

From Policy to Practice: Teaching English in Paraguay's Public Education System

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ABSTRACT

Paraguay's Law No. 5031/2013 represents a major shift in national language policy by mandating English instruction in public schools from preschool through secondary graduation. Focusing on teacher education, this study evaluates the scope and effectiveness of strategies used to implement this mandate. This mixed-methods study analyzes curriculum frameworks, policy documents, and semi-structured interviews with government officials and teacher educators. The findings reveal notable progress, including updated curricula and a nationwide in-service teacher training program. However, key challenges persist, such as a shortage of certified English teachers, inconsistent teacher preparation, and an over-reliance on virtual platforms where in-person training is unavailable. Interview data show that while teacher education programs formally integrated English in 2019, systemic barriers limit its success. These include scarce teaching resources, weak institutional support, and English's low priority compared to Paraguay's broader bilingual education framework. By detailing both achievements and ongoing hurdles, this study enriches research on foreign language instruction in Paraguay. Ultimately, it offers practical insights for policymakers and educators striving to improve teacher preparation and advance equitable, high-quality education.

KEYWORDS: language policies, education policies, English-as-a-Foreign-Language, English.

De la política a la práctica: La enseñanza del inglés en el sistema de educación pública de Paraguay

RESUMEN

La Ley N° 5031/2013 de Paraguay representa un cambio significativo en la política lingüística nacional al hacer obligatoria la enseñanza del inglés en las escuelas públicas desde preescolar hasta la graduación de secundaria. Centrándose en la formación docente, este estudio evalúa el alcance y la eficacia de las estrategias utilizadas para implementar esta normativa. Este estudio de métodos mixtos analiza marcos curriculares, documentos de política y entrevistas semiestructuradas con funcionarios gubernamentales y formadores de docentes. Los hallazgos revelan avances notables, incluyendo currículos actualizados y un programa nacional de capacitación docente en servicio. Sin embargo, persisten desafíos clave, como la escasez de profesores de inglés certificados, la preparación docente inconsistente y una excesiva dependencia de plataformas virtuales cuando no se dispone de capacitación presencial. Los datos de las entrevistas muestran que, si bien los programas de formación docente integraron formalmente el inglés en 2019, las barreras sistémicas limitan su éxito. Estas incluyen la escasez de recursos didácticos, el débil apoyo institucional y la baja prioridad que se le otorga al inglés en comparación con el marco educativo bilingüe más amplio de Paraguay. Al detallar tanto los logros como los obstáculos actuales, este estudio enriquece la investigación sobre la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras en Paraguay. En definitiva, ofrece perspectivas prácticas para los responsables políticos y los educadores que se esfuercen por mejorar la formación del profesorado y promover una educación equitativa y de alta calidad.

PALABRAS CLAVE: políticas lingüísticas, políticas educativas, inglés como lengua extranjera, inglés.

INTRODUCTION

For several decades, English has become the *de facto* lingua franca around the world, both for commerce and for science and technology. Many countries around the world have incorporated the teaching of English as a foreign or additional language as part of educational development efforts that allow their citizens to access higher levels of education and position the country in terms of education and knowledge production (Enever, 2018). At the regional level, according to Romero and Sayer (2016), there is a trend in Latin America towards the teaching of English starting in the early years of primary school, the implementation of a national curriculum and the implementation of the standards of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). There are many challenges, among which the coverage problem stands out, whether at the territorial level or in terms of years of teaching, as well as the insufficient number of specialized English teachers. The latter has been addressed in different ways including using non-teacher English speakers or classroom teachers with some training and other measures such as the use of ICT. For example, in Uruguay, Plan Ceibal English uses an online program to teach English with teachers who are not necessarily English speakers (Kaiser, 2018). Other strategies include strategic linkages with other countries in order to have English-speaking volunteers to collaborate in teaching English classes (Cronquist and Fiszbein, 2017).

In Paraguay, Law No. 4251/2010 “ON LANGUAGES” stipulates that “the State shall promote the teaching of foreign languages, especially those that are official languages of States that are partners in supranational organizations” and that “all inhabitants have the right to learn other national and foreign languages” (Paraguay, 2010). In addition, nine years ago Law No 5031/2013 “WHICH IMPLEMENTS THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN THE CURRICULUM SCALE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION FROM PRE-SCHOOL TO THE 3rd COURSE OF MIDDLE EDUCATION” was enacted (Paraguay, 2013). As identified in the name, this law stipulates the teaching of English at all educational levels naming the Ministry of Education and Science (MEC) as the coordinator of the necessary mechanisms for its implementation with a three-year term to enter into force. Based on this Law, the MEC has adopted a series of measures that include curriculum design and teacher training for the teaching of English in the country's schools and colleges (MEC, 2012; 2019). English teaching has been incorporated into the curriculum of the new teacher training (MEC, 2019b) and through the PROCEMA program, training has been provided to teachers first of the first and second cycles in 2018 and for teachers of the third cycle and intermediate level in 2022 (MECDigital, 2017; UNA, 2022).

