

A Novel Approach to Teach Grammar in Chilean State Schools: From a Traditional to a Communicative Approach

Uma Proposta Inovadora para o Ensino de Gramática em Escolas Públicas Chilenas: de abordagens tradicionais à comunicativas

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ABSTRACT: Grammar instruction has been regarded as a pivotal, yet controversial topic when it comes to foreign language teaching and learning. Views on this grammar debate have undergone considerable changes throughout the years, which have shifted from conventional methods, based on pure formulation of grammar structures, towards a more communicative approach to language learning. This article not only seeks to review the role of grammar teaching in publicly funded schools in Chile and the internal and external factors that entail difficulties in achieving a more progressive type of instruction, but also it intends to make a valuable contribution to teachers via an alternative approach to maximizing student learning and engagement when grammar is being tackled. This approach known as Encounter-Clarify-Remember-Internalize and Fluently use (henceforth ECRIF) is intended to serve as a reference for teachers interested in redirecting their teaching practices.

KEYWORDS: ELT¹, grammar instruction, teaching, EFL, ECRIF.

RESUMO: O ensino de gramática tem sido considerado um tópico central, embora controverso, quando se trata de ensino e aprendizagem de línguas estrangeiras. As visões sobre este debate gramatical sofreram mudanças consideráveis ao longo dos anos, que mudaram de métodos convencionais, baseados na formulação pura de estruturas gramaticais, para uma abordagem mais comunicativa para a aprendizagem de línguas. Este artigo não apenas busca revisar o papel do ensino de gramática nas escolas públicas do Chile e os fatores internos e externos que dificultam o alcance de um tipo de ensino mais progressivo, mas também pretende dar uma contribuição valiosa aos professores por meio de uma alternativa abordagem para maximizar a aprendizagem e o envolvimento do aluno quando a gramática está sendo abordada. Esta aborda-

¹ Stands for “English language teaching” [Ensino de língua inglesa].



gem conhecida como Encounter-Clarify-Remember-Internalize e Fluently use (doravante ECRIF) é sugerida para servir como uma referência para professores interessados em redirecionar suas práticas de ensino.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: ELT, instrução de gramática, ensino, EFL, ECRIF.

1 Introduction

Throughout the years grammar has been a central feature to the process of teaching and learning a second language and undoubtedly one of the most difficult aspects to tackle within the classroom (NETTO-SHEK, 2020). Controversially, the shift from a traditional to a more contextualized and communicative approach would entail a major change in a context where the teaching of English has been regarded as a worthless subject to be learnt.

This is the case of Chile, where English is not spoken daily outside instructional settings, even more; the language is not spoken by neighbouring countries. Therefore, English in Chile is regarded as a foreign language and classified in Kachru's expanding circle (KACHRU, 1992). Thus, a considerable number of local learners simply do not get to see the connection between English and the relevance to acquire a second language in this globalised society (KORMOS; KIDDLE, 2013). Their driving force towards the learning process is undermined by the factors mentioned hitherto, which in conjunction with overt grammar instruction emerge into disaffected learners who can correctly produce forms on drilling exercises yet are not able to use the language in context.

However, the Chilean Ministry of Education introduced a plan to enhance the learning of the foreign language in the country. The program is called "English Open Doors Program", which, in 2004, included the training of teachers, investment in educational materials and introducing English speaking volunteers to motivate Chilean students to learn the language and to understand its relevance in the current world (TORRICO-ÁVILA, 2016). Even though this plan has had an economic motivation behind which is attracting foreign investment (TORRICO-ÁVILA, 2016), human and monetary resources have been invested to increase the number of learners and improve the proficiency in English (CHILE, 2004; AGENCIA DE CALIDAD DE LA EDUCACIÓN, 2017), the results show that there is an influence of social class categorisation connected with level of proficiency (MATEAR, 2007, 2008; BYRD, 2013). In this unequal context where there are multifarious ways to promote the language, the following paper aims at suggesting a new approach to teach and learn English based on a grammatical perspective, the ECRIF framework. In order to do that, a current approach employed within the Chilean context we are familiar with will be critiqued under a socio-pedagogical umbrella with the ultimate purpose of suggesting a pedagogical innovation focused on grammar-based instruction. It is argued that this proposal can be more appropriate for Chilean students from the crowded classrooms of state schools to acquire the language more effectively due to the nature of the educational approach.

