is necessary that ETEPs move beyond their focus on language learning, teaching methods, and the symbolic incorporation of SJ done through short field or practicum placements, or a single course on diversity in their curriculum (McDonald & Zeichner, 2008; Sierra, 2016; Zeichner, 2019).

To genuinely prepare teachers able to implement SJ language pedagogies (Nguyen & Zeichner, 2019), ETEPs should be designed in collaboration with communities from marginalised contexts and delivered by teacher educators engaged in SJ initiatives who have challenged their own biases, and are critical of socially unjust reproduction school systems (McDonald & Zeichner, 2008). Consequently, it is critical that ETEPs provide opportunities for teacher candidates to examine their beliefs and prejudices and develop a greater understanding of the injustices behind English language teaching, social and power structures, and the diverse social and linguistic realities of students and their families (Hall, 2016). This will better equip NTs to critically examine the curriculum, develop appropriate instructional material and tests (Nguyen & Zeichner, 2019), be compassionate towards students at social risk, and develop relevant and customised teaching practices that build on students’ learning needs and sociocultural and linguistic resources (Sierra, 2016).

### **Sen’s Capabilities Approach: Social justice and education**

Sen’s Capabilities Approach (CA) is used to address issues of social justice in multiple fields, including education (Adamson, 2021). As such, Sen’s (1999) Capabilities Approach (CA) ‘provides a very useful way, given the complexity of diverse societies in the world, to think about social justice’ (Unterhalter, 2003, p. 2). Particularly, the idea of SJ entails the creation of opportunities and conditions for all individuals to do what they value in life (Alexander, 2008) and take part in the social decisions they choose (Sen, 1999). From the point of view of education, in the CA ‘not only is the right to equal opportunities for students important, but also the capability to function as participants in equal-opportunity educational processes and outcomes’ (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007, p. 240).

CA offers an alternative and analytical epistemological paradigm ‘for thinking beyond access to education and for considering the potential for individual freedoms both in and through education’ (Hart, 2012, p. 276). Sen’s framework can help educators understand the role education plays in: (a) equipping students with the necessary capabilities ‘to pursue the opportunities they value’ (Walker, 2005, p. 109); (b) helping them develop their future identities or becoming the person they value (Adamson, 2021); developing educational functionings “necessary for future adult capabilities so they can freely choose a life they perceive as ‘good’ (Ward, 2020, p. 325), (c) evaluating the impact of teaching resources in the creation of educational capabilities (Hart, 2019); (d) understanding the critical role of educational institutions in the formation of students (Gale & Molla, 2015);

and (e) reflecting what capabilities and opportunities teachers offer in their classrooms—to whom and how fairly—and how they facilitate the formation of valuable capabilities to function in society (Imperiale, 2017).

### Capabilities and functionings

A central value in the CA is what people are actually able to *do* (e.g., vote, travel, study) and *be* (e.g., be educated, be well-nourished); hence, it is important to look at the *freedom* and *opportunities* people have to formulate *capabilities* or ‘valued doings and beings’, and thus convert resources into *functionings* they value (Sen, 1999). Simply put, *capabilities* represent real opportunities and freedoms to achieve functionings and *functionings* entail the achievement itself, that is, the beings and doings individuals have reason to value (Sen, 2009).

Another instrumental principle in the CA is the emphasis placed on people’s *freedom* to *do* and *be* and to ‘determine what we want, what we value, and ultimately what we decide to choose’ (Sen, 2009, p. 232). Conversely, freedom (i.e., opportunities to become social persons and fully realise important doings and beings) can be suppressed by *unfreedoms* or the deprivations that restrain the social lives and social participation of individuals (e.g., poverty, lack of economic opportunities, institutional neglect; Sen, 1999). Moreover, Sen provides an expanded notion that denotes social justice, social commitment and individual responsibility, drawn by personal values, objectives and opportunities, and making freedom the primary means of individual and social development (Sen, 1999, 2009). In Sen’s words, (Sen, 1999), the notion of freedom ‘enhances the ability of people to help themselves and also to influence the world’ (p. 18). The core principles of Sen’s CA are, therefore, a good fit for examining the social justice experiences of NTs in schools at social risk and the interplay between teaching English and educational vulnerability in Chile.

