

REVIEW

Intensity of support and equity: the place of EELs in the Chilean education system

Intensidad de apoyos y equidad: el lugar de las EEL en el sistema educativo chileno

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Cite as: Álvarez Gutiérrez KA, Muñoz Monrroy DM, Herrera Díaz P. Intensity of support and equity: the place of EELs in the Chilean education system. *Neurodivergences*. 2023; 2:81. <https://doi.org/10.56294/neuro202381>

Submitted: 13-06-2022

Revised: 26-11-2022

Accepted: 06-04-2023

Published: 07-04-2023

Editor: Prof. Dr. Javier González Argote 

ABSTRACT

Introduction: the article examined the place of Special Language Schools (EEL) in the Chilean education system, framing it within General Education Law No. 20.370/2009 and specific regulations for TEL/TDL. It contextualized how decentralization and enrollment expansion favored the diversification of modalities, positioning EELs as a specialized response for early intervention and equitable access to the curriculum.

Development: the study described three areas: (1) the organization of the education system and its levels and modalities; (2) the regulatory framework for special education and EELs—including Exempt Decrees No. 148/1980, No. 192/1997, No. 1300/2002, and its amendment No. 1085/2020, Law No. 20.422/2010, Decree No. 170/2010, and Decree No. 83/2015—; and (3) the functioning of EELs, addressing language theories, linguistic levels, and pedagogical and speech therapy strategies. It identified that EELs provided more intensive support than PIE, especially in terms of speech therapy hours, and that professionals such as special education teachers and speech therapists conducted initial assessments and periodic reevaluations, coordinating interventions with families and school teams under DUA principles. It also noted tensions associated with resource heterogeneity, continuity of support, and gaps between EELs and PIE.

Conclusions: it concluded that the existence of EELs was normatively justified and pedagogically relevant for children with SLI/SLD, ensuring early and systematic intervention in the form, content, and use of language. It proposed challenges strengthening detection and continuous evaluation, converging standards between EEL and PIE, strengthening collaborative work, and consolidating longitudinal monitoring systems that would guide funding and technical support toward verifiable results of inclusion and curricular achievement.

Keywords: Special Language Schools; TEL/TDL; Chilean Educational Regulations; Early Intervention; Educational Inclusion.

RESUMEN

Introducción: el artículo examinó el lugar de las Escuelas Especiales de Lenguaje (EEL) en el sistema educativo chileno, enmarcándolo en la Ley General de Educación N.° 20.370/2009 y en normativas específicas para el TEL/TDL. Contextualizó cómo la descentralización y la expansión de matrícula favorecieron la diversificación de modalidades, situando a las EEL como respuesta especializada para la intervención temprana y el acceso equitativo al currículo.

Desarrollo: el estudio describió tres ejes: (1) la organización del sistema educativo y sus niveles y modalidades; (2) el marco normativo de la educación especial y de las EEL —incluidos los Decretos Exentos N.° 148/1980, N.° 192/1997, N.° 1300/2002 y su modificación N.° 1085/2020, la Ley N.° 20.422/2010, el Decreto N.° 170/2010 y el Decreto N.° 83/2015—; y (3) el funcionamiento de las EEL, abordando teorías del lenguaje, niveles lingüísticos y estrategias pedagógicas y fonoaudiológicas. Identificó que las EEL proveyeran mayor intensidad de apoyos que el PIE, especialmente en horas fonoaudiológicas, y que profesionales como docentes de educación diferencial y fonoaudiólogos realizaron evaluación inicial y reevaluación periódica,

articulando intervenciones con familias y equipos escolares bajo principios de DUA. Asimismo, registró tensiones asociadas a heterogeneidad de recursos, continuidad de apoyos y brechas entre EEL y PIE.

Conclusiones: concluyó que la existencia de las EEL estuvo normativamente justificada y pedagógicamente pertinente para niños con TEL/TDL, al asegurar intervención temprana y sistemática en forma, contenido y uso del lenguaje. Planteó como desafíos fortalecer detección y evaluación continua, converger estándares entre EEL y PIE, robustecer el trabajo colaborativo y consolidar sistemas de seguimiento longitudinal que orientaran financiamiento y soporte técnico hacia resultados verificables de inclusión y logro curricular.