The following lines will elaborate, firstly, on the socio-economic characteristics of the Chilean classrooms and on how they may impact the learners' competence and fluency in English in spite of the many efforts carried out by the various stakeholders and practitioners to improve the national results and, secondly, how pedagogical innovations oriented towards student-student interactions may become the

aiding tool for teachers in the overcrowded local state school classrooms due to its many benefits. In turn, this framework may help improve the results as it increases the learners' engagement in the contents.

2 Teaching English as a Foreign Language: The Chilean context

2.1 Literature Review

To work as a teacher in Chile cannot be regarded as a straightforward task, particularly when it comes to the teaching of English as a foreign language (henceforth EFL) given that English is not spoken outside classroom settings, and therefore scarcely reinforced at home. Despite the efforts exerted and the public discourse of bilingual commodification (GLAS, 2011), Chile remains listed within a low proficiency category when it comes to English language use (EDUCATION FIRST, 2017). Thus, government policies continue to push for improved English teaching scenarios (BARAHONA, 2015).

As part of a major school reform held in 1998, the English language as a compulsory subject per se – from grade 5 to 12 – was incorporated in the Chilean National Curriculum (MCKAY, 2003). The primary aim was to supply students with an adequate amount of language learning experiences not only to enhance and certainly reinforce their proficiency in the target language, but also to develop them into active individuals capable of taking part in diverse 21st century international scenarios, such as technology, communication, and data processing wherein the use of English becomes essential (MATEAR, 2008; GÓMEZ BURGOS; SANDOVAL MOLINA, 2020). In order to accomplish this purpose, EFL educators – in the state sector – work under the guidelines established by the Ministry of Education (henceforth MINEDUC), the governing body responsible for the design of the curriculum framework, which intends to meet the standards specified by the Common European Framework of Reference (henceforth CEFR) (DÍAZ LARENAS, 2015). Therefore, language educators are expected to build a communicative potential that enables students to actively use the target language and are also recurrently expected to deliver lessons that are not only meaningful, but also experiential in nature, wherein their learners' particular needs are addressed and validated (SEPULVEDA-ESCOBAR, 2020). However, reality may greatly differ from what is being expected, especially if external factors are taken into account. This current and rather unfavourable state of affairs becomes even more critical when teaching EFL as part of state-funded schools.

3 Issues in the English Language classroom

3.1 The teaching of Grammar in Chile

One of the features that depicts the instructional methodology in most schools funded and regulated by the state, is the teaching of structures using explicit meta-language to students which continue the tradition of conventional instructional practices (ABRAHAMS; RÍOS, 2017). This structure-based approach to teaching grammar is a central problem since learning does not occur through interaction and meaningful language use; rather, the focus is placed on isolated linguistic items, being the learners' first language (L1) the principal medium of instruction (HEDGE, 2002). We acknowledge that this traditional approach to teaching in conjunction with mixed-ability learners would not foster the use of the Target Language (henceforth TL) for authentic communication (LIGHTBOWN; SPADA, 2013).

As explained in the aforementioned paragraphs, English is a compulsory subject for pupils between the ages of 10 and 17. Notwithstanding the amount of study undertaken, it would be inappropriate to claim that the learners we have taught would finish secondary education with a proficient command of the TL. The teaching activity is controlled by a 'type A' grammatical syllabus (WHITE, 1988; CELCE-MURCIA, 2001; ELLIS; SHINTANI, 2013) whereby learners internalise morphosyntactic features of the language system in a pre-selected order that increases in complexity alongside with learning objectives (NUNAN, 1988). Teachers are expected to make use of the lesson plans and textbooks distributed by the MINEDUC; however, they are allowed to modify the suggested activities insofar as they comply with the guidelines set within the national English teaching framework (ABRAHAMS; RÍOS, 2017). Nonetheless, the lack of resources and materials available in the school, the large number of learners within the classroom, the number of lessons per week, and the insufficient preparation time teachers are provided with, entail an additional difficulty which has a considerable effect on the type of instruction applied. However, to fully understand this teaching issue, it is imperative to consider it as multifaceted and complex given that numerous deep-rooted attitudes, beliefs and perceptions underpin the concept of teaching and learning EFL in the Chilean context. Such factors, intrinsically linked to the socio-cultural aspects of learning, are reflected in both teachers' and pupils' performance in the classroom (BARAHONA *et al.*, 2021).

