

## SIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING EXPERIENCES IN CHILEAN DEAF EDUCATION: An Unofficial Curriculum

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**Abstract:** In Chile, there is not yet an official Chilean Sign Language (LSCh) curriculum. LSCh was considered just as a means of communication for many years (Law 20.422, 2010). Recently, thanks to the modification of the law, LSCh is now recognized as a natural, native language and intangible heritage of Chilean deaf people (Law 21.303, 2021). The law also states that deaf children's right to be educated and get access to the national curriculum in ChSL as their first language must be respected. Despite the absence of an official LSCh curriculum, educational experiences do exist in both special and mainstream schools with deaf students, in which LSCh has been incorporated as a means of teaching the national curriculum. This article presents an analysis of the current implementation of educational plans and programs for deaf students in which LSCh has been integrated. With this aim in mind, experiences and opinions of members from different educational contexts and communities were collected, and representatives of organizations that elaborate educational policies were consulted.

**Keywords:** Sign language. Sign language curriculum. Chilean Sign Language. Deaf Education. Chilean Deaf Education.

## EXPERIÊNCIAS DE ENSINO DE LÍNGUA DE SINAIS NA EDUCAÇÃO DE SURDOS CHILENOS: Um Currículo Não Oficial

**Resumo:** No Chile ainda não existe um currículo oficial para a Língua de Sinais Chilena (LSCh). A LSCh foi considerada por muitos anos apenas como meio de comunicação (Lei 20.422, 2010). Recentemente, graças à modificação da lei, a LSCh passa a ser reconhecido como língua natural, original e patrimônio imaterial dos surdos chilenos (Lei 21.303, 2021). A lei também estabelece que o direito das crianças surdas de serem educadas e de terem acesso ao currículo nacional em LSCh como sua primeira língua deve ser respeitado. Apesar da ausência de um currículo oficial de LSCh, existem experiências educativas em escolas especiais e regulares com alunos surdos, nas quais a LSCh foi incorporada como meio de ensino do currículo nacional. Este artigo apresenta uma análise da implementação atual dos planos e programas educacionais para alunos surdos nos quais a LSCh foi incorporada. Para tanto, foram coletadas experiências e opiniões de membros de diferentes contextos e comunidades educacionais, e consultados representantes de organizações que desenvolvem políticas educacionais.

**Palavras-chave:** Língua de Sinais. Currículo em Língua de Sinais. Língua de Sinais Chilena. Educação de Surdos. Educação de Surdos Chilena.

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## EXPERIENCIAS DE LA ENSEÑANZA DE LENGUA DE SEÑAS EN LA EDUCACIÓN DE SORDOS CHILENOS: Un Currículo No Oficial

**Resumen:** En Chile aún no existe un currículum oficial de Lengua de Señas Chilena (LSCh). La LSCh fue considerada sólo como un medio de comunicación durante muchos años (Ley 20.422, 2010). Recientemente, gracias a la modificación de la ley, la LSCh pasa a ser reconocida como lengua natural, originaria y patrimonio inmaterial de las personas sordas chilenas (Ley 21.303, 2021). La ley también establece que se debe respetar el derecho de los niños sordos a ser educados y tener acceso al plan de estudios nacional en LSCh como su primera lengua. A pesar de la ausencia de un currículum oficial de LSCh, existen experiencias educativas tanto en escuelas especiales como regulares con estudiantes sordos, en las que se ha incorporado LSCh como medio de enseñanza del currículum nacional. Este artículo presenta un análisis de la implementación actual de los planes y programas educativos para estudiantes sordos en los que se ha incorporado la LSCh. Con este fin, se recogieron experiencias y opiniones de miembros de diferentes contextos y comunidades educativas, y se consultó a representantes de organizaciones que elaboran políticas educativas.

**Palabras clave:** Lengua de Señas. Curriculum en Lengua de Señas. Lengua de señas Chilena. Educación de sordos. Educación Chilena de Sordos.