Palabras clave: Escuelas Especiales de Lenguaje; TEL/TDL; Normativa Educativa Chilena; Intervención Temprana; Inclusión Educativa.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental pillar in the comprehensive development of societies, and its quality directly affects students' learning opportunities. In the case of Chile, recent regulatory frameworks have sought to guarantee an educational system based on the principles of quality, equity, and participation, as established by General Education Law No. 20.370/2009. In this context, special education has gained relevance as a strategy aimed at addressing diversity and eliminating barriers that hinder school inclusion, incorporating specific programs and modalities that respond to the educational needs of different groups of students.

A significant component of special education in Chile is the Special Language Schools (EEL), intended for preschool children diagnosed with Specific Language Impairment (SLI) or Developmental Language Disorder (DLD). These establishments aim to intervene early in communication and language difficulties, promoting access and curricular progression for students. Their existence is part of a long regulatory tradition that, since the 1980s, has regulated the functioning of differential groups and, subsequently, has established specific plans and programs for intervention in SLI/DLD through decrees such as No. 1300/2002 and its subsequent amendments.

An analysis of the Chilean education system reveals how administrative decentralization, which began in the 1980s, and the expansion of enrollment in the 1990s and 2000s influenced the diversification of educational modalities. In this scenario, EELs emerged as a specialized alternative within the special education modality, with a regulatory framework governing both their creation and their pedagogical processes. Likewise, educational regulations in general and public inclusion policies reinforce the need to guarantee timely support for students facing barriers to learning, ensuring equal opportunities in access to education.

The theoretical framework underpinning this research is organized around three main axes: the Chilean educational system and its conceptualization; the regulations and regulatory framework governing Special Language Schools; and the functioning of these institutions, considering aspects related to the conceptualization of language, the theories that explain it, and pedagogical and speech therapy intervention strategies. In this way, it seeks to contribute to the debate on the justification for the existence of EELs, evaluating both their regulatory relevance and their impact on the language development of students with SLI/SLD.

DEVELOPMENT

Theoretical Framework

Quality education seeks to promote the comprehensive development of students by placing them at the center of the teaching-learning process, as mentioned by the Ministry of Education.⁽¹⁾ In this sense, Law No. 20.370/2009 states that Chile seeks to have an educational system distinguished by the quality and equity of its service, safeguarding the rights and duties of the members of the educational community.

This chapter corresponds to the theoretical framework in which the existence of special language schools will be analyzed, focusing on three main lines of research. The first of these corresponds to the Chilean education system, which includes an overview and conceptualization, and the regulations governing Chilean education. The second line of research refers to the regulations and regulatory framework of Special Language Schools, considering public policies on special education and the regulations governing these schools, and the third line refers to the functioning of these establishments, delving into the conceptualization of language and the intervention of SLI/SLD.

Chilean Education System

The Chilean education system has brought about changes in the conceptualization of education and its processes, in areas such as teaching practices and the various agents involved in this process. Below is an overview and conceptualization of education in Chile, considering the levels and modalities that seek to respond to the academic training of students, and the historical regulations that govern the education system.