3.2 Social Factors

A number of socio-cultural constraints are present in the Chilean context. First and foremost, English is learnt as a foreign language and this situation truly poses an issue in state-funded schools. Most learners come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds whose cultural norms have clearly shaped their identity and mental representations towards language learning. Little or no parental support is granted, which makes the process even more difficult. English is not regarded as a priority primarily because opportunities for authentic interaction are fairly limited, our neighbouring countries speak Spanish, and for some peo-

ple the opportunity to travel abroad seems to be unlikely to happen. For this reason, to use the TL within the classroom presupposes an absolute challenge for both teachers and learners. They become dependent on their L1, and the exposure to English is minimised to such an extent it is only present when giving commands or instructions. Taking these previously mentioned factors into consideration, it is unavoidable to ponder on the genuine issue behind this resistance to learn a second language. It seems to be that it is not all about the approaches or methods used to deliver the lesson, yet about a weak conceptualisation on social identity and its pivotal role in the relationship of language learners and the context wherein learning occurs (NORTON, 2000).

3.3 Pupil factors

Teaching large classes is a major challenge in our context, particularly if one's desire is to keep students highly engaged. On the one hand, physical and management constraints are determinant if one is to teach roughly 45 learners whose learning abilities, preferences, strengths and weaknesses greatly differ from one another. As a matter of fact, learners are not grouped according to their linguistic proficiency which makes differentiated instruction even more difficult to attain. On the other hand, considering that most of them come from underprivileged backgrounds, L1 literacy skills and communicative competence may have not been thoroughly developed since early years (DÍAZ LARENAS, 2015). This lack of solid skills is likely to leave some students significantly behind for immediate success in the English language subject.

4 Description of a typical lesson

It is undeniable that the beliefs that not only teaching practitioners, but also different stakeholders have about teaching are inextricably intertwined with the further classroom decisions that can be made pertaining to pedagogical practice, approaches, material design, among others. Such beliefs play the role of a framework and hence impinge on the expectations and values attributed to the teaching-learning process in question (DANIELSON; MCGREAL, 2000). Based on this perspective, a typical EFL lesson is characterised by a structured-based instructional environment (CELCE-MURCIA, 2001) where the roles of teachers and pupils are seen as the 'expert' and the 'novice'. An Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) exchange (SINCLAIR; COULTHARD, 1975) is the common pattern of interaction that teachers utilise to elicit information from the students. Accordingly, the instructional system is rather teacher-fronted (RICHARDS, 2001) as opposed to what research claims in relation to what contemporary methodologies ought to endeavour; that is, classrooms where students become active participants of their learning process and teachers foster meaningful interaction among all members of the class (TSUI, 2001).

As for the role of grammar – the key issue in this critique – it is considered of primary importance. Learners are taught by means of a highly deductive fashion and discovery or contextualized learning is not promoted to a substantial extent, as the focus is placed upon explicit learning. As Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam (2006, p. 2) put forth, this type of learning refers to “a more conscious operation where the individual

makes and tests hypotheses in search for a structure”, which will eventually turn into an explicit knowledge of the formal properties of the language that learners will be expected to consciously draw on when completing worksheets or elaborated drilling tasks. By way of illustration, students are presented with grammar through a still prevailing PPP paradigm (Presentation-Practice-Production) whose stages move from controlled to freer practice. More specifically, learners reproduce the target form during the first stage with the aim of producing language as part of a freer practice activity in the latter one (HEDGE, 2002).

However, the fact that students are able to get to the ‘production’ stage does not imply that they will be capable of using certain structures spontaneously and accurately. This is equally relevant to be emphasised considering that, in most of the cases, learners solely work within the ‘presentation’ and ‘practice’ stages, respectively. This argument suggests that in the absence of sufficient opportunities to produce language meaningfully, declarative knowledge – THAT – will be unlikely to transform into the type of procedural knowledge – HOW – that enables the learner to become aware of his/her own learning process and further develop higher order thinking skills (ORTEGA, 2008). This may be counterproductive since mixed-ability groups who are taught in the same fashion will not be able to become autonomous and responsible learners of their individual abilities, a situation that may deprive some students of successful opportunities to approach language learning (LIGHBOWN; SPADA, 2013).