### Introduction

The Chilean Sign Language (LSCh) was recently recognized as “the natural, original language and intangible heritage of deaf people, as well as the essential element of their individual and collective culture and identity. The State recognizes its status as the official language of deaf people” (Law 21.303, 2021, p. 1). For many years, the hearing society has considered the LSCh as a form of communication that occurs among deaf people, without acknowledging the cultural and identity aspects of this language for the deaf community.

In the Chilean educational context, LSCh does not have an official curriculum to be implemented in the classrooms with deaf students. However, the Chilean Ministry of Education (Ministerio de Educación - MINEDUC) has carried out various initiatives to promote and integrate the LSCh in both special and regular schools. Likewise, educational communities have constructed curricular proposals in order to provide deaf students’ access to the national curriculum using this sign language.

To account for this experience, the context of the functioning and organization of the Chilean educational system is firstly presented, revealing the roles of those who have acted (and are still acting) in the process of implementing LSCh in the school; that is, the special education teacher, the deaf co-educator and the LSCh interpreter. Secondly, some milestones in the LSCh recognition process are highlighted, along with a chronological description of the MINEDUC’s

initiatives to promote the LSCh in deaf students' learning process. In line with this context, the last part of this paper discusses the results of three interviews and personal communications we conducted with representatives of the above three acting roles in deaf education. Based on their reflections and on a compilation of documents that we have also studied and analyzed in the specific area, we provide an account of the progress made and the persistent challenges in moving to an educational system that recognizes the right of deaf children to be educated in their own language.

### **Background of the Chilean educational context**

The Chilean educational system for deaf students is coordinated by the Special Education Unit of the General Education Division of the Ministry of Education. The Chilean deaf community can access education through two different educational modalities. The first corresponds to the Special School, which implies an educational space where only students with some type of disability attend. Within this modality, there are schools specialized in the care of deaf students only, and other schools that welcome students with intellectual, motor, or visual disabilities, or students with multiple disabilities. In this last educational option, deaf students participate either in a special course that has its own study plan or are inserted in the school with the same plan as the rest of the students (MINEDUC, 2013 in GONZÁLEZ et al., 2017).

The second modality is the regular school with a *School Integration Program* (In Spanish, Programa de Integración Escolar - PIE). This program is defined as a strategy of the educational system that aims to encourage the participation of students, especially those with Special Educational Needs (SEN), whether permanent or transitory. To this end, a set of resources and supports are available for schools such as: specialized professionals, specific training for teachers, educational materials and the application of diversified pedagogical strategies according to students' needs (MINEDUC, 2013; 2017b).

A third modality, which is very rare, are the Hospital Schools or Hospital Classrooms, which have a pedagogical model of educational care for students in a situation of illness, who are hospitalized or undergoing medical treatment, and who are either patients or receive this

educational care at home. These Hospital Classrooms are designed to provide educational continuity to a student who is a patient (MINEDUC, 2020).

In relation to the distribution of deaf students in the educational system, although there are no studies that account for any statistics, according to the Ministry of Education the total number of deaf students until 2021 is 2,227. These are distributed as follows: 1,842 deaf students mainly in regular schools that have PIE, and 385 deaf students in special schools. It can be seen that the vast majority of Chilean deaf students attend regular schools.

### **The Special Education Teacher**

Considering their role in the schools with PIE, the special education teacher works as part of the *classroom team*<sup>3</sup>. This professional works along with the regular classroom headteacher, and the deaf co-educator. His/her chief functions include: determining deaf students' support according to their educational needs, working directly with the students, and guiding the classroom headteacher about curricular adaptations to be implemented (MINEDUC, 2022).

In the context of special schools, a special education teacher plays a similar role to that of a regular classroom teacher, thus being responsible for the learning process of students in several subjects, following the national curriculum (MINEDUC, 2022).