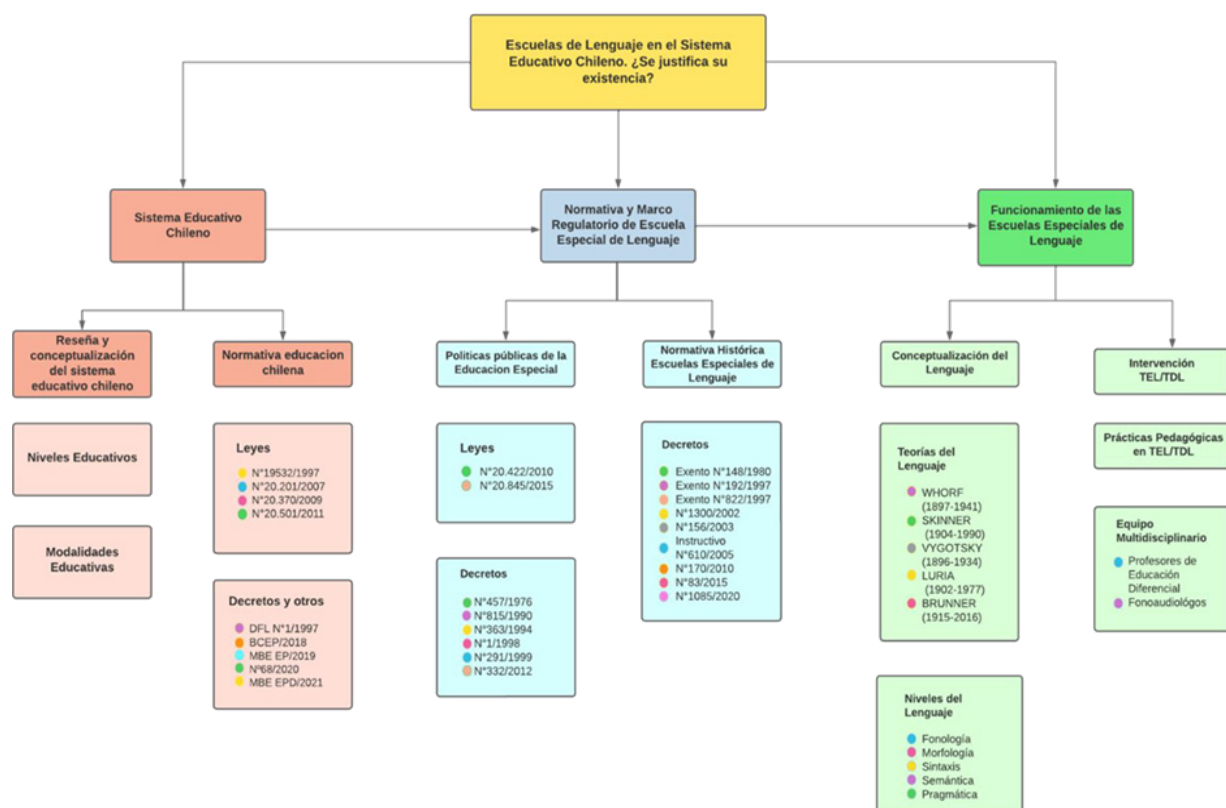


Figure 1. Concept map

Overview and Conceptualization of the Chilean Education System

The administration of the Chilean school system was completely centralized in the Ministry of Education until 1980, as pointed out by Paredes et al. The system underwent a profound reform, decentralizing the administration of public schools and transferring it to the municipalities. This led to the creation of a state subsidy, generating two types of subsidized schools: municipal schools, in which administration is the responsibility of the municipality, and private subsidized schools, administered by private entities.

Paredes et al. also point out that in the 1990s, educational coverage increased significantly, which meant an increase of approximately 535 000 students in preschool, primary, and secondary education, mainly in subsidized private schools, with 55 % of the total number of new students, while municipal schools only saw a 31 % increase in enrollment. As a result, 523 new subsidized private schools and 310 private fee-paying schools were created during that decade, while the number of municipal schools decreased by 31. This trend continued and worsened between 2000 and 2006, with the number of subsidized private schools increasing by 746 and the number of municipal schools decreasing by 259.

According to Article 17 of DFL No. 2/2009, there are four levels of education in Chile: preschool, primary, secondary, and higher education. Preschool education serves students in their educational process before entering primary school, promoting the comprehensive development of children. There is also primary education, which seeks to develop students' knowledge, attitudes, and skills. Secondary education seeks to deepen students' general education, offering differentiated training in scientific-humanistic, technical-professional, and artistic fields. Finally, there is higher education, which aims to train students in a specific field.

On the other hand, Article 22 of the same law mentions educational modalities, which are options within regular education to respond to specific teaching needs. These include adult education, which is aimed at adults who wish to complete their studies, and special or differential education, which is developed transversally at different levels, providing services, specialized knowledge, technical assistance, human resources, and materials.

In this regard, according to Law No. 20.370/2009, the following shall be considered within the modality of special education: hospital classrooms, which are educational establishments for students who need to remain hospitalized, as well as special schools, which are specialized educational centers that serve students with permanent educational needs who require specific support. Special language schools, which are establishments specializing in early childhood education for children diagnosed with SLI/LD, are also included.

Currently, the Chilean education system is governed by the guidelines and orientations of the LGE, which establishes that education is a process of lifelong learning, manifested in a regular or informal manner. Considering the above, the Chilean government seeks to guarantee the right to education through concepts

such as quality, equity, and participation, noting that it is the duty of the state to promote access to education, eliminating all types of barriers.

Thus, based on this conceptualization and outlined in several decrees, the Chilean education system is constituted with respect to its educational levels and modalities, providing the guidelines for the regulations that govern it.

