

1 English Language Teaching Expansion in South America: Challenges and Opportunities

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Introduction

In recent years many governments, particularly in developing countries, and specifically in South America, have become increasingly involved in the provision of foreign language teaching, especially English, incorporating or expanding this area of the school curriculum and leading many private sector language teaching providers to move away from offering courses for children and toward the adult market. Various programmes of intensification or teaching using technological innovations have made it possible for student populations who had very limited access to language learning in the past to have this opportunity in the school context. This access is perceived as crucial by many stakeholders, particularly families, but also by teachers and future employers. This reality poses many questions for decision makers as regards the types of programmes to implement and concerning issues such as teaching methodologies to be used, resources required, training of teachers, etc. Financing of these programmes is by no means a minor issue and long-term support of initiatives is not always easy to come by. However, even when sufficient financial resources are made available, the results can be mixed.

Whatever the case, systematic reflection on these issues often lags behind the implementation of policies that are driven by political imperatives. Traditional training bodies (colleges and universities) are often caught up in their own reforms and in bureaucratic structures that make it very difficult for them to adapt to an increasingly diverse and demanding environment. This is, of course, not exclusive to the education of English language teachers, but the pressure is exacerbated in this context given the rapid increase in demand for teachers and the multiplicity of skills that are required of these teachers. Models that were traditionally focused on developing a high level of language proficiency are increasingly becoming insufficient and leading the way for more skills-based programmes.

Another factor that requires attention is how these innovations impact the experience of learners, particularly in relation to other languages that may be used by the local community or individual child. Increasing awareness is developing of the far from homogeneous nature of the student population. However, this awareness has not yet seen significant strides on the road to action that may encompass all the student population, particularly as it refers to multilingualism and language tuition in schools.

A diverse network of actors, often interrelated, have considerable impact on these processes, though their participation is not always self-evident. Among these, there are publishers, examination boards, cultural agencies, universities, etc., many of which have expanded their areas of interest often overlapping with each other. These organisations provide everything, from material resources to trainers and teachers and technical support in developing curricular and assessment tools. In many countries, this is a quick fix to make a leap from a situation with little or no expertise to one of wide coverage of provision. A question that should be asked is at what price this is done. This chapter presents a review of a number of initiatives that have been implemented in the last decade in different countries in South America which illustrate how the different stakeholders interact.

Context, Background and the Need for Innovation

Recent years have seen significant changes in South America as regards the place of language teaching in educational policy. Governments throughout the region have taken on board the view often expressed by international bodies concerning the importance of developing language skills – particularly English language skills – in the population. These policies aim to allow citizens to fully participate in the economic benefits derived from the more fluid exchanges made possible by the process of globalisation of the economy and wider access to information technologies.

Whereas in the past, foreign language skills were, in general, perceived as the realm of the elite and thus associated with secondary or higher education and with private schools, recent years have seen the greatest expansion in coverage in the early years of primary school and even preschool. This matches a widespread perception among the general public that if foreign languages are not learned in the early years of schooling, the opportunities for mastery later on are dramatically and negatively affected. In the rhetoric that accompanies such innovations, reference is made, somewhat secondarily and perhaps rather superficially, to the positive cognitive effects of bilingualism and early second language acquisition. The elements that are often missing from the presentation of such innovations are the conditions required for such ends to be realistic (Banfi, 2010; Curtain, 1990).

During the 20th century, a stratification of the education system and differentiation of access in relation to income bracket was in place or became the norm in South American countries, depending on the varying starting points of different education systems, and a number of educational institutions within each country could be identified as providing an education to the socio-economic elite. These were labeled bilingual or international schools and invariably comprised an important language tuition component (Banfi & Day, 2005; Mejía, 2002). Another sector that experienced considerable growth during the 20th century was the provision of language tuition in extracurricular private language classes in the context of private language institutes. Because of the aforementioned stratification, little or no contact existed (or exists) between these institutions and others engaged in programmes that could be viewed as having much in common with them (Banfi & Rettaroli, 2008; Banfi *et al.*, 2016).