### **The deaf educator**

In a recent study by González (2017) with a group of deaf educators (deaf teachers and deaf co-educators) about their role in deaf education, deaf educators perceive themselves as “identity models and transmitters of Deaf experience, language and culture for deaf students”, thus highlighting the importance of their role in deaf education. In order to fulfill this role, Deaf educators agree that “it is necessary to identify oneself as a member of the Deaf community, handle specific knowledge and teaching-learning methodological tools” as well as promote a positive relationship between the Deaf and hearing community (GONZÁLEZ, 2017, p. 229).

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<sup>3</sup> The *classroom team* is a group of professionals, who work collaboratively in the classroom. The common goal is to improve the quality of teaching and learning, within a framework of diversity and respect for students' individual differences.

In Chile, the name *deaf co-educator* has been adopted to refer to deaf adults who work in schools, but who do not have a professional degree. Hence, they can not be in charge of a school subject, as is the case of a deaf teacher (who has a university degree for the profession). However, there is still no clarity on the part of the majority of schools about the role the deaf educators should play. Consequently, from one school to another, the functions they carry out and the responsibilities that each one has vary significantly (DE LA PAZ et al., 2016; GONZÁLEZ, 2017). According to Catin et al. (2020), based on the interviews they conducted with co-educators in the south of Chile, they point out that the main activities deaf co-educators develop in educational contexts are “games and/or didactic activities that facilitate the student's acquisition and evaluation of their language in the context school, in addition to executing LSCh training activities for the educational community” (p. 156).

It is relevant to indicate that in 2018 the *Deaf Co-educator Profile of Chilean Sign Language and Deaf Culture* (in Spanish, *Co-Educador Sordo de Lengua de Señas Chilena y Cultura Sorda*) was published by the body that certifies labor competencies at the national level (Chile Valora). This was the first step to certify those Deaf adults who have years of experience working in both special and regular schools, but do not have a document that endorses their skills and competencies to educate deaf students (GONZÁLEZ, DÍAZ, 2022). In this profile, it is made explicit that its main purpose is:

the transmission of the Chilean Sign Language (LSCh) and Deaf Culture, and the support of teachers and assistant professionals in the teaching-learning process of deaf students, according to the characteristics of the school context, the principles of Deaf Pedagogy and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). (Gobierno de Chile, 2018, par 3.).

Currently there are no statistical studies available to indicate with certainty the distribution and number of the active deaf co-educators in the educational environments in the country. However, according to the information collected by the MINEDUC professionals, until the year 2021, there was a record of 94 co-educators, 24 of them in special schools, and 53 in PIE (A. Pérez, personal communication, November 9, 2021).

On the other hand, deaf teachers who are adults with degree qualifications in the teaching profession, are a minority, and work to a greater extent in special schools. In these, they fulfill

the same role as a regular teacher and thus, they are in charge of an entire class or a curriculum subject.

### **The Chilean Sign Language Interpreter**

The Chilean Sign Language interpreter in the context of regular education is a professional whose function is “to transmit pedagogical content, conversations, discussions and reflections of the actors who participate in classes from an oral language to a visual gestural language and vice versa” (TOLEDO et al., 2020, p. 691).

In current regulations, the LSCh interpreter appears as part of the resources that facilitate deaf students’ information access (Supreme Decree No. 170, 2009; MINEDUC, 2015). However, there is still no training that leads to a professional degree in sign language interpretation and translation (from Spanish to LSCh and vice versa). At the moment, universities have created diploma courses and technical specializations that aim at providing the necessary knowledge and tools to those who want to perform as interpreters (GONZÁLEZ, PÉREZ, 2017).

Recently, in 2020, through the *National System for Certification of Labor Competencies Commission* (2020), the *Chilean Sign Language Interpreter Profile* is established in the educational context, which, as in the case of the deaf coeducators, has the purpose of certifying the developed competencies and abilities of those exercising this role. This profile describes their role as an interpreter in both LSCh and Spanish (oral or written), facilitating deaf students’ communicative access “regarding curricular content and practices within the educational community, according to the needs of the curriculum and student’s characteristics” (Gobierno de Chile, 2020, par. 4).