5 An alternative approach to maximizing student learning: What does research say?

If grammar is regarded as a fundamental feature to be covered in language learning, it is of utmost importance to decide on the best strategies to “integrate grammar teaching into a communicative methodology which pays attention to all aspects of communicative competence, and what precise form that teaching should take” (HEDGE, 2002, p. 145). As Cook (2008) asserts in one of the four assumptions of language teaching, there seems to be nothing wrong with incorporating grammar in the classroom. What may be disadvantageous is to present the linguistic items in isolation with no focus on communicative exercises. Equally, what should be avoided is the direct explanation of the elements of language, given that there is no inherent relation between the mastering of grammar aspects with relatively accurate and fluent performance. In the same way, the attempt to consciously apply rules at the moment of speaking may considerably increase the amount of time it takes a person to produce an utterance, hindering, in this manner, fluent communication (LARSEN-FREEMAN, 2001).

Research in the field suggests a distinction between approaches to the teaching of grammar, namely Focus on Form (FonF) and Focus on FormS. As stated by Long (2001), the former differs from the latter in the sense that within a FonF instruction, the chief centre of the lesson is placed on communication in context, with a minor target on grammar features. This idea derives from his prior work on the ‘interaction hypothesis’ (LONG, 1981) and how utterly important it is that learners engage in real communication and further negotiation of meaning in order to raise awareness and create links between meaning and form. In contrast, in a Focus on FormS approach grammar points encompass the lesson content to a great extent, and therefore learners rely heavily on the linguistic properties of the language. Similarly, Burgess

and Etherington (2002) emphasise an additional approach known as Focus on Meaning, which proposes virtually the same as in FonF, yet no attention is given to structures and the focus of instruction is on conveying meaning only. The fundamental difference between the three mentioned approaches relies on their theoretical underpinnings. Whereas FonF and Focus on meaning are rooted in the assumption that learners acquire the language by a great deal of exposure to comprehensible input as part of a subconscious process akin to the way children pick up their mother tongue (KRASHEN, 1981), Focus on FormS is grounded on the principle that learning a second – or foreign – language comprises the development of complex cognitive processes and language itself happens to be regarded as a mere skill (SHEEN, 2002).

Certainly, teaching grammar is a controversial topic and diverse studies have attempted to provide an empirical explanation on how learning may differ in instructed or naturalistic contexts (PICA, 1983; NAZARI; ALLAHYAR, 2012; NORRIS; ORTEGA, 2008 FOTOS, 1998). The studies in question have shown that even though there are similarities in the order of acquisition, there are also remarkable differences in terms of the levels of grammatical competence. As suggested by Ellis (2005), learners who are taught within a structured-based instructional environment would generally achieve a higher level of grammar proficiency; nonetheless, direct instruction does not ensure that learners will be able to internalise what they have been taught and eventually apply it in real situations. Furthermore, it is substantially important to deem that teaching grammar might be beneficial to a certain extent – particularly during the early stages of the learning process –, yet for effective grammar to take place, teachers ought to strive for a balance not only between the content rules and their natural order of acquisition but also with their degree of contextualisation (ELLIS; SHINTANI, 2013).

Approaches to grammar teaching are a controversial issue and so is the medium of instruction, which is to say, the use of the L1 in L2 settings. Most of the literature indicates that the L2 ought to be the principal vehicle of instruction and communication as part of the language classroom with the intention of supplying learners with plentiful opportunities to cognitively process the TL and consequently to engage in comprehensible output (SCHWEERS, 1999). Some researchers, on the other hand, argue that in light of pedagogical and affective benefits for the learner, the use of the L1 can be a valuable tool for learning the L2 chiefly in meaning-oriented tasks (STORCH; WIGGLESWORTH, 2003). Within this framework, in a study conducted by Antón and DiCamilla (1998) on adult learners of Spanish, it was verified that learners draw on their mother tongue primarily to scaffold assistance or clarify information either with the teacher or peers. As a result, it can be inferred that the L1 serves a great purpose when it comes to the development of certain tasks in the classroom, to foster interaction among learners and eventually enhance their willingness to take risks when using the TL (AUERBACH, 1993). However, the use of the L2 should work in conjunction with the prior elements by being incorporated into teacher talk and, thus, provide learners with the quality and quantity of language to be acquired (ELLIS; SHINTANI, 2013).