Whereas, on the whole, in the years that preceded the 1990s it was those who could afford it who had access to foreign language tuition in the early years (be it via private schools, extracurricular classes or private tuition). Languages entered the educational agenda fully toward the end of the 20th century, although there were some pioneering exceptions. Even if the educational establishment still does not consider foreign languages on a par with mathematics, first language (Spanish or Portuguese), social sciences and natural sciences, it is clear that parents and politicians think otherwise. Often linked or presented in connection with the development of technological skills, foreign languages, usually equated with English, are often discussed as the most important and tangible innovations introduced by a particular government, and they are generally well received by parents.

Theoretical foundations and political background

At the international level, the drive for a multilingual education can be traced to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) 1999 conference, where this notion was defined as the use of at least three languages: one, the mother tongue; another, the regional or national language; and the third, an international language. This concept was based on the levels at which an individual may interact with other people in relation to historical, geographical and sociopolitical parameters. However, language and communication was only part of the picture, and in the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO, 2003), an explicit link was made to the intrinsic relation between languages and the cultural fabric of the communities they belong to, and, thus, its central role in the maintenance of cultural diversity. This view underlies the recommendations made to the member states to guarantee the conditions required to foster linguistic pluralism.

The Council of Europe, and therefore, the European Union, have a decidedly plurilingual outlook that reflects the linguistic diversity of its territory. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2001) has been incorporated in many contexts beyond the European Union to describe expected language levels for students and, in some cases, teachers. In Europe, languages are viewed as central to the cultural patrimony of the region and many resources are invested in their promotion, both within and beyond the European Union, which may, in turn, pose a potential threat to minority languages elsewhere.

Even though there are no specific language policy documents from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the thrust of its recommendations and practices places English at the center of international economic transactions and, therefore, as a requirement for those wishing to partake in them.

The involvement of organisations such as the British Council or the US Department of State in English teaching innovation projects is by no means a new development or one that is exclusive to Latin America (for example, on the link between English language and development, see Coleman [2011]; for programmes in contexts as diverse as Poland, Rwanda, India and Spain, see Tribble [2012]). The experiences reported in these sources clearly exemplify the diverse and complex nature of the English language involvement of these agencies in different contexts around the world. They also illustrate the far-reaching influence of these organisations (see also Graddol [1997, 2006]; for an alternative view of the nature of the involvement, see Phillipson [1992]).

Clearly, even though one can learn from the experiences elsewhere, much of the literature concerning the teaching of English deals with programmes that are often quite distant and refer to issues that are often not relevant to a particular reality. As I will show in the description of the programmes, the innovations implemented throughout Latin America in the state primary sector in recent years have little connection with initiatives such as peacekeeping projects (e.g. Crossey, 2012) or small-scale intensive language or bilingual instruction (e.g. Reilly, 2012). Although I would not want to deny that it is possible to learn from experiences elsewhere, the fact remains that home-grown reflection on local programmes is scarce. The important lesson to be drawn here is that one size does not fit all or, as was succinctly put in the title of Simon Gill's (1997) chapter: 'Local Problems, Local Solutions'.

English Language Innovation: Description of the Programmes

Rather than explore one particular project, this chapter sets out to delve into how different initiatives have been implemented throughout South America in the last two decades. The programmes have aimed to

expand the provision of English language tuition while contemplating the peculiarities of each context from the educational and sociocultural points of view. Here, I provide a brief description of each example and then draw on the shared traits to attempt a comprehensive picture of challenges and possibilities. Similar trends can be observed in other countries in the region even if their programmes have not yet developed as fully as those described here.

The case of Chile: *Programa 'Inglés Abre Puertas'* (PIAP) [English Opens Doors]

This programme was initiated in 2003 with the aim of improving the English language level of students from their fifth year of general basic education, i.e. primary school to fourth year of secondary school. To accomplish this goal, the steps followed involved the definition of national standards for English language learning, teacher professional development and the provision of support for English language teachers (Ministerio de Educación, Gobierno de Chile, n.d.).

As explained by the Ministerio de Educación, Gobierno de Chile (n.d.), the programme offers a system of incentives for teachers to engage in professional development activities leading to the improvement of their language and teaching methodology skills. This was implemented in stages with an initial English language test administered to 4575 teachers all over Chile and the possibility of accessing an international qualification for those who obtained a B2 level on the CEFR and linking them to scholarships aimed particularly at those teachers below the expected levels. In 2013 and 2014, this was supplemented with online courses and distance learning professional development programmes provided by an external body (i.e. the British Council) with a combination of local and foreign trainers.