Since the incipient description of the LSCh interpreters’ function and role, there’s still a confusion, especially in the school context. Through a qualitative study that focused on the reflection of Chilean interpreters, Toledo et al. (2020) demonstrated that LSCh interpreters currently fulfill pedagogical functions that do not constitute part of their responsibilities, such as “explaining content, giving examples, showing images, making drawings and writing annotations” (p. 690).

Regarding the number of interpreters who participate in educational settings, the Special Education Unit of the MINEDUC registers a total number of 237 people exercising this role, either in special or regular schools with PIE. However, these data are not subject to a statistical study (A. Pérez, personal communication, November 9, 2021).

### **The LSCh recognition process**

For ten years, under the Law 20.422 (2010) that establishes standards on equal opportunities and social inclusion of people with disabilities, sign language in Chile was considered only a means of communication used by deaf people. This recognition was implicit, as it was part of a regulation regarding disability and did not refer to a language recognition as such (GONZÁLEZ et al., 2019). Recently, on January 22, 2021, Law 21.303 was enacted, amending Law 20.422 (2010). This modification in the regulations implied a change in the LSCh status and at the same time, it defined relevant concepts such as: deaf person, deaf community and what it means to be a person with a hearing disability.

LSCh was recognized as the natural, original and the official language of deaf people. Moreover, the law describes it as the “intangible heritage of deaf people, as well as the essential element of their culture and individual and collective identity” (Law 21.303, 2021, p. 1).

On the other hand, the law considers the deaf person as one who has reduced or absent auditory functionality, emphasizing their visual development and consequently their right to have access to sign language communication. It also stresses the right to be identified and be recognized as part of a language community that constitutes a minority culture. In terms of deaf education,

teaching for deaf students in the establishments ... must guarantee access to all the contents of the common curriculum, as well as any other that the educational establishment offers, through sign language as the first language and in written Spanish as a second language. (Law 21.303, 2021, p. 2).

This change of status would mean an important support for the strengthening of deaf students' education in their first language. However, since this change is very incipient, no concrete actions have yet materialized in this regard. When consulting with a representative of the MINEDUC' Special Education Unit about the impact of this law, she points out

I believe that the fact of defining deaf people; the fact of defining sign language (...) and the fact of incorporating and considering that (...) you have the right of full access to the curriculum through your language as your first language (...) are three vital and crucial elements for deaf education bilingual approach. These factors would be essential to LSCh integration into the educational process, and in turn, opening the space for hearing (students) to learn this language. (A. Pérez, personal communication, June 10, 2021).

### **MINEDUC initiatives to promote the LSCh in deaf education**

Although the LSCh recognition as a language is too incipient to talk about the impact of such regulation change, it is worth noting that for more than a decade, the Special Education Unit of the MINEDUC, has been carrying out a series of actions to integrate and strengthen the LSCh in the deaf students' curriculum. Such actions include: training and guidance of educational communities; creation and dissemination of educational materials, and training workshops for deaf co-educators and LSCh interpreters. These latter actions have advanced towards establishing the profile and competencies of both co-educators and interpreters in the aforementioned educational contexts. Below we present these initiatives in a chronological order, to provide an overview of the progress in each indicated aspect.

### **The Deaf Education Strengthening Program**

In 2005, the *New National Special Education Policy* was presented by the MINEDUC referring to the period from 2006 to 2010. The lines of action of this policy focused on improving curriculum and school management, integration school program and attention to diversity. Furthermore, its aim was to strengthen the educational work of special schools through teachers' and professionals' training, to promote family participation, and to raise awareness regarding disability issues (HERRERA, 2010).