6 Pedagogical Innovation

6.1 Understanding teaching through learning: a brief insight into the ECRIF Framework

The process of learning a language is a very complex one regardless of whether it takes place in formal classroom settings or in naturalistic contexts. One of the key elements to take into account is the amount of exposure to the TL, particularly in Chile where learners have very limited or merely no access to gain substantial opportunities to receive comprehensible input outside the classroom. For this reason, this would be the primary measure to take in order to ensure a successful learning opportunity for students. An extensive L2 input policy as put forward by Ellis (2005) within his *Principles for instructed language learning* would truly make a difference because the more the exposure the faster they can start assimilating the patterns of the language and eventually acquire them. Even if they are not given the chance to put English into practice on daily circumstances out of the classroom, we teachers can create the atmosphere and further opportunities to maximise the use of the L2 through classroom management, and more importantly as the medium of instruction (NATION, 2003), though always giving students the option to use their mother tongue if they do not feel ready to produce.

Regarding the procedures to grammar teaching, the adoption of an eclectic approach which integrates aspects of grammar as part of a communicative framework (FOTOS, 2001) would be useful to be applied. The idea is not to leave the language structure completely aside, rather to include its items inductively in contextualised situations where students are given the opportunity to discover the patterns as they manipulate the language. This point is particularly relevant given that learners who receive no instruction on at least the most critical aspects of the language system may undergo accuracy-related issues that would certainly interfere with communication, principally in EFL contexts where English is not at their disposal (MITCHELL, 2000).

By fostering this balance between enough opportunities for negotiation of meaning and subtle attention to form we can definitely raise pupils' consciousness of the language that will allow them to notice particular grammar items in the subsequent input they will be exposed to; contributing, in this manner, to the test of new hypotheses, alteration of their current interlanguage, and ultimate development of implicit knowledge (SCHMIDT, 1990). For this reason, learners should understand not only the mechanics of the target language, but also the HOW, WHY, and WHERE a particular structure, word, or phrase is used. The idea is to develop the students' grammatical competence into a fluency-oriented experience that allows them to use the language as naturally and freely as possible (LARSEN-FREEMAN, 2003).

It is at this point that we consider the ECRIF framework to be valuable when it comes to adopting a teaching method that is more centred on the learner. It suggests a deep understanding of the learning process by raising teachers' awareness on their learners' experiences as they experiment with the TL within the classroom; and, rather than prescribing what or not to do as teachers, this framework serves a purpose

on connecting contents and activities from the perspective of the student (ALSALEEM, 2018). In a few words, it implies a ‘shift in teacher thinking’ as verbalized by the developer herself in one of her workshops.

ECRIF stands for Encounter (the TL), Clarify, Remember, Internalize, and Fluently use, which in turn reflect the phases students go through while learning an L2. Kurzweil and Scholl (2007) developed this framework as an alternative approach to maximize language learning and it has been widely used in ESOL-TESOL workshops. Notwithstanding that it was originally designed for English language teachers, it has also been applied to other teaching realms given that it benefits and regulates lesson planning and further collaboration in educational settings (KHALAF, 2016). The Mary Scholl’s framework briefly described as the SIT TESOL Certificate programme is an intensive 160-hour ESL/EFL teacher training course offered by Centro Espiral Maná (CEM) in rural Costa Rica, and it is a qualified provider of training courses from the SIT Graduate Institute in Vermont, US. It provides participants with the skills and confidence needed to succeed in the language classroom. Lesson planning, material design, and classroom management skills are fostered and enhanced throughout theoretical classes and successfully contextualized and evaluated via free daily English lessons offered for the local community in the village of El INVU de Peñas Blancas in Costa Rica. Mary Scholl is both the Director of CEM and a TESOL trainer in the certificate programme where, in conjunction with teacher Amanda Rossi, they share the basics of ECRIF and how to make it part of teachers’ instructional practices back in their home countries.

Considering the complexity of students’ learning process, the ECRIF framework provides strategies to transform instructional practices into more independent experiences that are centred on student-student collaboration, that will eventually equip them for fluent employment of the language in real world situations. As shown in table 1, the framework is arranged using a sequence of stages that range from simple to complex. These stages will not only help us know whether individuals within our classroom are actually learning a particular content or not, but most importantly to scaffold them in working towards a particular learning objective, helping them progress step by step.