Chilean education regulations

Education regulations govern and organize the education system, define how schools operate, and declare the principles and purposes of education, guaranteeing the right to education for all.⁽²⁾ This section mentions the most relevant laws, decrees, and regulations governing Chilean education.

Among the regulations governing the Chilean education system, DFL No. 1 of 1997 stands out. It regulates the professional requirements, duties, obligations, and rights common to all education professionals mentioned in the decree, with the aim of establishing statutes governing the teaching profession. Later, in the same year, Law No. 19.532/1997 was created, establishing the full-day school system and providing guidelines for its implementation in schools throughout the country, setting an important precedent in Chilean education due to the change in school hours.

Law No. 20.201/2007 amended DFL No. 2 of 1998 on education, subsidies for educational establishments, and other legal bodies. Transitional SEN is understood to mean those students who require specific support and extra assistance to access and progress in the national curriculum for a certain period of time during their schooling, as a result of a disorder or disability diagnosed by a professional. It should be noted that these regulations will determine the requirements, instruments, or diagnostic tests to identify students with SEN who will be beneficiaries of the subsidy.

As mentioned above, LGE No. 20.370/2009 replaces the former LOCE No. 18.962/1990, responding to student needs with the aim of regulating the rights and duties of all members of the school community, establishing changes in the national curriculum, and improving educational quality and equity.

Another relevant law in Chilean education is Law No. 20.501/2011 on quality and equity in education, which seeks to improve quality in various aspects of the educational community, such as principals and teachers. Later, the Early Childhood Education Curriculum Guidelines,⁽³⁾ were created, which seek to guide the learning processes of students at the pre-basic level.

Starting in 2019, various regulations were created to guide pedagogical practices in the country's educational establishments, such as the Framework for Good Teaching in Early Childhood Education,⁽¹⁾ which seeks to strengthen professional ethical practice. followed by Supreme Decree No. 68/2020 on Indicative Performance Standards for Early Childhood Education Institutions and their Supporters, and the Framework for Good Teaching/ Teaching Profession Standards,⁽⁴⁾ was created to establish an ethical-pedagogical standard for what a teacher should be and know.

In this way, Chilean educational regulations are shaped by the aforementioned laws and decrees, giving way to the policy and regulatory framework of the Special Language School.

Regulations and regulatory framework of the Special Language School

The regulations seek to safeguard and regulate compliance with specific aspects, in this case within the school system, in order to consolidate the comprehensive development of students within the educational context (Superintendency of Education, 2019). This section presents the public policies on special education, determining the regulations for special language schools in Chile.

The following section presents the public policies on special education in the Chilean education system.

Public Policies on Special Education

In the 1950s, policies for special education began to be created. In this regard, specific regulations were created to provide greater coverage in support for students with "mental disabilities." Later, in the 1960s, actions were taken to consolidate special education in Chile, where it is important to mention the founding of a commission to study intellectual disability. Subsequently, Decree No. 457/1976 was enacted, establishing differential groups in the country.

It is also important to mention Supreme Decree No. 815/1990, which establishes technical and pedagogical standards for the intervention of students with disabilities due to severe relationship and communication disorders, approving study plans and programs for people with autism, severe dysphasia, or psychosis. Years later, Decree No. 363/1994 was created, approving technical standards for the operation of technical offices in special schools, with the aim of updating regulations regarding the organization of these schools for the progressive improvement of pedagogical practices in special education establishments.

Later, Decree No. 1/1998 was created, which "regulates Chapter II, Title IV of Law No. 19.284/1994b, which establishes standards for the social integration of persons with disabilities." In other words, this decree arises

from the need to provide specific guidelines to achieve the full social integration of persons with disabilities, adapting the educational system and providing educational alternatives for students with SEN. It also sets out the benefits, duties, and rights of persons with disabilities, providing a series of rules for compliance with the decree.

The following year, Decree No. 291/1999 was created, which “regulates the functioning of Differential Groups in Educational Establishments in the Country,” making technical and administrative adjustments to current study plans and programs, allowing students with SEN to access and progress in the curriculum, improving teaching and learning environments through the work they do. In addition, the same decree states that their purpose is to intervene with students with SEN not associated with a disability, i.e., those who have difficulties in adapting to school and/or learning. It should also be mentioned that they may be guided by a special or differential education teacher, but if no such teacher is available, any teacher trained for the role may take on the task.