As regards methodological updating, by the beginning of 2014 almost 1000 teachers had participated in 'English Summer Town' workshops and 'English Winter Retreats' organised jointly by the British Council, the Department of State and English Opens Doors in 12 different venues throughout the country (for a critical view of the programme, see Matear [2008]).

Some of the professional development activities that are a central part of this programme involve the use of online platforms, an environment both demanding and challenging. Maintaining teacher participation in these contexts can be difficult and this may threaten the continuity of teacher involvement. The tutors on these programmes are a combination of local experienced teachers and foreign trainers, adding further complexity to the context (for a critical review of the English Opens Doors programme, see Abrahams & Silva Ríos, this volume).

The case of Colombia: *Colombia Bilingüe* [Bilingual Colombia]

The *Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo* 2004–2019 [National Programme of Bilingualism 2004–2019] sets standards of expected communicative competence to be achieved in English throughout the education system (from preschool to higher education) following the CEFR levels (Ministerio de Educación, Gobierno de Colombia, 2005a). The programme started with a diagnostic test conducted in 2009 to assess the language level of English language teachers, which yielded results that required attention as only 10% of those teachers assessed reached a B2 level or higher (the expected levels had been published as from 2006). This in turn led to the definition of a timeline of target levels expected to be achieved by teachers as regards their language proficiency which is measured by means of international evaluations and certification together with a professional development programme. The programme is viewed as an important component in fostering national competitiveness, an aim to which considerable attention is paid in the planning of actions. This programme also relies on international cooperation from organisations such as the British Council–Colombia and the US government, in the form of advice and workshops for teachers (Ministerio de Educación, Gobierno de Colombia, 2005a).

For higher education, a system of evaluations through obligatory official state exams called *Estado de Calidad de la Educación Superior* [State of Quality in Higher Education] has been implemented since 2009 with the aim of assessing levels achieved by students in their final year of higher education while also obtaining information about the state of the higher education system itself. The English language component of these tests focuses on reading comprehension skills (Ministerio de Educación, Gobierno de Colombia, 2005b). Also, within this component of the programme, the government sets out to improve the standards of English language degree courses.

Some (e.g. Fandiño-Parra *et al.*, 2012) have questioned the apparently ideological nature of this programme as well as the focus on the instrumental aspects of language teaching. These criticisms also refer to the uncritical adoption of international standards without public debate of the implications and pertinence of such a decision. Another line of criticism concerns the restrictive view of bilingualism as pertaining exclusively to the Spanish–English dyad (Mejía, 2006).

The case of Uruguay: *Ceibal en Inglés* [Ceibal in English]

This is probably the most audacious of all the programmes described here both in terms of its scale and its use of technology not as a supporting feature but as central to the English language teaching process. The programme started in mid-2011 with a pilot experience in 20 classrooms and by the end of 2014 it had reached 50,000 children in 400 schools (Plan Ceibal, 2014a). It is jointly administered by the *Conectividad Educativa de Informática Básica para el Aprendizaje en Línea* (Ceibal, by its acronym in

Spanish, which stands for Basic Information Technology Connectivity for Online Learning) and the British Council (Banegas, 2013). The programme targets the primary school population of children between the ages of 9 and 11 years and provides three 40-minute weekly English language lessons taught jointly by a remote teacher through videoconferencing (one lesson) and a classroom teacher (two lessons). The remote teacher is an English language teacher who may be in another physical site within Uruguay or as far away as the Philippines. The classroom teacher does not necessarily speak English at the onset of the programme (most do not), but starts learning by means of *Learn English Pathways* (British Council, n.d.), a series of online self-study courses for adult English language learners. Both teachers follow detailed lesson plans and use a handbook designed for them (i.e. Banfi & Rettaroli, 2012). As part of the programme, students take part in large-scale summative tests of the kind implemented for other content areas (Plan Ceibal, 2014b) as well as international certification, i.e. Cambridge English: Young Learners, Key and Preliminary English Tests (Cambridge English, 2014).

This programme is intrinsically intertwined with the One-Laptop-Per-Child programme already in place (Psetizki, 2009; Rivoir & Lamschtein, 2012) and with political backing to implement a creative way to quickly provide a solution to a perennial problem, i.e. the dearth of teachers to teach English at the primary school level.