Table 1. ECRIF stages described. Based on Mary Scholl’s workshop information.

| Stage | Stage description | Students’ possible thoughts and reactions towards a particular language point | Suggested techniques |
|----------------|---|---|---|
| E Encounter | Learners encounter TL for the very first time. They realize the existence of a particular word, structure, or aspect of language. | What is this? I don’t know this What is this about? What should I do with this? | Deductive or inductive teacher fronted/ controlled presentation. Storytelling (with or without realia), role playing, videos, pictures, etc. where learners experience TL and are able to notice it. |
| C Clarify | It happens ‘inside’ the learner. They discriminate between the meaning, use, and form of the language point. They may ask questions to determine whether their understanding is correct or not. | Is it used this way? Am I right or wrong? How do they differ? What’s the difference between x and y? What’s the meaning of...? How do I...? I see what it means. I’m starting to understand. | - Questions (CCQs) Concept Checking |

| | | | |
|-------------------|---|---|--|
| R Remember | Learners commit new language points to short-term memory. | I'm starting to understand this and it's easier for me to use. I can do this simple task. | Repetition Drilling Gap fill Cloze Information gap Guessing/matching games *These strategies are also known as 'controlled practice'. |
| I Internalize | Learners commit new language points to long-term memory. They connect newly acquired knowledge to immediate context and experiences They are able to use the TL without referring to support material. | Oh, I can connect this to my own life and experiences. I can successfully put it into practice without looking at my notes. | Guessing games Information gap Storytelling/roleplaying Short-answer activities Projects Structured discussions - Card games. * Although they look similar to the previous stage, they differ in the sense practice will be freer and less controlled. The learner is given more chances to decide how to use this new information. |
| F Fluently use | Learners use the new language point fluidly to communicate ideas. This happens when learners use their current understanding to spontaneously produce language in a creative way, in real-life communication type of tasks. | - - - - I can automatically and spontaneously use this new knowledge. I can put it into practice in real life. Cool, I don't have to think consciously about it. I am able to reflect on my performance and self-correct. | Fluency lines Guessing games Debates PBL projects Role Playing Discussions Question mingle Blind poker Question table game Information gap interview River talking Collaborative group tasks. Any other fluency configuration tasks. *In terms of corrective feedback, it is relevant to note that it is not offered during fluency activities so as to avoid interrupting the flow of production. Albeit it is very useful in all the aforementioned stages. |

Certainly, by combining these strategies into a communicative type of lesson and including a wide array of activities, techniques, and procedures, learners would benefit in the sense that their individual differences – and preferences – would be considered. It is necessary to ponder on the extent to which what is being designed and proposed accurately meets the needs of our learners, particularly when mixed-proficiency level students with varied perceptions towards language learning are grouped in the same classroom and taught under the same circumstances.

7 ECRIF in South America

We would venture to state that this approach remains briefly addressed in the existing body of literature. Only a few studies have been conducted to explore the elements of the ECRIF framework (examples), but not in teaching contexts that are somehow similar to the ones we get to experience in our continent. A few published research studies and theses on this topic have been reported in Latin America. Paredes (2019), for example, reported a comparative study of two teaching methods (one of them being ECRIF) towards the enhancement of productive speaking skills. The results obtained suggest that ECRIF offers the most appropriate strategies for language learners. Participants showed increased motivation levels, which certainly, impinged on their participation and usage of spoken English both confidently and spontaneously.

Similar results were presented by Baque and Paredes (2020) whose findings are of direct practical relevance. Their observations support the principal tenet of ECRIF, that is, scaffolding students for them to work on specific contents in a meaningful way. According to the authors, the ECRIF framework enabled learners to improve fluency, rhythm, and intonation. Quite recently, the effect of ECRIF on the development of speaking skills on Ecuadorian students was also researched and presented as a Master's Thesis. Using a document analysis technique and non-experimental research, Caiza (2021) observed that ECRIF facilitated the process of planning and designing tasks so as to foster speaking skills among her 32 participants. According to the pre-test, learners' command of the language was poor in terms of grammar, vocabulary, and fluency. Based on the post-test analysis, results showed that the framework truly makes a difference in comparison to more traditional approaches as every stage provides learners with the necessary tools in such a manner that they were able to use novel grammar structures and vocabulary to support their speaking performance.

As more research into ECRIF is still necessary before obtaining a definitive answer to its application in different contexts, it is hoped that this article will contribute to pave the way so that English teachers can get familiar with this framework, feel encouraged to gain more insight into its usage and eventually start considering the given stages to benefit the teaching learning process of English.