Deaf students' education became part of this new policy through the *Deaf Education Strengthening Program* (period from 2006 to 2009). This program was in charge of a team made up by a deaf teacher, a psychologist with experience working with deaf children and their families, and a special education teacher. One of the central activities in 2008 was the training of teams consisting of a special education teacher and a deaf adult from different regions of Chile. The training was focused on teaching about LSCh and Deaf Culture (MINEDUC, 2008). In the same year, another relevant organized activity was the *First Deaf Co-educators National*



*Workshop*, which aimed at promoting dialogue and reflection on the role and functions of deaf co-educators in the special school. Through these discussions, the workshop helped educators and policy makers in acquiring more information about the role of co-educators in the different regions of the country (A. Pérez, personal communication, June 10, 2021).

During 2009, the objective of the Strengthening Program for Deaf Education, was the generation of educational material for schools and families with deaf children. The main purpose of these activities was to raise awareness about the relevance of LSCh in deaf students' learning process in diverse educational contexts. One of the outstanding activities was the launch of the *Bilingual Dictionary of Sign Language and Spanish* (ACUÑA et al., 2009; MINEDUC, 2009a). This was the first material that was produced as part of a research process led by the Metropolitan University of Educational Sciences with the support of the MINEDUC. The dictionary was delivered to different schools, and is currently available on the MINEDUC website for download. With regard to families, *The support guide for families of deaf children. The Story of Matías and his family* was generated (MINEDUC, 2009b). Along with the distribution of these materials, regional and national meetings were held with deaf educators and professionals from special and regular schools with PIE.

### **Use of Information and Communication Technologies with LSCh**

After the Deaf Education Strengthening Program, MINEDUC has continued to carry out its support activities for schools with deaf students. Between 2011 and 2015, the *ICT and Diversity* Project was developed, which aimed at promoting the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in schools with students with special education needs in Chile. In 2015, professionals from special and regular schools with integration programs in the country were trained in ICTs and were given software to support reading in Spanish and the acquisition of vocabulary in LSCh and with special focus on the subjects of Mathematics, Science Natural Sciences, History, Geography and Social Sciences (MINEDUC, 2017a). Overall, these activities aimed at training the deaf co-educator and LSCh interpreter, and at reflecting on and defining their profile.

In 2015, the *2nd Deaf Co-educators National Workshop* was held. With more than fifty participants from different schools in Chile, this conference aimed to deepen deaf co-educators'

expertise in the linguistics of LSCh and lesson planning, as well as their knowledge in diversifying their teaching strategies for deaf students (A. Pérez, personal communication, June 10, 2021). Three years later, in 2018, a *3rd Deaf Co-educators National Workshop* was held, whose main objective was to collect ideas and experiences to lay the foundations of the co-educator role in education.

The construction of a job profile that described the skills, knowledge and activities to perform in educational contexts, was the result of a long process that began in 2008 when the figure of the Deaf Co-Educator started to become official. However, it was not until 2017 that a *Chilean Sign Language Labor Competencies Sectoral Organization* (LCSO) was established. The LCSO is composed of deaf organizations' representatives, schools with deaf students' representatives, and public institution members such as the Special Education Unit of the MINEDUC and the National Disability Service (SENADIS). Under the guidance of the National System for the Certification of Labor Competencies Commission, this team managed to define the *Deaf Co-educator of Sign Language and Deaf Culture Profile of Competencies* (Government of Chile, 2019), which specifies the deaf co-educators' role and functions, as described in the previous sections. A year later, in 2019, the *1st LSCh Interpreters National Workshop* was held. In 2020, the *Chilean Sign Language Interpreter in Educational Contexts* profile was formalized, following a similar process to the one described above (Government of Chile, 2020).

The establishment of both profiles represents the beginning of a validation and recognition process of both roles. It is expected that from this first step, the professionals who fulfill these functions in the schools will be evaluated and subsequently certified as competent in each of these roles.