One of the questions looming over this kind of heavily technological innovation is the uncertainty over the results they yield. Some preliminary evaluations point to the limited attestable results that the Ceibal programme has been observed to achieve (see de Melo *et al.*, 2013). Even though the English component of the programme was not evaluated as part of this report, its general conclusions could well be applied to it. However, certain specific aims such as the accessibility to a new content area for a population that would otherwise have been excluded is not as easily assessed (for a complete description of the Ceibal programme and its evaluation results, see Brovetto, this volume).

The case of the City of Buenos Aires, Argentina: *Idiomas desde Primer Grado* [Languages from First Grade]

In this case, reform and expansion can be found within an already strong system. For various historical and socio-economic reasons, the City of Buenos Aires has a long-standing tradition of foreign language teaching (see Banfi, 2013a) which is well beyond nationally defined requirements (compare, for example, the nationally approved Núcleos de Aprendizaje Prioritarios para el Nivel Primario: Lenguas Extranjeras [Core Learning Areas in Foreign Languages for Elementary Schools] [Consejo Federal de Educación, 2012] with the Diseño Curricular de Lenguas Extranjeras [Curricular Design for Foreign Languages] approved in 2001 [Ministerio de

Educación, Gobierno de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires, 2001)). This contrast is also reflected in a more general social demand concerning the teaching of languages, in particular English (see Tocalli-Beller, 2007).

The teaching of foreign languages was gradually introduced in primary schools in the late 1960s and subsequently expanded to achieve, by 1996, full coverage for all children from the age of 9 in all state schools. In most cases, the language adopted was English, but some schools also incorporated French or Italian. This development was accompanied by the creation of a network of state-run language schools known as Centros Educativos Complementarios de Idiomas Extranjeros [Foreign Language Complementary Educational Centres] where children and teenagers can further their language skills as an extracurricular activity. A small but significant cluster of state sector schools which taught languages from first grade already existed prior to this date. These are the 14 Escuelas Normales [Normal Schools]. In 1999, the programme of Escuelas Plurilingües [Plurilingual Schools] was introduced, ultimately reaching 26 schools where languages are taught intensively (increased number of hours and two languages per child; the languages taught are French, English, Italian and Portuguese; German is also taught, for the most part in secondary school). With this backdrop, in 2009 the government of the city started a process that would, in the course of three years, provide full coverage of foreign language from first grade in all state-run primary schools, some 440 institutions. This involved significant administrative and organisational reforms, especially in the context of a highly unionised teaching body. Of necessity, this new programme required the incorporation of teachers who were not teaching in the state sector at that time, and a big question mark was whether this employment option would prove attractive enough to them. As it turned out, it did and, to date, the shortfall of teachers is minimal particularly if contrasted with other educational levels. This was possible, to a great extent, thanks to the availability of sufficient teachers, a direct consequence of a long tradition in teacher training in the different languages (for a review, see Banfi, 2013b). The programme was also accompanied by the unprecedented provision of bibliographical material (including textbooks), which had a particularly significant impact in the schools that serve populations from the lower socio-economic brackets. A number of other factors have interacted with this innovation to facilitate and enhance the teaching of languages. These include:

- (1) The concomitant implementation of Plan Sarmiento Buenos Aires (<http://www.buenosaires.gob.ar/sarmientoba>), the City of Buenos Aires' One-Laptop-Per-Child programme which reached all primary schools as from 2010 (see Ripani, 2014) and involves the provision of a laptop to every child and teacher in every primary state-run school in the City of Buenos Aires.

- (2) A language certification programme, *certificados en lenguas extranjeras* [foreign language certificates] (Ministerio de Educación, Gobierno de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires, n.d.) in place since 1999.
- (3) Professional development for teachers provided by supervisors and trainers from *Escuela de Maestros*, the teacher professional development school. Some of these professional development activities are in-service but, for the most part, they are voluntary and interest driven.
- (4) Heightened attention paid to the teaching of languages (bilateral agreements to promote the teaching of languages; the *Buenos Aires y sus Idiomas* [Buenos Aires and Its Languages] yearly meeting; a programme for teaching languages to adults). A recent innovation, and in several senses a departure from previous programmes, introduced to the system in 2014 was the creation of a two-way dual immersion programme in Spanish and Chinese, although it is still early days to report on this programme. For further information, see www.buenosaires.gob.ar/areas/educacion/niveles/idiomas/index.php.