### Research method

This paper uses a qualitative paradigm (Creswell, 2014) to examine how Chilean ELT NTs navigated their first teaching years after graduating from ETEPs, focusing on their opportunities and freedoms to achieve the functionings they value in vulnerable school contexts and their awareness of social(in)justice in education.

### Participants

Set in diverse Chilean school contexts, 164 participants responded to an open-ended online survey. I selected the accounts of NTs who reported working in public schools in contexts of educational vulnerability and with students from marginalised backgrounds ( $n = 133$ ) from which 26 agreed to be interviewed. These participants had one to five years of teaching experience; their ages were 22–35 years; 22 were female and 4 were male; and they worked in primary and high schools in Santiago, the capital city. After obtaining approval from the Ethics Office at my university, the study began. Ethical procedures were followed throughout the study—participants signed consent forms, were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Pseudonyms were assigned to secure confidentiality and anonymity.

## **Data collection and analysis**

The qualitative data was collected through a sequential design: an open-ended survey followed by a semi-structured individual interview. Two versions of the open-ended and interview questions were designed (Spanish and English) to allow the teachers to respond in their preferred language, as Van Nes et al. (2010) suggest.

The open-ended online survey was designed with the Fluid Survey software and distributed with the support of the EODP. The survey included an invitation to participate, the purpose of the research, the link to the survey, and my contact information to the NTs in their database. The survey took approximately thirty minutes to complete and had two goals: create a profile of the participants (e.g., age, gender, years of teaching experience, etc.) and explore the types of schools where the participants began their career paths. For example, the questions asked the participants to provide information about their schools and their social context; their students' social and educational backgrounds; challenges and highlights of their teaching experience; the support networks in their school communities; and to reflect on their teacher education programs.

Prompted by the survey's open-ended questions, the objective of the interview was to examine in-depth the life and teaching experiences of NTs in marginalised schools (e.g., teaching and life experiences, community support, social context and students' social backgrounds in educational vulnerability, reflections on SJ).

Interviews were audio recorded, orthographically transcribed, translated from Spanish to English, and subsequently analysed following a thematic analysis approach (Nowell et al., 2017). The analysis involved organising and storing data; reading through the transcripts to identify patterns and generate the first codes; identifying patterns and connections between themes; developing a coding protocol to identify subthemes that described the participants' experiences in marginalised schools after graduating from ETEPs; and, finally, naming the themes and subthemes for ease of data reporting. In addition, N-Vivo 11 was used to cross-analyse the data.

## **Findings**

Using the lens of SJ in the CA, two broad categories were identified in the open-ended survey and the interviews: (a) Flawed English teaching education programs for educational vulnerability and (b) Exercising freedom for social justice. Subcategories, definitions, and sample quotes from the open-ended online survey and interviews are presented below. [Table 1](#) summarises the key findings that emerged from the participants' narratives.

### ***Flawed English teaching education programs for educational vulnerability***

The freedoms and opportunities individuals have to achieve capabilities are sometimes limited by *unfreedoms* that restrain them to do and be what they value in life (Sen, 1999). This section focuses on the restrictions imposed by contextless ETEPs on the participants' work in marginalised schools, and how lack of preparation triggered their need and motivation to better understand their students and school contexts. Under this category, two subcategories emerged from the interpretation of the data: contextless teacher education programs and self-study motivation trigger.

