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Voices and Perspectives from Our Online Press on the State of English Language Teaching in Mexico

David Guadalupe Toledo Sarracino[1], Laura García Landa[2], Nahum Samperio Sánchez[3], Darragh O'Grady[4]

Abstract

This documentary research on the discourse in electronic media surrounding the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language on the Mexico's border describes the social framework and analyses various linguistic contexts to make provisional recommendations regarding foreign language policy in Mexico. The digital journalism selected issues an opinion on (1) the teaching of English as a language additional to Spanish in Mexico (English Language Teaching, ELT), and (2) Mexico's position (at Federal and State level) implicit in their regional implementation of ELT. Thirteen articles from 12 regional, national, and international media sources were analysed using Guespin and Marcellesi's (1986) and Arnoux and Bein's (2015) theories, alongside Bardin's (1996) content analysis method for linguistic contexts in border regions. Qualitative analysis techniques were employed to identify and categorize the positions on foreign language policy presented in the Mexican media. The authors conclude with recommendations for ELT policy, proposing actions for foreign language policy planning. We argue for raised teacher-training standards to improve foreign language learning in mainstream education and Private language schools, thus positioning the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California to take more agency in our regional support role to the Mexican Secretariate of Education.

Keywords: *Language Policy, The Border Region, English Language Teaching (ELT).*

Introduction

This study describes the contexts related to the foreign language policy of English language teaching (ELT) in Mexico. These are understood as contextual spaces that generate diverse, convergent, and divergent discourse on the inclusion of languages in educational and academic settings in a hierarchy of three spheres: international, national, and local. These levels are interconnected as voices that either enable or limit the scope of political decisions regarding languages.

At the international level, we identify two contexts: the global thought context, which involves political actors such as the European Union with its Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), the World Bank (with its policy on education as a "treasure within"), and the UNESCO (with its policy on linguistic diversity), as well as the OECD through its public policies and reporting of the state of education worldwide. The second context is the economic market, where key factors include the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA from the US perspective, T-MEC in Mexico), as well as trade with the European Union, and MERCOSUR (the Southern Common Market).

At the national level, we identify three contexts: the Secretariat of Public Education (Secretaría de Educación Pública, SEP), Mexican universities, and the economic market of languages, with institutions such as the Mexican Institute for Competitiveness (IMCO), private language schools (PLS), and the Mexican business community. Finally, at the local level, we focus on the Mexican state of Baja California, and the social, cultural, and linguistic dynamics related to the populations that inhabit the region.

[1] Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, Faculty: Facultad de Idiomas Tijuana.
[2] Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.
[3] Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, Faculty: Facultad de Idiomas Tijuana, Email: nahum@uabc.edu.mx.
[4] DaraIdiomas Centro de Idiomas, Email: darraghogrady@daraidiomas.com.

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Language Policy

This study describes the linguistic context of English language learning in Mexico, resultant from the correlated language policies of the institutions at the different educational levels and the reality of living on the Mexico-United States border. Throughout the document, we use Jarvad's definition of language policy (2001, cited in Bergenholtz, H. and Tarp, S. (n.d.)) as:"A set of laws, regulations, and norms that establish the conditions of a language, including its relationship with other languages and what constitutes the correct form of the language, as well as the various types of initiatives undertaken to actively promote, strengthen, and consolidate a language." (Bergenholtz, H. and Tarp, S. n.d., 18)

It is worth noting that different actors are involved in the planning of language policy: institutions, groups, PLS, and the business community (Hjort, n.d.: 3). Even within the same language, certain types of discourse are considered (often subconsciously) "more correct" than others, and this is due less to linguistic issues than to political and ideological ones (Bagno, 2009). In this sense, the concept of language policy allows a clear understanding of how the visible and the invisible constitute policies of and about language. Language policy takes into account "the various ways in which a society acts upon language, whether consciously or not" (Guespin & Marcellesi, 1986).

Thus, in the literature, we observe an openness to recognizing a "non-conscious" dimension, which has a significant impact on language policy. This "invisible" dimension, though active within the setting of foreign language policy, is rooted in ideologies according to Del Valle (2004, 399), for whom "Language ideologies are understood as systems of ideas that integrate general notions of language, speech, or communication with concrete views and actions that affect the linguistic identity of a particular community."