Then, in 2005, the National Special Education Policy was enacted, which marks an important milestone in special education as it aims to guarantee the right to education for students with SEN through full access and equal opportunities.⁽⁶⁾

The next step forward was taken with Law No. 20.422/2010, which establishes standards on equal opportunities and social inclusion for people with disabilities. In other words, it is responsible for ensuring the right to equal opportunities for people with disabilities, safeguarding their full social inclusion so that they can improve their quality of life. With regard to education, it seeks to guarantee their access to the educational system. Another relevant decree in special education is Decree No. 332/2012, which “determines minimum ages for admission to special or differential education, adult education, and curricular acceleration adjustments.” In other words, this decree was created in response to the need to ensure equal opportunities with regard to access to education for students with SEN.

Finally, it is important to mention Law No. 20.845/2015 on school inclusion, which regulates student admission, eliminates shared financing, and prohibits profit-making in educational establishments that receive state contributions. This law establishes modifications with respect to the financing of establishments, inclusion in school admission processes, and the prohibition of profit-making, which represents an important milestone in Chilean education as it regulates various relevant aspects.

In this way, public policies on special education are established, based on the regulations that comprise it, in order to advance toward educational inclusion. Considering this, the regulations for Special Language Schools will be determined.

Historical Regulations for Special Language Schools

Special language schools provide support and tools to students with SLI/SLD. Based on this, there are public education policies that regulate this intervention, including laws, decrees, and instructions. Below is a review of the historical regulations for this diagnosis.

Exempt Decree No. 148/1980 approves curricula and programs for oral language disorders in special education schools. Based on this, research into intervention for SLI/SLD begins.

Years later, Exempt Decree No. 192/1997 was created, approving study plans and programs for the intervention of students with communication, developmental, and speech disorders. In other words, it proposes the plans and programs that should be applied by special schools that serve students with SLI/SLD. In this way, these decrees began to cover the various diagnoses related to language and communication in students and to develop public policies for their intervention. In the same year, Decree No. 822/1997 was enacted, modifying Exempt Decree No. 192 and specifying the criteria for defining oral language disorders.

Decree No. 1300/2002 was also created for the intervention of students with SLI/SLD, establishing plans consisting of two parts: the General Plan and the Specific Plan. These apply to institutions that intervene with students with this diagnosis, i.e., pre-school students can attend a special language school or regular education institutions with PIE, receiving support from a speech-language pathologist in individual or group sessions of up to three children, with each session lasting 30 minutes, as shown in table 1 below.

| Institution Level/cycle | Special Language School | | | School Integration Program | |
|-------------------------|---|------------------------|-------------------------|--|-----------------|
| | Upper middle level | First transition level | Second transition level | Second transition level | Basic education |
| General plan | 18 | 18 | 16 | - | - |
| Specific Plan | 4 | 4 | 6 | 6 | 9 |
| Total hours | 22 | 22 | 22 | 6 | 9 |
| Age of entry | 3 years old by March 31 of the corresponding school year. | | | 4 years old by March 31 of the corresponding school year | |

As shown in table 1, there is a significant difference between the hours of intervention in PIE and Special Language Schools, which demonstrates the inequality with respect to the support provided for TEL/TDL intervention.

Special Language Schools treat TEL/TDL and, according to Decree No. 1300/2002, cannot treat any students with other conditions, such as “mental deficiency, hearing loss, deafness, cerebral palsy, relationship and communication disorders, and voice disorders,” as these establishments only specialize in TEL/TDL.

The following year, Decree No. 156/2003 was enacted, amending Exempt Decree No. 1300/2002 and stipulating that specialist teachers must hold a degree or postgraduate qualification in special or differential education with a specialization in language or hearing and language, awarded by an institution of higher education.

Based on Decree No. 1300/2002, Instruction No. 610, “on the care of students with Specific Language Disorders,” was created in 2005 to regulate the correct implementation of Decree No. 1300/2002. This document states that prior to the speech-language evaluation, documentation of the student’s background is required, including certificates such as a birth certificate and parental authorization to perform the evaluation. According to the above, in order for a student to be diagnosed with SLI/SLD, at least two assessment instruments must be applied, one for the comprehensive level and another for the expressive level, to identify possible students with this diagnosis and the difficulties they present, which must be addressed and supported in order to enhance their linguistic development.

After some time, Decree No. 170/2010 was implemented, which regulates the requirements for determining which students with SEN will receive state subsidies. Later, Decree No. 83/2015 was enacted, which promotes access to the national curriculum for students with SEN by applying the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which is considered a strategy for responding to diversity.