Although in this case some of the initiatives have several decades of application and the new initiatives have built on what already existed, one of the most significant challenges is how to articulate the different programmes and components to ensure the best possible results. The balance between continuity over time, programme evaluation that feeds into the system toward improvement and the introduction of changes that optimise actions is an essential mandate (for a description of a project designed to prepare future language teachers in the integration of technology, see the chapter by Veciño, this volume).

Lessons to Learn: Implications and Future Directions

The particular cases of policies implemented throughout the region and outlined in this chapter should allow us to draw some general observations concerning certain emerging patterns. This section will be concerned with these general traits. In some cases, where a trait is not shared, an attempt has been made to identify a spectrum along which the various programmes may vary with respect to a particular variable.

A defining shared trait of these initiatives is that they are government led. In this sense, it can be argued that the teaching of foreign languages has gained status and found a place within education policy. Also, after decades of *laissez-faire* policies, the state is regaining control as regards what, when and how languages are to be taught. The topic has gained social and political visibility and is present in the agendas of many politicians. This involvement has been translated into a concrete expansion of coverage with more years and more hours, from earlier in the school trajectory. However, even though the programmes may be promoted by the state, at the local or

national level, in some cases the brunt of its financing still remains with the families of the students (see Ramírez Romero *et al.*, 2012).

As regards language diversity, English has an overwhelming presence in these programmes. Whether it is the only or the majority language adopted, it is clear that the thrust of these policies is to promote what is perceived as a language of international communication that will open up opportunities in the future, both for the learners and the country. In those cases where there are exceptions to the English-only rule, the languages taught within the school context are global languages as well, i.e. French, Italian or Portuguese. The latter, of course, is a prominent regional language but, although efforts have been made to promote its teaching (e.g. in Argentina, National Law 26.468/2009, National Congress of Argentina, 2009), widespread uptake is still to be instantiated.

Almost without exception, the implementation of new language teaching programmes (or their expansion) now requires the definition of standards of some kind. These standards may serve as a set of core contents set at national levels that all jurisdictions need to comply with or may be standards that pertain to a particular jurisdiction, and go over and above the minimum requirements. In some cases, the curricular developments are home grown, in others, they are adopted from some external body.

There is also concern with the evaluation of results, and here again, the parameters may be developed by the country in question or obtained elsewhere. There is widespread use of certification (of different kinds and for different purposes) and reliance on external certification of teachers by means of qualifications designed to account for general English. For example, in certain cases, external certifications are used to measure the levels of English language of teachers. The instruments used are not designed with teachers or the particular context in mind. Nor do they contemplate teaching abilities that teachers will require.

To a greater or lesser extent, there is a direct or indirect presence of forces external to the education system (e.g. publishers, examination groups, the British Council, US embassy). These organisations often have a regional outlook, drawing few distinctions across countries and favoring projects that have general application and replication rather than those that are customised to particular needs. When this participation involves the design of programmes or teaching materials, the involvement is explicit, often by means of open bids (e.g. in the case of Chile, Colombia and Uruguay). However, even in those programmes where this is not the case (e.g. in the City of Buenos Aires), the presence is nevertheless felt, e.g. through teaching materials acquired for the programme.

Even though there is a drive to evaluate these programmes and comply with the requirements of accountability, the reports, when produced are limited, partial or simply not disclosed to the public. This is partly linked to the lack of involvement of academic institutions that could provide

important objective data for improvement as is the case in many other traditions such as the Canadian or European contexts (e.g. Blondin *et al.*, 1999; Burnaby, 2008; Enever, 2011; Nikolov & Curtain, 2000).

The lack of sufficient reporting is surprising considering the widespread interest from the general public with growing and (perhaps) somewhat unrealistic expectations in terms of levels of attainment of students. This interest is also reflected in fairly regular media reporting, although often, and partly owing to the limited systematic build-up of academic knowledge, this sort of reporting can be biased in one way or another. Serious and clear reporting would probably contribute to generating more realistic and balanced views.