### **Technical guidelines for educational establishments with deaf students**

During 2021 and 2022, the Special Education Unit of the MINEDUC developed Technical Guidelines for educational establishments with deaf students (MINEDUC, 2022). For its elaboration, the opinions and needs expressed by those deaf people who are involved in deaf education were considered. Among these, teachers and directors of educational establishments, as well as different professionals from the academic and research fields. This

material refers to the different areas to be regarded when optimal conditions for deaf students' education are to be provided. At the same time, it serves as a guide and support for the schools by defining the roles and functions of professionals involved in deaf education.

### **Experiences in LSCh integration in the Chilean curriculum**

The process of integrating the LSCh in the Chilean curriculum is characterized by a diversity in its application in both special and regular schools. To better understand this process, we will describe the alternatives of implementing the National curriculum. In the first place, the Chilean Curriculum contemplates: the Curricular Bases, the Study Programs, and the current Study Plans according to the national legislation.

The Curricular Bases establish the Learning Objectives (LO), which describe the minimum performance that students are expected to achieve for each subject and according to the school grade. The Study Plans present a proposal for common subjects for all schools in the country, including a distribution of an allocated time to work with each one of them. The Study Programs correspond to a didactic proposal about how to achieve the proposed LO in the school year. These programs refer to each subject individually and include guidance on the work methodology, resources and evaluations (MINEDUC, 2017c).

Plans and programs have mandatory quality. However, schools are free to develop their own Plans and Programs. For this purpose, they must fulfill the general objectives defined in the Curricular Bases, and add complementary objectives according to their particular aims and needs. These particular Plans and Programs must be reviewed and authorized by the MINEDUC in order to be implemented.

Another concept is the Curricular Proposal. This is a reference document, specific to each school, which is prepared by the educational community for the best curriculum application, following the students' specific characteristics and the school context.

Finally, the Curriculum Appropriation refers to the exercise of the educational communities in answering the question: "How does the national curriculum adapt to the context, characteristics, interests and needs of the students?" It is expected that the school designs the best curriculum adaptation for its students to "develop quality skills, attitudes and knowledge, so that they can access a comprehensive education" (MINEDUC, 2017c, p.14).

### **Examples of LSCh curricular implementation in deaf schools**

Based on the experience of a professional from the MINEDUC's Special Education Unit, a deaf teacher with experience in deaf schools, and a special educator working in regular schools with deaf students, we present in this section some examples of how schools have implemented sign language - the LSCh in our case - in the curriculum.

Currently, there are two deaf schools only (among the existing deaf schools) that have created their own Plans and Programs. The remaining have either developed Curriculum Proposals to make adaptations to the national curriculum, or have just followed the national curriculum. In line with these school experiences, the chosen examples aim at demonstrating how these two schools have developed an educational trajectory towards a Bilingual Intercultural approach, using the LSCh as the first language to teach deaf students.

Both schools are located in Santiago, the capital of Chile. The first school created its own Plans and Programs, which were prepared by the school's educational community and were approved by the MINEDUC. In this educational space, the LSCh is a specific subject in the curriculum and is taught by deaf educators (INDESOR, 2014). According to the opinion of a professional working at the MINEDUC's Special Education Unit, although this school is a benchmark in terms of its educational proposal, this type of experience is difficult to replicate in other contexts (A Pérez, personal communication, June 10, 2021).

A second example is a deaf school that created a LSCh department composed by deaf co-educators and deaf teachers. Through collaborative work, this group managed to build a Curricular Proposal to provide pedagogical guidelines on how to teach the LSCh as the first language (L1) for deaf students from different educational levels. A deaf teacher, who is part of this LSCh department, states:

How did it begin? I had the idea that an L1 program was missing...some orientation to work according to the learning objectives, the learning indicators... They said it was something very interesting and important to address and we started working on different ideas.

The teacher points out that they are still working on this proposal and that they are testing it (K. Díaz, personal communication, July 22, 2021). Therefore, although there is an agreement

within the school to regulate the LSCh teaching process, it is limited to the space provided by the regular curriculum to implement the proposed actions.