Subsequently, Decree No. 1085/2020 was created, which “amends Decree No. 1.300, exempted, of 2002, of the Ministry of Education, which approves study plans and programs for students with specific language disorders.” This decree seeks to modify specific articles of the aforementioned decree to improve unclear aspects. In this regard, it replaces sections and incorporates elements such as specificity in the semester evaluation. It also states that non-teaching activities are complementary to the functions of the specialist teacher.

This establishes the historical regulations for Special Language Schools in Chile, determining the laws and decrees that govern them. Based on this, we will take a closer look at how these schools operate.

Functioning of Special Language Schools

Considering that there are many children in Chile whose language acquisition and development process is hindered, with SLI/SLD being one of the most common disorders in preschool children,⁽⁷⁾ enrollment in special language schools has increased exponentially. According to a study conducted by Granada et al. in the Valparaíso and Metropolitan regions, which are among the most populated in the country, there has been an increase in enrollment over the last 14 years.

Next, we will examine the functioning of special language schools in order to determine whether their existence is justified, which is key to the development of this research. We will also delve deeper into the concept of language and TEL/TDL intervention to understand the support provided in these schools.

Conceptualization of language

Language is the ability of human beings to communicate with others through a system of signs and sounds.⁽⁸⁾ It also provides the ability to express ideas, resolve conflicts, and allows human beings to develop thinking and acquire knowledge.⁽⁹⁾ Furthermore, as Berger et al. point out, language is the most important system of signs in human society, due to the ability of human beings to develop vocal expressions and turn them into linguistic ones. They also indicate that “everyday life is, above all, life with the language I share with my fellow human beings and through it. Therefore, understanding language is essential for any understanding of the reality of everyday life” (p.55). In this way, language is fundamental to the social development of human beings.

Similarly, Watson, cited by Hernández⁽¹⁰⁾ defines language as a manipulative habit, in which he proposes the theory of mental processes as thought and mentions that there can be no thought without speech, implying that language can be used through the development of thought.

In humans, according to Chomsky, cited by Hernández⁽¹⁰⁾ language is a finite or infinite set of sentences that all humans have, where he mentions that the mind allows for the production of language and understanding of the message. From another perspective, in 1998, the same author points out that language is responsible for humans having history and cultural development. This explains the importance for humans of studying language and, for the purposes of this research, understanding how it is used in education.

According to Piaget, language begins with thought and is then profoundly transformed into oral production, allowing for communication between individuals and reinforcing individual thought through collective thought.

This means that language begins with people's individual thoughts and is transformed into communication through interaction with others.

The authors mentioned above agree that thought directly influences language, making it essential for communication. In this sense, strengthening language at an early age will facilitate linguistic development in students with SLI/SLD.

Within this line of thinking are language theories that analyze in depth how language works and develops, that is, they announce the language structures that will be used by speakers (Baralo, 1996). In relation to the above, there are several authors who discuss language theory, some of whom are: Whorf, Skinner, Vygotsky, Luria, and Bruner. Table 2 below presents "language theories and their explanations."

| Table 2. Language theories and their explanations | |
|---|--|
| Authors | Explanation |
| Theory of WHORF (1897-1941) | Explains language as determinism and considers that language determines thought. Through various studies, Whorf realized that the language spoken in different countries influences the way people think and act. ⁽¹¹⁾ |
| SKINNER'S THEORY (1904-1990) | Explains language as behaviorism, which deals with human behavior in learning language, where parents shape speech production to reinforce their children's sounds. |
| Language theory of VYGOTSKY (1896-1934) | He determines that the origin of language is social, where human beings manage to communicate and engage in social exchanges. He also argues that language is the basis for expressing thoughts, ideas, and emotions. ⁽¹¹⁾ |
| Language theory of LURIA (1902-1977) | He explains language as neurolinguistics, where he studied the functioning of the brain and considers it to be an instrument of communication and a transmitter of experiences. He also proposes that language can coordinate, establish, and facilitate other forms of behavior. |
| BRUNER's theory of language (1915-2016) | Bruner argues that language is learned through communicative forms. This author studied mother-baby communication and mentions that we have a support system in language acquisition, that is, a systematic and routine environment that facilitates the child's understanding of what is happening to them and around them, where, through routine and repetitive interactions, the child can learn language. ⁽¹¹⁾ |

Based on these theories, language can be understood, according to the same authors, as a mental process in which various important aspects such as context or interaction with others interfere, so that, as it is a systematic process, it can be expanded and developed.