However, taking into account the difficulties mentioned above for the implementation of this law, common to the countries of the region, in 2020, the Chamber of Deputies of the Nation approves Declaration 476 “That urges the Ministry of Education and Science to comply with the provisions of Law No. 5031, Which implements the English language in the curriculum of public education from preschool to the third year of high school” (Paraguay, 2020). Taking into account this background, the present study aims to analyze the scope of the actions carried out for the implementation of English language teaching in publicly managed institutions. Thus, this study aims to investigate the scope of actions related to didactics and teacher training carried out by the Ministry of Education and Science for the implementation of English teaching in publicly managed institutions. Specifically, the study seeks to identify

the policies for teaching English as a foreign language proposed by the legislation and the central government; to describe the actions related to didactics and teacher training carried out by the Ministry of Education and Science; and, to evaluate the scope of the actions carried out to concretize the teaching of English as a foreign language as stipulated in Law No 5031/2013.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is no doubt that English is today the predominant language used as a lingua franca in all continents to communicate in the fields of politics, business, education, tourism, media and most especially science and technology. For this reason it is studied worldwide by hundreds of millions of people and is perceived as a window to personal and social development (Rao, 2019; Sneider, 2020). One of the areas where there is an exponential development is in what is known as Education 4.0 where the relationship with Digital English gains preponderance (Hariharasudan and Kot, 2018). In addition, Wagner et al. (2019) highlight how foreign language teachers can contribute to the development of their students' global problem solving skills.

Thus, for several decades now, developing countries have seen English language teaching as a way to enable the insertion of their citizens into the knowledge society (Nunan, 2003; Dogancay-Aktuna and Hardman, 2018). Furthermore, Chen et al. (2019) highlight that the experience of speaking English from an early age contributes positively to success in learning English later in life as well as to attitudes and motivation in relation to such learning. For these reasons, many countries have adopted the teaching of English from the earliest levels of education; however, Nunan (2003) highlights that this has led to significant problems including confusion and inconsistencies at the public policy level, especially in relation to the starting age, inequity in access to effective teaching, insufficiently prepared teachers, and an inconsistency between curricular rhetoric and pedagogical reality.

In the Latin American region, there is a growing trend to start teaching English from the beginning of the school stage, which brings a number of challenges in addition to those already mentioned above (Romero and Sayer, 2016). To address some of these challenges, Ahmadi and Reza (2018) propose technology as an instrumental tool to enhance language learning. Thus, to address the lack of prepared teachers, Plan Ceibal English uses an online program to teach English with teachers who are not necessarily English speakers (Kaiser, 2018). In a qualitative study, Sandoval and Canese (2020) analyze the feasibility of using videoconferencing as a tool for teaching English in Paraguay and conclude that for this to be possible, the infrastructure conditions must be in place and a sustainable action plan must be in place to ensure success.

In Paraguay, Law No. 4251/2010 "OF LANGUAGES" stipulates that "the State shall promote the teaching of foreign languages, especially those that are official languages of the States co-associated in supranational organizations" and that "all inhabitants have the right to learn other national and foreign languages" (Paraguay, 2010). According to the study conducted by the Secretariat of Linguistic Policies (Paraguay, 2018), there is a record of twelve foreign languages studied, whose countries have embassies established before the Paraguayan

Government are: Arabic, Mandarin Chinese, English, French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, Korean, Mandarin Chinese and Taiwanese.

In addition, in response to the need to reduce the gap that exists between children and young people who attend bilingual institutions with their own resources, Law No. 5031/2013 “THAT IMPLEMENTS THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN THE CURRICULUM SCALE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION FROM PRE-SCHOOL TO THE 3rd COURSE OF MIDDLE EDUCATION” (Paraguay, 2013) was enacted. This law stipulates the teaching of English at all educational levels naming the Ministry of Education and Science (MEC) as the coordinator of the necessary mechanisms for its implementation with a three-year term to enter into force. Based on this Law, the MEC has adopted a series of measures that include curriculum design and teacher training for the teaching of English in the country's schools and colleges (MEC, 2012; 2019a). Also, the teaching of English has been incorporated into the curriculum of the new teacher training (MEC, 2019b).

Through the PROCEMA program, training has been provided to teachers first of the first and second cycles during 2018 and for teachers of the third cycle and middle level in 2022 (MECDigital, 2017; UNA, 2022). Recently, the MEC has signed an agreement with the National Administration of Public Education (ANEP) and the Ceibal Plan of Uruguay for the use of the “English without limits” program in a pilot plan that includes 300 public schools of the first and second cycle of basic school education (Agencia de Información Paraguaya, 2021). Taking into account the above, this study aims to analyze the scope of the actions carried out for the implementation of English teaching in publicly managed institutions.