**Table 1.** Findings: categories and subcategories.

Category	Subcategories
Flawed English teaching education programs for educational vulnerability	Contextless teacher education programs Self-study motivation trigger
Exercising freedom for social justice	Freedom to teach in educational vulnerability Freedom to care in educational vulnerability

### **Contextless teacher education programs**

Unanimously, the participants referred to their ETEPs as part of their teaching experiences. One common response identified in the transcript data was the feeling of ‘absolute’ unpreparedness of NTs to face the reality of vulnerable schools. In particular, the teachers were concerned with the preparation they received in their university teacher education programs and described them as ‘unrealistic’, ‘not enough’, or ‘impossible to apply in a classroom with 35 socially disadvantaged kids’. In general, the participants agreed that ETEPs ‘did not consider any strategies about English language teaching and learning in school contexts with students with deep learning and academic drawbacks’ or did not prepare them to work with ‘poor or no teaching material’. About her training, one interviewed NT -Angela- explained: ‘they [teacher educators in ETEPs] teach you methodologies that sound beautiful and innovative but NO ONE teaches you to teach terribly neglected kids and how the hell to do it’. This teacher eloquently described the fact that ETEPs did not prepare teachers who opted to work in marginalised schools and asserted that the preparation received in her program was far from being appropriate and situated for educational vulnerability.

Along with this, the participants’ testimonies indicated that ETEPs take issues of social justice ‘superficially’. On this point, Pablo, a surveyed participant asserted: ‘The biggest challenge for me has been the false idea they give you at the university. They say they pay attention to diversity and inclusivity but they don’t’. Moreover, single courses on SJ offered by ETEPs were also considered ‘insufficient’, ‘light’, or ‘ineffective’. For instance, Laura during the interview commented: ‘At the university we had *one* course about social issues. Some careers train you for this, but not English. The little they taught me wasn’t enough to really apply it. I’m not ready to teach here’. Besides, the teachers felt that many deep social and ‘delicate’ issues such as ‘drug addiction’, ‘poverty and family violence’ ‘are not even dealt with at the university’. Maria, a surveyed teacher indicated that ‘students live many things that universities don’t prepare us for, such as families absent from the education and lives of their kids’, meaning that what ETEPs offer teacher candidates lacks depth and does not consider issues beyond ELT such as the impact of absent families or parent abandonment and neglect.

At the same time, the way in which ETEPs approached social justice was perceived as ‘frustrating’ and ‘challenging’ by the participants who felt ‘unready’ to work with students with ‘low motivation because they [the students] know that in their sociocultural context they will never use English’. Likewise, Barbara expressed in her interview hard feelings about her program: ‘to this day, this terrifies me. I resent my university because they NEVER prepared me to work with socially disadvantaged students’. In sum, the NTs’ narratives revealed that ETEPs presented various flaws—or unfreedoms—that impacted their experiences in vulnerable school contexts. On the one hand, teacher education

programs seemed to be decontextualised, farfetched, and unrealistic for a type of student population that suffers from social neglect, and on the other, the shallow preparation these new teachers received at the university made them feel under prepared and frustrated at the same time.

### ***Self-study motivation trigger***

Interestingly, the overwhelming lack of preparation perceived by the participants was not taken lightly. Teaching alone with no support tools provided by their ETEPs, triggered in the NTs the need to do something because they had ‘no option’ and they wanted to ‘learn about the social reality of schools and students’. For example, Monica commented in the interview that she decided to self-learn further to understand her students: ‘last year, I started reading about child psychology. At the university we only had one course on psychology of the adolescent, so I felt absolutely unprepared for this reality’. At the same time, reaching out to other members of the school community—‘English teachers’, ‘teachers from other disciplines’, ‘the academic coordinator’—also helped these teachers who needed constant and meaningful feedback, ‘moral’, ‘academic’ and ‘administrative’ support. On this issue, Loreto commented during the interview:

I even spoke with the educational psychologist that visits the school to ask for help. I was desperate, I didn’t know what to do. I cried a lot, tried different ways of teaching and the children jumped and jumped on the chairs. She helped me see that these kids [vulnerable students] are unusual, that normal school rules and regulations don’t work here, and that they have a different perception of the world.