Human language is based on different levels, such as phonological, syntactic, morphological, semantic, and pragmatic, where the use, function, and development of this language are mainly related to context.⁽¹²⁾ These levels allow for an in-depth understanding of how language works in students and thus enable intervention at the most basic levels of language, thereby allowing for a comprehensive intervention process. Table 3 below defines these levels:

| Table 3. Language levels and their definitions | |
|--|---|
| Levels of language | Definition |
| Phonology | Studies phonemes and describes the vowel sounds of a language. ⁽¹²⁾ |
| Morphology | Studies the structure of grammatical phonemes, observing their form and function. ⁽¹²⁾ |
| Syntax | The study of word order or combination; therefore, syntax is what makes up the structure of a sentence. ⁽¹²⁾ |
| Semantics | The study of the meaning of words and sentences. ⁽¹²⁾ |
| Pragmatics | Refers to the use of language in relation to social, situational, and communicative contexts. ⁽¹²⁾ |

Based on the above, knowledge and development of language levels are relevant to the acquisition of literacy, which is difficult when it comes to SLI/SLD,⁽¹³⁾ as this will allow the professionals in charge to intervene correctly when difficulties arise in these areas, where, according to Owens⁽¹⁴⁾ the concepts of form, which includes syntax, morphology, and phonology; content, which includes semantics; and use, which includes

pragmatics, stand out. These three concepts constitute the main components of language and are highlighted in the development of linguistics in students for the beginning of the speech process and subsequent intervention process in students with SLI/SLD.

SLI/SLD intervention

Various studies on language difficulties, according to Barbieri et al.⁽⁷⁾ have determined the existence of SLI/SLD, defined as a difficulty in the development of verbal language not caused by an underlying pathology such as intellectual disability or psychopathological disorders. With the new update of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), “specific language disorder” is changed to “language disorder,” defined as a persistent difficulty in acquiring and using language due to deficiencies in understanding and expressing it.⁽⁷⁾

In Chile, 4 % of children between the ages of 3 and 7 have SLI/SLD, which is divided into expressive SLI and mixed SLI. The former is characterized by difficulties in oral language, i.e., word production, while the latter affects morphological, syntactic, phonological, pragmatic, and semantic levels at the comprehension and expression levels.⁽⁷⁾

As mentioned, SLI/SLI can be addressed in special language schools and regular schools with PIE. The study plans and programs for intervention in this diagnosis are governed, among other decrees, by Decree No. 1300/2002, which stipulates that work should be carried out using a general plan and a specific plan.

It should be noted that the main purpose of special language schools, according to Instruction No. 610/2005, is to provide support and tools so that students diagnosed with SLI/SLD can achieve the learning objectives stipulated in the early childhood education curriculum, acquiring basic knowledge and skills for their development.

As for the PIE, it seeks to be a regular education strategy for children and young people with temporary or permanent SEN, providing various human and material resources in order to respond to these needs through strategies such as collaborative work and co-teaching between regular educators and special education professionals.⁽¹⁵⁾

These curricula seek to provide students with access to comprehensive learning to address SEN in each school. It should be noted that there are schools with PIE that have a full school day (JEC), which increases the hours of the specific plan in preschool from 6 to 8 hours and in elementary school from 9 to 10 hours. In this regard, there is a significant difference in hours between special schools, language- , and PIE, which is more than 10 hours, which translates into the intervention that students receive.⁽³⁾

Article 10 of Exempt Decree No. 1300/2002 states that the pedagogical care provided by Special Language Schools is governed by the regulations of the technical-pedagogical guidelines, Framework for Good Teaching/ Teaching Profession Standards⁽⁴⁾ and the Early Childhood Education Curriculum Guidelines. It also establishes that the professionals working in these schools are special education teachers and speech therapists, who support the progress of students entering these schools with language difficulties. Likewise, in regular schools with PIE, the planning and specific support provided to students is carried out in conjunction with the team of professionals at the educational establishment.^(16,17,18,19,20,21,22,23)

Along the same lines, Article 11 of the same decree states that specialist teachers must obtain a degree in Special or Differential Education from an institution of higher education. The non-teaching curricular activities that these professionals must carry out include: conducting pedagogical entrance assessments, participating in the educational plan, working in collaboration with the educational establishment team, and providing support to families in overcoming SLI/SLD.^(24,25,26,27,28,29,30)