### **LSCh curricular implementation in regular schools with PIE**

Experiences in the regular schools with PIE differ from those in special schools. The interviewed MINEDUC professional acknowledges some barriers for the LSCh implementation that are mainly associated with the vision and position of the schools' management team. In her point of view, in order to install the LSCh teaching and learning process, firstly, school leaders must understand deaf people from a cultural and linguistic perspective. Secondly, the school leaders need to find the strategies to transmit such an understanding to the educational community, so as to ensure their responsibility to integrate the LSCh in the curriculum and hence, in their teaching practice. Currently, this situation does not happen, and the work of the educational community depends on the professionals who manage language at school, such as the interpretes or the special education teachers. Thus, these professionals take the lead on deaf students' educational process (A. Pérez, personal communication, June 10, 2021).

A special education teacher who works with deaf students in a regular school with PIE, reflects on the difference between aspirations and ideals about the implementation of LSCh teaching in these schools, and the specific barriers that hinder its implementation. Mainly she highlights the bureaucratic aspects, the lack of information, and the few collaborative spaces in the school community in general. In her own words she said:

Nowadays when we talk about the implementation of sign language as a subject... I want that to happen, I want to believe it, but it is difficult for me, because it has been disappointing in many aspects. Not because there is no will. There is a lot of bureaucracy, lack of information, and little teamwork (...) there is a lack of collaborative spaces. There are very few of them in relation to what we need. (G. Coronado, personal communication, July 27, 2021).

Moreover, the special education teacher indicates the relevance of the presence of professionals such as the LSCh interpreters and deaf co-educators. She points out the multiplicity of roles that these professionals have to fulfill the LSCh teaching in the schools. In a conversation she held within her work team, the professional points out:

We always talk about the topic of what my role is. Am I an interpreter or a teacher? The truth is that I always tell them: -‘Here, you are everything. You are a teacher, you are an interpreter, you are a psychologist, you are a friend’ (...) we are not limited to just teaching. (G. Coronado, personal communication, July 27, 2021).

Regarding the deaf co-educators’ role, she indicates their participation in regular schools as linguistic reference. Deaf co-educators work directly with deaf students, and as they participate in the Deaf Educators Center (CES), they help in connecting with the extended deaf community nationwide (G. Coronado, personal communication, July 27, 2021). Deaf educators in Chile have organized themselves through the CES. Its main objective is to "strengthen deaf education and generate a network that allows sharing information, teaching materials, solving pedagogical doubts and carrying out training activities in relation to work methodologies that focus on deaf students" (GONZÁLEZ, DÍAZ, 2022, p. 173).

### **Curricular Appropriation of schools with deaf students**

During 2019, the MINEDUC’s Special Education Unit focused on supporting special schools from the perspective of Curricular Appropriation. The representative of this department points out that special schools must be transformed into regular schools that work with the national curriculum but offer a Deaf Space. This Curricular Appropriation process does not necessarily imply the creation of unique Plans and Programs. The schools need to define how to teach the LSCh. This means, offering educational opportunities for deaf students to learn how to communicate in LSCh as well as to develop sign language linguistic knowledge. In the interviewee words

Schools are free to present their own plans and programs if they want. Maybe, it is not enough for them just to contextualize through a curricular proposal, and they really want to manifest their own project (...). This is the first step of the discussion (...). One thing is how deaf students develop their language and another thing is how the school opens the space for the student to learn about the language. (A. Pérez, personal communication, June 10, 2021).

Moreover, the MINEDUC interviewee indicates an important difference between the knowledge and competences that hearing and deaf educators have developed in deaf and regular

schools. In her opinion, special school educators have developed specialized strategies in working with deaf students, but they do not have strong training in applying the national curriculum. In contrast, regular school educators have received training in specific disciplines. Therefore, regular schools need “to strengthen those elements that are typical of deaf people”, and in the case of special schools, to strengthen the curriculum and move towards a bilingual perspective (A. Pérez, personal communication, June 10, 2021).