8 The implementation of ECRIF in the Chilean state classroom

8.1 Methodology

As the over-arching aim of this article attempts to contribute in terms of a novel proposal to tackle grammar instruction, it was needed to derive certain information regarding different experiences coming from the few Chilean EFL teachers who had the chance to get certified by one of the creators of the ECRIF framework in Costa Rica, and who can explain in further detail, whether they have been using aspects taken

from this framework as they plan and deliver their lessons back in Chile. It is for this reason, that, this work adopted a qualitative approach, being a collective case study the selected methodology to gain a better sense of the participants' experiences and also to further elucidate how determining the suggested framework was for their teaching practices.

The study sample was comprised of four Chilean EFL teachers and the recruitment process was based on a non-probability sampling technique². A convenience sample method was adopted given that a pool of respondents was conveniently available to us (COHEN *et al.*, 2011; SILVERMAN, 2010). Andrea, Karen, Rocío, and Claudio – pseudonyms used to protect participants' identity and assure confidentiality – were particularly relevant to this work, given their thorough understanding about ECRIF and their heterogeneity in terms of context and years of working experience.

8.2 Results and discussion

In this context, all four teachers responded a detailed survey where they explained their thoughts, opinions, and feelings regarding the use of the framework under study. The in-depth examination of the data generated a tangible picture of how empowering and positive ECRIF can be while used in the language classroom. In general terms, the data revealed that teachers have a sound understanding of the framework features, and this understanding, in turn, allows them to be critical about other aspects that should be considered if thought to be applied in the Chilean context. When asked whether their lessons using ECRIF have been successful or not, common answers would fall into the category of very successful, especially when it comes to planning and task development:

“Yes, they have been successful to a great extent. I measure ‘successful’ by complementing the more ‘visible’ results – whether students are able to do the Fluency activity after a series of scaffolded activities – with how they feel in the process.” (Claudio)

“Yes, it helps you to plan better, even if you don't apply it in your planning. You are aware of certain things that are useful, and you follow a structure within your classes.” (Rocío)

“My sessions have been very successful whenever I applied ECRIF because, in my opinion, it helps students in retaining the information taught better and for a longer time.” (Karen)

These extracts complement other answers related to ECRIF strengths and weaknesses:

Table 2. Teachers' perceptions on ECRIF

| Strengths | | Weaknesses | | |
|-----------|---|--|---|--|
| Andrea | - | Principles are well described and easy to follow | - | Not too flexible. Needed more space for “personal” touch |
| Rocío | - | It helps with lesson structure and planning | - | Sometimes time-consuming, especially when following a textbook scope |

² The design of this research has been authorised by the ethical committee of Instituto de Pensamiento y Cultura en América Latina A.C., México.

| | | | | |
|---------|---|--|---|--|
| Karen | - | It mimics the way we acquire things in a natural way | - | Time-consuming in terms of activity design |
| Claudio | - | Scaffolding | - | Some teachers might get overwhelmed with the number of steps, even though it is not necessary to follow a particular order Unrealistic expectations |
| | - | Doesn't assume that students already know something | | |
| | - | Increasing challenge for learners | | |
| | - | Flexibility, not necessarily linear | | |

While the ECRIF framework is characterized by a myriad of advantages to language learning, such as: increased learner motivation, integration of cultural experiences, development of communicative skills, enhancement of intercultural communicative competence, etc. (TAMRABET, 2017-2018), it is not exempt from limitations that ought to be considered if implementing the model. First and foremost, it is time-consuming in terms of planning and task design. This framework might require the language educator to support his teaching practices with supplementary approaches and techniques and organize the contents to be taught wisely so that to successfully attain the right application of the framework and eventually gain an understanding of each one of the stages. In addition, a variety of activities are expected to be included in all the stages to keep learners always engaged and allow the students to smoothly integrate into them. The role of the teacher is substantial when it comes to the preparation and implementation process. However, sometimes, this set of weaknesses come hand in hand with teachers being too overwhelmed, thinking that it is mandatory to follow all steps to the letter. According to Claudio and based on his experience, it is not only relevant to implement, but to also instruct other teachers about ECRIF:

“It is a framework with multiple steps, more than usual – PPP for instance. I do see the value in breaking down the steps in further detail, but I have also seen how some teachers get overwhelmed by having five, which can be even more if we include Activating Schema at the beginning, Post Fluency Feedback at the end, etc. I also think some teachers might be tempted to always start by having students Encountering the new language, instead of FOWSAK-ing (Finding Out What Students Already Know) in order to make decisions of where to start/continue. This challenge is not unique to ECRIF, it's more of an assumption when we have frameworks with acronyms that go from left to right. Teachers might tend to assume that particular order is set in stone.”