This testimony evidences different issues. First, the hard reality lived by new teachers; second, the emotional stress caused by lack of preparation for educational marginalisation; and third, the teacher’s initiative to find a specialist in her school context to seek classroom management help.

Notwithstanding, the lack of preparation from ETEPs also drove NTs to learn more about their students and be better equipped to teach them through the participation in ‘team meetings’, ‘workshops organized by the school’, ‘PD [professional development] courses to improve my teaching practices and give my students a sense of safety’ or ‘working closely with the homeroom teacher’. Likewise, about university unpreparedness and self-motivation to learn how to work in a school at social risk, Tomas articulated:

I’ll be honest. I didn’t learn to work in this school in my university. What I know about working in a vulnerable school comes from talking to parents and colleagues, but mainly observing the other teachers’ lessons, finding the right person to solve a problem, and reflecting on my own practices after observing others.

This excerpt evidences the flaws in ETEPs and the need of new teachers to find ways to (re)learn how to teach in schools in contexts of vulnerability.

These themes bring to light the mismatch between how ETEPs prepare teacher candidates and the overwhelming reality of schools at social risk. Most poignant in the participants’ narratives cited here was that they were reflective and critical of their university programs. From the CA perspective, the teachers experienced obstacles and



*unfreedoms* presented by contextless teacher education programs for educational marginalisation; however, this motivated the NTs' *freedoms* to embark on different initiatives to understand social justice issues in their school contexts.

### ***Exercising freedom for social justice***

Sen's (1999) conceptualisation of social justice involves the creation of equal opportunities and conditions for individuals to do what they deem valuable to their lives. This second main category focuses on how, despite the unfreedoms presented by their schools' social backgrounds and their lack of preparation from their ETEPs, NTs exercised their freedom to move away from English teaching to prioritise the learning and well-being of their students. Two levels were identified in the data: freedom to teach and freedom to care in educational vulnerability.

### ***Freedom to teach in educational vulnerability***

A central theme in the participants' narratives was their desire to help their students learn the language, even though their ETEPs did not specifically prepare them to do so. However, great concern was expressed about the overwhelmingly evident 'disconnection between the Ministry of Education and the lives of marginalized students' manifested by unattainable 'curricular demands and unsuitable prescribed teaching materials'. On this point, the mismatch perceived by the NTs could be accounted for by the Ministry's lack of 'connection and coherence' and ignorance 'of what these kids need today'. About this discrepancy, one interviewed participant -Susana- asserted:

the textbooks are designed for a standard student population. The language in the books is much higher than my students' ... You use the audio material and they really don't understand what's going on. Too fast, too much vocabulary. No wonder the kids get lost.

This teacher's observation illustrates her frustration teaching English in vulnerable learning environments where ministerial curricular requirements and teaching materials are critically inappropriate.

Notwithstanding these feelings, to compensate for this challenge, the participants reported developing new skills, namely withdrawing from the nuances of English teaching to give priority to diverse issues such as 'different paces of learning', 'short attention span' and 'deficient second language learning skills', and modifying and 'adapting' 'the language contents' to the language level of their students. They also indicated that they had to 'create appropriate teaching material', 'try trial and error teaching strategies', or find imaginative solutions geared towards the language learning ability of their learners, such as using 'videos, cartoons, bingo, karaoke' or 'writing about their favourite singers and celebrities'. The participants' accounts can be read as their ability to defy the unfreedoms presented by the discrepancy between the Ministry of Education and the language learning reality of marginalised students, and to exercise their freedom to teach in ways that are pertinent to their students.