On the other hand, according to the deaf teacher interviewed, although the Curricular Appropriation process can serve as a basis for a proper LSCh curriculum, the main objective would not be fully achieved using the regular curricular plans and programs proposed by the MINEDUC as a base. These plans, from the beginning, were not thought of from a deaf perspective.

Copying the programs of the Ministry of Education? No. (...) My own experience, the experience of deaf people is important. The Ministry of Education does not know, it has no knowledge regarding that (...) The program must be taught from the deaf culture, the sign language linguistics of deaf people. (K. Díaz, personal communication, July 22, 2021).

### **Advances and challenges in the LSCh curricular integration**

This last section presents some more reflections in relation to the main advances and challenges regarding the LSCh integration in the national curriculum. Firstly we address the regulation change, which by the force of Law 21,303 (2021), altered the view of the LSCh as a means of communication. The LSCh is now recognised as a natural, original language, an intangible heritage of the deaf community of Chile.

Moreover, this same law, in article 34, establishes that deaf students education must guarantee access to all the contents of the common curriculum, as well as to any other that the educational establishment offers, through sign language as the first language and written Spanish as a second language, so that legal support is generated for a future curriculum.

Another point to highlight are the actions generated by the MINEDUC, through the Special Education Unit. Fifteen years ago this entity began to develop a series of initiatives to promote the LSCh use in schools that have deaf students as part of their educational community. These efforts have been in line with strengthening the special schools and the PIE, by training

teachers and professionals, generating educational support material and promoting family participation.

In recent years, the MINEDUC's work has focused on establishing a competency professional profile, in order to certify the work that the deaf co-educators and LSCh interpreters are conducting in the educational contexts (Gobierno de Chile 2018, 2020). The development of such profiles may lead to certain standards of knowledge, skills, and competencies that these professionals must demonstrate and/or acquire. In addition, these profiles will identify levels of professional achievement with the scope to, subsequently, provide them additional training about the competencies in which they are most weakened.

Such a development would validate the central role of the co-educators in the transmission and teaching of the LSCh and Deaf Culture. Also, it would strengthen their participation in the contents and strategies of the LSCh teaching from a Deaf Pedagogy perspective (GONZÁLEZ, 2022). In relation to the LSCh interpreters, it would allow progress towards the professionalization of their role, considering the fact that there is no interpreter career in Chile.

The progress in schools' actions is primarily met in the creation of curricular proposals for the LSCh teaching in the curriculum. As mentioned previously, some deaf schools have created their own plans and programs, with an Intercultural Bilingual perspective, hence validating the LSCh as the first language for the deaf student. Some of the regular establishments with PIE have advanced towards raising awareness of the LSCh and its importance in the education of the deaf child, as well as of the need of the LSCh interpreters and deaf educators present in these educational settings. However, there is no clarity about how to incorporate the knowledge and experience of the deaf community in the educational plans and programs of these schools.

Parallel to these advances, we were able to distinguish some challenges for the LSCh inclusion in the school curriculum. Based on this study, the most important challenge is to increase the number of deaf educators in the schools, followed by an advancement in defining and recognising their professional position and role in the various educational environments. Moreover, there is a need to advocate the founding of a collaborative space among deaf adults



(professionals and/or not) for securing a constant exchange and strengthening of deaf pedagogical practices and tools.

In terms of curricular challenges, an accompaniment (e.g., curriculum guidance) of the MINEDUC for the implementation of Curricular Proposals or the creation of particular Plans and Programs is needed. This accompaniment must be specific and respond to the realities and needs of both deaf and regular schools.

Finally, the experience of those Chilean deaf schools that have implemented an Intercultural Bilingual model can serve as an educational paradigm to be studied, adopted and/or adapted by other types of schools, nationally (and perhaps internationally), so as to respond to deaf students' educational needs. Hopefully, educational communities can take these challenges into consideration, and act accordingly for the necessary changes and improvements towards implementing educational model(s) that truly assert(s) the cultural and linguistic rights of the Chilean deaf students.

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