As regards programme implementation, one of the options faced by reformers is the rate of expansion and the expectations in terms of ultimate coverage of a given initiative. This is intrinsically linked with the practical possibilities of a given context on the one hand, and the philosophical underpinning of the initiative on the other. So, even though almost all the programmes described involve some kind of gradual implementation (by year, by state, by institution), a crucial distinction is to be found in those that aim to ultimately provide universal coverage, and thus have an inclusion mindset, and those that aspire to incorporate (English) language tuition in some schools, states, etc. Inclusion on a large scale in this context involves not only the social inclusion of economically disadvantaged students (see Pozzi, this volume, for a description of how the English language is used to promote inclusion policies in the City of Buenos Aires), but also the inclusion of a more diverse spectrum of needs, particularly special needs (see Vilar Beltrán *et al.*, 2013). Another parameter to consider when analyzing coverage of an initiative is the obligatory vs optional nature of the courses. When the courses are included in the school curriculum and timetable, coverage can be assured, even if issues of relative quality still remain an open question. However, when the courses are not obligatory and classes are not integrated in the school curriculum, the chances of reaching the whole population are limited.

Most of the innovations reported here have focused on the teaching of the English language (or expansion thereof) at primary school (or even earlier). This choice can be ascribed to a number of factors. Clearly, the generalized perception that ‘the earlier, the better’ has much to account for. However, the (probably well-founded) view that this educational level is more amenable to such initiatives and that the results are more clearly and directly perceived, make it an attractive proposition for those searching a quick return on their educational or political investment. This often leaves untouched the higher levels of the education system and the (desirable) articulation of the primary school innovations with the teaching of languages that already exists in secondary schools. There seems to be general consensus that the teaching of languages, which also generally

means English, in secondary schools, is of poor quality and achieves limited results. It would seem that, bewildered or frustrated by the complexities and resistance to change of the upper levels, this sector has been abandoned to its own devices in the hope that the changes will filter up as students reach secondary school.

Many of the programmes described involve the use of technology which may range from videoconferencing (Ceibal in English) and One-Laptop-Per-Child (Ceibal in English and Plan Sarmiento Buenos Aires) (see Brovetto; Veciño, this volume, for further descriptions of these projects in Uruguay and Buenos Aires) or technology-mediated teacher development (English Opens Doors) (see Abrahams & Silva Ríos for a critical review of the English Opens Doors programme in Chile). Technology is not news to teachers of English who were probably the first to resort to early technology such as video and audio cassettes in the classroom. In those countries with a long language teaching tradition, this has simply been a natural bridge to the use of more sophisticated technologies such as interactive whiteboards. The role of publishers and technology development companies cannot be overlooked here (Sharma & Barrett, 2007; Walker & White, 2013).

Teachers are central to the teaching process and their representative bodies, i.e. unions, play an important role in the implementation of policy. However, this role may be somewhat reduced or constrained. Certain programmes deal with the limited qualifications or reduced knowledge of the teaching context by providing preplanned lessons or teaching and other materials that drastically limit the margins of professional decision-making by teachers. In general terms, teachers have little say in shaping their own professional development.

What the ideal educational background of the teachers in these programmes should be is by no means a settled question. In some cases it is a teacher with generalist training in primary education and some knowledge of English who teaches the language. In others, the aspiration is that teachers should have specialist education in the teaching of the language with linguistic and pedagogical components. In some countries, such as Argentina, this training has gone from a two and a half year higher education programme to four years but, contradictorily, it has lost its level specificity so that now a qualified teacher has to have undertaken a four-year programme but is certified to teach a given foreign language at all levels of the education system. In other national contexts, the qualification requirements are far more contingent on the specifications of a particular language teaching initiative. The level of institutionalisation of a given programme has a considerable impact on the profile of teachers present and future. If the programme is perceived as unstable, temporary or offering poor working conditions, it is unlikely to attract sufficiently qualified teachers to it or students to teacher education programmes. Those programmes that

can guarantee a measure of stability are far more likely to attract a steady stream of well-qualified teachers.

Teacher education institutions are not central, or even have marginal participation, to the innovations: they are not consulted as part of the decision-making process, partly because they are often embroiled in their own reform processes or, in some cases, because they are not viewed as possessing the collective expertise to advice on policymaking processes. As Coleman (2011: 30) indicates, this is not an uncommon pattern as 'politicians and planners do not pay much attention to applied linguists working on the L[anguage]P[lanning] field'. Although often coinciding in time, the reforms of the teaching education curricula are, paradoxically, disconnected from changes in the rest of the system.