For this reason, when we propose analysing linguistic contexts, we also consider a description of the sociolinguistic spaces where languages interact. This helps characterize language policy. For this reason, it is necessary to emphasize that the teacher, when planning the teaching and pedagogical use of languages (the forms that interact, are learned, or are taught), is no less political than those who legislate on languages. Teaching decisions are always influenced by linguistic ideologies that, as Del Valle affirms, impact on how languages work (Mansoor et al., 2022).

The International level: Foreign language policy in global thought and the market economics of Mexico

The first step towards describing foreign language policy in this context is the understanding of the concept of trade blocs in the Americas: T-MEC (Tratado entre México, Estados Unidos y Canadá), as it is called from the Mexican perspective, (previously the North American Free Trade Agreement; NAFTA), the EU (European Union), and MERCOSUR (Mercado Común del Sur, which translates as the Southern Common Market in English). This shift in the systemic dynamics of the Western world has generated hubs that have impacted on economic and labour structures in the Americas and Europe. As a result, market forces have become a fundamental element of education and academia, with the predominance of a market culture centred around financial markets. The formation of these blocs has also impacted the field of languages as described by Bourdieu in 1985) in *¿Qué significa hablar?* (*What Does It Mean to Speak?*).

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), signed in 1994 between the United States, Canada, and Mexico, now the renegotiated United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) from the US perspective, (T-MEC in Mexico), has resulted in public policy regarding English-language instruction that spans all levels of education in our country. This new regional perspective has resulted in an increased market and vocational orientation for education in Mexico and there emerged a discourse focused on quality, excellence, and standards, as noted by Aboites (2007).

In later years, Mexico designed a strategy to improve English language teaching syllabi and teacher training programmes were developed, supported by the growth of public and private universities, as well as the creation of undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in ELT fuelled by the "bilingual" education boom in the private education sector.

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NAFTA brought benefits to Mexican foreign language policy through the professional development of teachers and the emergence of an implicit foreign language policy (present, soft, and without legal power), which established the professionalization of foreign language teachers as a priority. This is evidenced by the number of degrees in ELT and Language Education that were created during this period (see Costa et al., 2000).

Regarding foreign language policy in the global context, the primary driver has been the European bloc. The publication in 2001 of the explicitly non-prescriptive Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) provided an attractive and familiar hierarchy of language level standardisation, implemented in Mexico in 2004 by the promotion of international testing. The CEFR, published by The Council of Europe in 2001, not only describes international best practices for language teaching but also for language assessment and testing bodies that have interpreted the non-prescriptive recommendations of the CEFR for the development of their tests. Mexican universities have followed suit, where we have seen innovation in teaching, assessment, and language certification, as well as attempts to incorporate new methodologies in foreign language teaching.

On a final note, concerning the MERCOSUR region (Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Bolivia, plus associate members), an indirect effect of the above was observed during the Seminar on Language Management held in Québec (2002), Asunción (2003), and Rio de Janeiro (2006). There was an initiative to position, at least at the level of discourse, the languages of the Americas — Spanish, French, English, and Portuguese — on the same level, acknowledging the respect for the linguistic diversity of each region. Although there was no real declaration of these policies at the local level (Chareille, 2003), the fact that such a policy was articulated suggested an equal relationship between these languages and their inclusion in language policy in both public (government, commerce, schools, etc.) and private sectors. This sparked both support and opposition to what could be viewed as an attempt to homogenise the diverse cultural, linguistic, social, and even economic identities of each commercial region.

The National Level: Foreign Language Policy in the Context of Educational Quality and Efficiency

At the national level, we identify three contexts: the context of the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP), the context of Mexican universities, and the context in the economic: the Mexican Institute for Competitiveness (IMCO), Private language schools (PLS), and Mexican business community.

The Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) and English Language Teaching (ELT)

In the context of foreign language policy in Mexico, the SEP plays a fundamental role. Two prominent public sector projects, the Certificación Nacional de Nivel de Idioma (CENNI, "National certification of language level") and the Programa Nacional de Inglés (PRONI, "National English language syllabus"), provide a framework for understanding how foreign language policy has been implemented in this context. These initiatives have aimed to strengthen English language teaching in the Mexican context.