### ***Freedom to care in educational vulnerability***

Under this category, participants' accounts describe how they gave importance to the affective and humanistic side of English teaching. Their comments bring to light the indivisible relationship between teaching and caring manifested by the teachers'

consideration of ‘positive reinforcement’ and the ‘personal and affective needs of the students’, and their wish to be accountable to and responsible for their students who live imperilled lives. For example, Denisse noted during the interview:

My students live in shanty towns where the police raid their homes . . . so, on Fridays we send soft, calm, well-behaved kids back home, but on Monday they are like . . . the Taz devil from cartoons. Then, we find out that their dad was taken to jail, or that he hit their mom. And we start [our work] all over again.

This testimony refers to the impact of home violence, the communities, and the social background of students on the day-to-day work of this young teacher and her effort and resilience to educate and help her students despite such constraints.

Furthermore, a simple act such as selecting pertinent activities or instructional material may reflect the teachers’ moral commitment towards their students. Most often, the surveyed and interviewed NTs recounted using ‘visual material or videos to get their short attention back’, ‘doing karaoke not only to improve their pronunciation but also to relax a bit from the violent backgrounds they come from’, or spending their own money to ‘buy a textbook with audio that was more basic to help them get used to listening’. However, despite the teachers’ efforts, some felt ‘challenged’ or ‘frustrated because, to these kids, learning English is a lost battle’.

Indeed, care was also maximised by the participants’ disruption of the ‘stiff’ or ‘nasty formal’ image that students had of teachers, manifested by their decision to be ‘engaging’ and to avoid being ‘distant’, observing ‘how they move inside the classroom, where they sit each class, or the way they talk or treat each other’, or ‘showing interest and using positive reinforcement’.

Despite the unfreedoms that hindered the work of these teachers in vulnerable schools, they were able to self-direct the teaching of the language. Participants’ accounts of their freedoms reveal their intention to teach the language in the best possible way by intertwining their discipline with affection and care, and at the same time disregarding the system’s lack of attention to and consideration of marginalised students.

## Discussion

Aware of the systemic inequalities of the Chilean school system, I drew on Sen’s (1999) notion of SJ in the CA as the foundation of this study to examine, from the voices of NTs of English who recently graduated from ETEPs, their teaching experiences in schools in contexts of vulnerability. The findings centred on a critical theme: the importance of appropriate and situated teacher training programs for educators who opt to work in school contexts with challenges that surpass ELT. An overwhelming majority of the participants described feeling unprepared to embark on the quest of teaching in educational marginalisation and lacking adequate skills (Sleeter et al., 2016) and resources to manage the students, their learning, and their own teaching. As such, the participants were critical of the cookie-cutter approach of ETEPs designed to learn how to teach English to a standard student population without consideration of the needs of vulnerable students, their families, and the reality of marginalised schools.

Moreover, the teacher preparation these NTs received from their ETEPs—based on the romantic notion of ‘beautiful and innovative’ English language teaching methods—were deemed unrealistic, farfetched, and ill-suited for students who present severe affective, learning, and academic needs. This point draws attention to the uniformity of ETEPs and their (in)coherence with the reality of public-school education in Chile. What is more, the participants’ narratives bring to light the rudimentary depth and cosmetic incorporation of social justice in teacher education programs (Zeichner, 2019) manifested by the incorporation of single courses on issues such as diversity or learning psychology, but that leave relevant concerns unattended, such as community and family violence, drug addiction, abandonment, or serious student learning drawbacks, which—in the long run—make new teachers feel frustrated and resentful of their ETEPs.

The staggering feeling of unpreparedness expressed by the participants served as a springboard to find ways to understand their students and their schools. Indeed, idleness was not an option for these young teachers who decided to self-study—to expand the knowledge gained in one university course -, reach out to various members of their school communities to seek support, enrol in PD courses or attend team meetings and workshops. Therefore, when knowledge about social justice and school marginalisation was not provided by ETEPs, it was co-created with other teachers, academic support staff, and specialists involved in educational vulnerability. As such, to obviate ETEPs in Chile to contribute to perpetuating a socially unjust educational system, it is crucial that such programs adopt a grassroots approach, that is, design their social justice initiatives *with* members of vulnerable school communities, such as parents and local teachers and *by* teacher educators involved in such initiatives in order to provide future English teachers a contextualised understanding of the social and socioeconomic background of marginalised student populations (McDonald & Zeichner, 2008).