Since ECRIF is not linear, teachers are given the freedom to arrange the stages based on students' needs or interests. What truly matters is that language educators engage in reflection to effectively design lessons that serve as steppingstones for their pupils. Useful questions to consider may be:

- Did students successfully encounter the TL? Were they focused when I presented the language point? Did they realize there was something unknown for them?
- What can I do to assist learners in clarifying form, meaning and use?
- How can I make the process meaningful for them? How can I connect the TL to their immediate context and experiences?
- How can I design tasks that encourage students to express their thoughts and interact with peers to achieve the same outcome?

When asked about how suitable ECRIF would be for the current Chilean context, all four teachers agreed that, even though elements of the framework can be easily followed, there are some other aspects to consider, problems to be offset and additional needs to be met if planning to implement it within the Chilean classroom.

“It empowers students with the will to communicate, unfortunately personality and cultural/institutional habitus is a big challenge to implement this type of methodology.” (Andrea)

“Unless you work with a personalized curriculum, it is not easy to use it. Public, subsidized, and private schools use books and people in Chile believe that if you don’t use it, it won’t be meaningful nor advantageous for them.” (Rocio)

“It is highly effective, and it has good results. It is a time saver when you are on the verge of falling off schedule. It works for me in my context. I don’t know about public/private schools/universities or other institutions and large classes.” (Karen)

“I think a lot of unsuccessful situations in the classroom (in general, not just ECRIF-related) are connected to students’ basic needs (safety, roof, food, emotional support, etc.) not being met. That is something we teachers cannot always ‘fix’ on our own. But I am positive that a teacher who uses ECRIF and slowly builds a culture of active learning in the classroom will have better results than someone who uses some version of the Translation Method or a methodology that relies on copying/doing exercises without a clear purpose.” (Claudio)

The previous discourses bring up the centrality of considering context-sensitive circumstances and settings if wanting to promote not tailored initiatives within the Chilean language classroom, given that they might come across as to be generally divorced from the features pertaining to specific types of students within particular contexts. A recurrent feature regarding teachers in Chile is that their working conditions are neglected and there is a disproportionate responsibility allocated to them in pursuit of what the educational system has claimed to be applied without considering other factors (ÁVALOS, 2010). It is for this reason that novel teaching approaches should be linked to both teachers’ and learners’ personal needs. And this is precisely what ECRIF has to offer.

As it is not a prescriptive model and it does certainly not intend to dictate how a lesson should be staged (KURZWEIL; SCHOLL, 2007), ECRIF allows teachers to adopt a learning-centred view and modify lesson stages as they deem necessary.

9 Conclusions and recommendations

As a final remark and based on our own experience, we would venture to affirm that the teaching of English goes beyond the implementation of traditional methods which only focus on form rather than meaning. As teachers, we ought to do our utmost in order to reflect upon our teaching context and our students’ individual needs with the ultimate purpose of selecting appropriate approaches and techniques that maximize student learning. Clearly, there is no single ideal method to attend to, quite the opposite; it is a mix and match process characterized by infinite hypotheses to be tested that will eventually lead us to achieve the outcomes we have set for our learners.

Notwithstanding, this work constitutes a substantial contribution for including more innovative pedagogical strategies into the language classroom, as it gives light to the use of a framework that has not been widely explored in the Chilean context. It also suggests the consideration and application of significant modifications to an improved proposal.

First and foremost, improvement of quality and equity of education should be accomplished wherein new curriculum reforms, English lessons time frame and up-grading of resources are considered in the future. From this perspective, non-traditional approaches like ECRIF and its explicit strategies would be easier to be developed by teachers and better accepted for the educational authorities. To implement this novel perspective for grammar instruction, not only language educators but also other school leaders should be willing to accept a tangible shift from more traditional to innovative approaches and, in doing so, engage in explicit training to properly apply these new strategies into their teaching practices, which is indispensable.

The primary limitation of this proposal relies on the fact that ECRIF knowledge is only available to a few EFL teachers and therefore has not been explored or disseminated enough in Chile. It has indeed been implemented by trainers and educators in Asia, North America, and some other European countries; however, little or no research has been conducted on the topic. Consequently, the data analysed for this proposal are not representative, and this in turn implies that the findings are unique and would surely benefit from future research so as to expand knowledge regarding this life-changing teaching framework and, eventually, promote a deep transformation of English language teaching in Chile.

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