METHODS

This study proposes a mixed triangulation methodology as presented by Creswell and Plano Clark (2018). Multiple sources and methodologies will be used for data collection, including documents and records of implemented policies, test results, classroom observations, surveys, and interviews with key informants such as managers and teachers participating in the implementations carried out by the Ministry of Education and Science. A purposive sampling strategy will be used for the selection of the samples in order to include the documents and records as well as the people best suited to provide the information needed for this study.

Official documents related to the teaching of official and foreign languages over the last twenty years will be collected, including the different laws enacted, as well as the policies established by the Ministry of Education to comply with these laws.

Official documents related to the teaching of official and foreign languages over the last twenty years will be compiled, including the different laws enacted, as well as the policies established by the Ministry of Education to comply with these laws. Interviews will be conducted with policy makers, including officials from the Secretariat of Language Policy, the Ministry of Education and the Paraguayan Language Academies to inquire about their perspectives on the different measures adopted by these institutions to address these legal mandates enacted by different official entities to address the realities of the linguistic landscape in Paraguay. Data will also be gathered from the official curricular documents

published on the official website and/or the descriptions of the programs and courses of study, in addition to interviewing teacher trainers and directors of teacher training programs. Prior to the visit, a preliminary processing of these data will be carried out in order to identify those that best serve the purposes of this study.

The proposed analysis includes the use of coding following Saldaña (2021) and the onion metaphor framework proposed by Hornberger and Johnson (2007) to analyze the multilevel and multidirectional interactions and complexities of language education and policy enactment. This framework aims to “reveal the agency spaces in which local agents implement, interpret, and perhaps resist policy initiatives in diverse and unique ways” (p. 509). For the mixed data analysis, a combination of descriptive and inferential statistical analysis as well as qualitative content analysis will be used. For this purpose, statistical data processing and analysis and qualitative analysis tools such as Excel, SPSS, R, QDA Miner, among others, will be used.

Based on the records of the courses taken, the impact of the courses on the language level and the pedagogy applied to language teaching acquired by the participants will be analyzed. The dimensions to be investigated in relation to language level have to do with oral and written comprehension and production skills. The dimensions related to the didactics of teaching English as a foreign language will focus on aspects related to the strategies and resources used for the teaching-learning process. On the other hand, the observations and interviews will serve to analyze the transfer of this knowledge to the practices of teachers of English as a foreign language in the official schools and colleges in our country.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

This study is expected to contribute to knowledge and public policy in relation to the teaching of English as a foreign language in our country. The analysis of the scope of the actions taken to implement Law 5031/2013 will have a relevant impact for the study of foreign languages in our country considering that there are very few works carried out within this field of study in Paraguay. In addition, the results will serve to inform public policy on the progress of the measures taken to implement a state policy as well as to propose solutions to make this policy effective to ensure a more equitable access to the cultural capital that implies the knowledge of a foreign language, especially English, considered as one of the fundamental pillars for the scientific and technological development of a country.

From its own conception and objectives, this research aims to contribute to the training of human resources with the skills for scientific research, performance in teaching and professional activity, and in all areas of life of the people who will participate in this study. The project contemplates spaces and opportunities for training human resources in scientific research, specifically in documentary analysis methodologies, case studies and qualitative-quantitative analysis.

The main beneficiaries are the students of EEB and EM of the officially managed institutions who will benefit from the implementation of the teaching of English as a foreign language from the first cycle of EEB. Teachers who are trained to meet the needs of these students are also beneficiaries, as well as the citizens in general, since they will have a more qualified

workforce that can meet the needs of an increasingly globalized society. In addition, governmental institutions, research centers, academic institutions, and the community in general, among others, will be beneficiaries of the project's results, as they will be able to directly and indirectly use the results of the research.

There are very few studies conducted in our country on the teaching of English as a foreign language. It is of vital importance to have updated data on the status of educational policies in this area since for the country to develop equitably and be able to comply with the 2030 agenda, specifically SDG 4, it is necessary to know the impact of the measures adopted by the Ministry of Education to ensure a more equitable education for all Paraguayan children and youth.

The analysis of the scope of the actions carried out by the Ministry of Education and Science in terms of didactics and teacher training will make it possible to know to what extent the trainers are capable of carrying out the implementation of English in the curriculum of public management institutions. The evaluation of the scope of the actions carried out for the implementation of the English language in the curriculum, as established in Law No. 5031/2013, will allow making a judgment as to the needs that should be covered in the area of English language teacher training. In this way, it will be possible to make the necessary adjustment to the existing curricula, as well as to elaborate new academic offers corresponding to the needs observed.

Globalization requires citizens to be increasingly trained in different areas that allow them to perform autonomously, for example in the use of ICTs, basic knowledge of different areas of knowledge, as well as the ability to communicate effectively in different environments. Precisely the knowledge of English facilitates access to more job and educational opportunities, and therefore it is necessary to know the extent of the efforts made by the Ministry of Education and Science to achieve this goal.

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