On the other hand, speech therapists must carry out a series of activities at the educational center, which are: conducting speech therapy assessments upon admission, participating in the educational plan, providing individual or group support to up to three students in the resource room, working in collaboration with the specialist teacher throughout the educational environment and with families, providing them with the appropriate support for students with SLI/SLD.^(31,32,33,34,35,36,37)

Regarding the evaluation, the decree states that it is applied on an ongoing basis throughout the student's time at the educational establishment, which will allow for evidence of their learning and development and will demonstrate the effectiveness of the teaching practices being implemented throughout the process, leading professionals to make meaningful decisions about the teaching-learning process. It should be added that these evaluations will be applied twice a year: the initial entrance evaluation, which certifies that the student has SLI/SLD, and the comprehensive reevaluation, which shows at the end of the year whether the diagnosis persists, determining whether the student continues to need specialized support or in which areas intervention should continue.^(38,39,40,41,42,43)

It should be noted that, according to Decree No. 1300/2002, progress assessments in relation to the learning objectives of the curriculum must be related to the planning for the educational level, considering the support plans and methodologies used for each student, which will allow for the effectiveness of pedagogical and speech therapy support according to the needs of each preschooler.

Based on the above, TEL/TDL in Chile intervenes in educational establishments, including special language schools and the School Integration Program, through study plans and programs. As mentioned above, there is a divergence between the hours of intervention provided in these schools, which shows a significant difference in the support provided to students with SEN. This intervention includes professionals such as speech therapists and special education teachers who evaluate and intervene in the process with the support of teaching assistants, in order to provide relevant support to each student. ^(44,45,46,47,48,49)

In this way, SLI/SLD is conceptualized considering its definition as a disorder, data regarding diagnosis in Chile, and how it is addressed in schools, taking into account the hours and professionals in charge.

This forms Chapter II, corresponding to the Theoretical Reference Framework in which the Chilean Education System, the Regulations and Regulatory Framework of the Special Language School, and the Functioning of Special Language Schools were developed. ^(50,51,52,53)

CONCLUSIONS

Analysis of the regulatory framework and the functioning of Special Language Schools (EEL) in Chile allows us to affirm that their existence is solidly justified from both a legal and pedagogical perspective. LGE No. 20.370/2009, together with specific regulations (Exempt Decrees No. 148/1980, No. 192/1997, and No. 1300/2002 and its amendment No. 1085/2020; Law No. 20.422/2010; Decree No. 170/2010; Decree No. 83/2015; Instruction No. 610/2005), forms a coherent framework aimed at ensuring the right to a quality, equitable, and inclusive education for children with SLI/SLD. Within this framework, EELs play an irreplaceable role: providing early, specialized, and systematic intervention on language components (form, content, and use) that are critical for access to the curriculum and socio-emotional development.

However, the evidence reviewed on prevalence, enrollment growth, and support differentials between modalities indicates that tensions persist that the system must address. The disparity in intervention hours between EEL and PIE, the heterogeneity in human and material resources, and the gaps in continuity of support when students transition to basic education can affect the effectiveness of expected achievements. At the same time, decentralization and expansion of the system have contributed to diversifying responses, but also require greater inter-institutional coordination, monitoring of results, and common quality criteria.

Consequently, four priority challenges emerge. First, strengthen early detection and intervention, ensuring diagnostic and evaluation protocols consistent with DSM-5 and periodic evaluations that provide feedback to teaching. Second, move toward convergence of standards of intensity and quality of support between EEL and PIE, ensuring that the choice of modality depends on local availability and not on student needs. Third, strengthen collaborative work between speech therapists and special education teachers, coordinating with families and classroom teams under DUA principles, and ensuring ongoing specialized training. Fourth, institutionalize longitudinal monitoring systems that measure linguistic progress, school integration, and curricular outcomes, linking funding and technical support to verifiable indicators.

In summary, EELs are a key part of Chile's inclusive ecosystem: they legitimize diversity, reduce barriers to access, and improve future opportunities. Their consolidation requires closing equity gaps between modalities, ensuring continuity of support, and anchoring decision-making in evidence, so that every child with SLI/SLD receives timely, relevant, and effective interventions throughout their educational trajectory.

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FUNDING

None.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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