Another key finding in this study supports Sen’s (1999, 2009) core principles of the freedoms and opportunities of individuals to formulate valuable capabilities or doings and beings. In this case, the participants broke from the unfreedoms presented by their lack of preparation from ETEPs and educational vulnerability in the Chilean school system to exercise their freedom to do what they valued, that is, seek teaching opportunities and implement diverse strategies and resources to compensate for the evident obliviousness of the Ministry of Education, manifested by -what teachers considered as- farfetched curricular demands and inappropriate one-size-fits-all teaching material (Muñoz et al., 2013). What is more, drawing on their experience working in vulnerable schools, the participants’ narratives evidence their capacity to complement their freedom to teach with their freedom to care for their students, even if that means deviating from teaching the language. As such, the teachers considered care and affection paramount to their work with students who have academic and affective needs (Yilorm et al., 2019). Indeed, positive reinforcement, observation of students’ behaviours, attention to details, re-educating the students after living through a hard weekend, or the disruption of traditional and distant models of teaching evidence the development of ethical and moral values towards teaching English and their profound commitment to helping their students learn a language that is foreign to their lives (Sierra, 2016). In other words, the participants’ accounts seem to evidence the indivisible connection between language teaching and care as an instrumental part of vulnerable learning environments.

## Conclusion

Inspired by Sen's notion of social justice, I sought to examine the experiences of new teachers who devote their first teaching years to working with vulnerable students in a system that segregates and ignores them because of their socioeconomic and social backgrounds. As alluded throughout this paper, NTs see their teaching training as multidimensional, that is, lacking relevant pedagogical knowledge components to learn how to teach English to students with social, affective, and academic drawbacks; lacking depth to learn how to deal with issues such as violence, family absenteeism, drug addiction, etc.; and lacking situated information to learn how to face precarious working conditions. To meaningfully help future teachers develop social justice pedagogies, ongoing and systematic opportunities should be provided to reflect, analyse, and experience overriding social justice issues. Indeed, preparing teachers to search for information that complements their education, identify and seek support from key members within school communities, and critically analyse the national ELT curriculum to develop contextualised accommodations and teaching practices could help new teachers alleviate the emotional burden of working in educational marginalisation.

The Chilean school educational system is formed of a wide variety of agents; however, the study only collected the perspectives of NTs of English. Further research that includes the voices of experienced teachers, administrative staff, students, parents, and classroom observation data, would provide an in-depth understanding of the reality of educational vulnerability that can benefit language teacher educators and language teacher education institutions. Finally, I wrote this paper hoping to contribute to the complexity of English language teaching in Latin America—where language teaching classroom conditions are alike and issues of social justice have not been resolved—and to the critical discussion of the prevalence of ELT linguistics and Western know-how in ETEPs and their disconnection with educational vulnerability. Teaching in schools in contexts of extreme marginalisation require a new vision of teacher education with context sensitive, content situated, and socially just language teaching programs that develop new teachers' pedagogical skills to cope, but also an ethical understanding and sensitivity to recognise diverse teaching contexts and opportunities to contribute positively to education.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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## Ethical Statement

The manuscript has not been submitted or published elsewhere. The data presented in this study was collected after receiving approval from the Office of Research Ethics and Integrity from the University of Ottawa, Canada. Ethical procedures were followed throughout the study - participants

signed consent forms, were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time, and their identities remained anonymous to secure confidentiality and anonymity. The data is not available in any repository because I do not have ethics clearance from the OREI to do that. The study presented here is part of my doctoral study sponsored by Becas Chile from the Government of Chile. There are no conflict of interest to disclosure.

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