The spectrum of institutions that educate teachers is very wide, and this is a complicating factor in itself, which means they represent diverse teacher education traditions, some with serious shortcomings in terms of their content (Vera, 2008), others that struggle to produce the number of graduates that the system would need (for a proposal on contemporary views on how to educate language teachers, see Díaz Maggioli [2012]). In this context, some of the short-term programs offered through British universities (e.g. Case 1 described in Wedell [2012]) or examination bodies (e.g. Cambridge English's In-service Certificate in English Language Teaching) appear attractive as a quick fix, especially in the light of the pressures of political timing. However, these programmes do not provide long-term solutions as they do not constitute capacity building at the higher levels of the education system.

One would hope that the field of English language teaching has come a long way from the days when Peter Medgyés's (1994) eye-opening work was much needed to clarify the false dichotomy or hierarchy between native and non-native English-speaking teachers but this debate has really bypassed the region for the most part.

The processes of expansion seem to go ahead in spite of the generally acknowledged insufficient number of teachers (both within and beyond the region as discussed by Cameron, 2003; Hoa & Tuan, 2002; Matear, 2008). This may be feasible in the short-run by relying on itinerant native English-speaker teachers, teachers trained in other education systems, the use of technology to bring teachers and students in distant geographical locations together, but it is a strategy that would appear to have a limited lifespan. The strategy also has significant blind spots in that, in many cases the rapid expansion leads to the inclusion of teachers with limited or significantly diverse backgrounds, which could be an enriching factor if capitalised upon, but is generally lost in the push for ever-more rapid expansion. What the breaking point will be is unclear, but the education of sufficient teachers to cope with the increasing needs will certainly have to appear in the agenda at some point. There is no simple solution to this

conundrum, particularly considering that, compared to the expansion in primary school teaching provision, higher education is a much more costly endeavor.

Progress in terms of contact between and across programmes in the region has been made in the last two decades. Whereas before there was virtually no knowledge of what was going on in terms of English language teaching in other countries in the region, now we are aware of the programmes that exist and have (some) access to the relevant information. This contact often comes in the form of teachers, trainers or other specialists participating in the programmes of another country. Resorting to individuals in the region for these roles presents the advantages generated by proximity (geographical, cultural, etc.) rather than being concerned with the spirit of programme contact or exchange. Exchanges sometimes occur at conferences or other events organised at the regional level by universities or other organisations, e.g. Policy Dialogues organised by the British Council (2012) or the Bilinglatam (International Symposium on Bilingualism and Bilingual Education in Latin America) conference series organised biannually in different Latin American cities – Buenos Aires, Argentina 2004; Bogotá, Colombia 2006; São Paulo, Brazil 2009; Oaxaca, Mexico, 2011; Valparaíso, Chile 2013, Lima, Peru 2015. Systematic contact at the level of programme design and/or administration is, however, practically non-existent.

Other types of organisations such as teacher professional associations, both at the national and regional levels, could function as strong stakeholders in these initiatives but, in practice, where they exist they have limited influence both at the level of decision-making and within the teaching collective itself. This is partly owing not only to the diverse profiles of the teachers in question but also to the strong unionisation of teachers to the detriment of the view of teachers as professionals.

On the whole, it can be stated that these innovative initiatives in South America can be analysed as a positive development but they also pose a number of challenges for the future that need to be addressed if the programmes are to truly yield the expected results. To more fully understand the implications and ramifications of these innovations, more attention needs to be devoted to research and analysis which will, in turn, no doubt, benefit teacher education and other capacity-building programmes.

Questions for Reflection

- (1) Given the increasing and welcome involvement of governments in the decisions concerning English language teaching, what steps could be taken to ensure that the assessment and reporting of the results of the programmes in question reflect reality as faithfully as possible?

- (2) What should the connection between English language programmes, the governmental bodies that implement them and higher education institutions be, particularly with respect to design, monitoring and improvement initiatives?
- (3) In an ideal world, which should be the stakeholders involved in the design and implementation of an English language teaching programme and how should their interactions be conducted?

Acknowledgement

The author would like to thank Silvia Rettaroli and Sandra Revale for their helpful comments on this chapter. Any errors that remain are, of course, the author's sole responsibility.

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