In 2004, the General Directorate of Accreditation, Incorporation, and Revalidation (Dirección General de Acreditación, Incorporación y Revalidación, DGAIR) of the SEP designed the national language recognition benchmark known as CENNI. This standard is undoubtedly a guide for educational institutions, proposing a framework of language level equivalencies for foreign language proficiency tests, foreign and national, in the Mexican context. Although CENNI has been used as a language proficiency requirement in various institutions, it has yet to permeate throughout the country. From the perspective of the impact of language policy on society, it is worth reflecting on how this national framework could be positioned in the national university context for academic purposes. Without a doubt, the DGAIR provides a coherent, reliable, and consistent institutional structure to achieve the objectives for which the CENNI was created.

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The Programa Nacional de Inglés (PRONI), previously known as the Programa Nacional de Inglés en la Educación Básica (PNIEB), positions English as an international lingua franca. This emblematic program has become the public policy for English language teaching (ELT) from its inception to the present day in Basic Education (Preschool, Primary, and the first cycle of Secondary education). This program has been maintained by the current federal government (as of September 2024), but its importance has not been emphasized in the diverse educational contexts of the 32 states. The SEP, in 2011, stated that "English language teaching in Basic Education within Mexico's public education system is mandatory only in secondary school". However, in recent years, significant efforts have been made to ensure that this subject is also taught in primary school (SEP, 2011, 13).

Twenty-one states have incorporated PRONI into their educational systems at preschool and primary school levels. As of 2022, the PRONI project was supported by some states with others not maintaining it as part of their implementation of the national educational framework. Similarly, it has been somewhat absent in the Sectoral Education Program, which in 2020 defined the priorities for education in Mexico. The administration of this program falls under the responsibility of the secretariats of education in each state.

In 2017, actions were taken by the Permanent Commission of the Honourable Congress of the Union to urge the Secretary of Public Education to strengthen the PRONI. This was known as the Estrategia Nacional de Inglés (National Strategic English Program). Despite these efforts, the progress made over the last eight years has been insufficient. It is our position that it'd be crucial to expand PRONI's coverage to all rural and urban schools, and in doing so, generate support for high-quality human resource training, maintain the quality of educational materials for the teaching of English, and create teacher training mechanisms to ensure the syllabus' efficacy. Improving teaching practice in public and private Basic Education schools remains a challenge.

Under the Estrategia Nacional de Inglés obtaining a teaching position requires having attained an advanced level English (C1 level on the CEFR or higher), certified with CENNI or equivalent. This is in addition to teaching competence, intellectual ability, and the commitment to a code of ethical best practice. The national teacher training colleges' (Escuelas Normales) inclusion of these requirements in the admission process for the Servicio Profesional Docente (Professional Teaching Service) marked a turning point for English language teaching in Mexico. (Coppel, 2017, 3) noted the following:

"...the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) of Mexico aims to create a fully bilingual education system by 2038, where content is taught in both Spanish and English." Within the Mexican educational context, this step of legitimising ELT in national teacher training colleges was a significant advancement. However, to date, there is no known system to track the effectiveness of this Estrategia Nacional de Inglés in Mexican educational policy, as noted by Ramírez and Sayer (2016).

The Linguistic Context of English in Mexican Universities (Instituciones De Educación Superior; IES)

Mexico currently has 180 academic programmes registered with the Asociación Nacional de Instituciones de Educación Superior (ANUIES). The catalogue of courses and degrees has a wide range of primary degrees focused on teaching English as a foreign language. Similarly, there are 30 postgraduate programmes in applied linguistics and more than 80 publishing houses specializing in ELT material for young adults. This is an offer which strengthens teacher training for the learning and teaching of foreign languages.

In 2013, a curricular reform at the high school level was undertaken which was published as the "Reforma Integral de Educación Media Superior" (2016), and the Sistema Nacional de Bachillerato was established. Curricular content related to ELT was adjusted to include a significant component of language and communication (this was also the case for Spanish). In the exit profile, the student is to be able to use language and value linguistic and cultural diversity and competencies related to these attitudes and behaviours are to be taught (RIEMS, 2013: 12-13). This marked a paradigm shift in curricular design for high schools in Mexico and it is aligned with the plurilingual and pluricultural competencies of the CEFR. It is still unclear whether this has been implemented in praxis.

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Concurrently, the explicit linguistic policy of the universities that establishes ELT as the central axis of professional training complements actions at the high school level with the long-term vision of the ANUIES (2018) in a document entitled Visión y Acción 2030 to prepare university students for a globalised reality where pluricultural communication in English could give them currency and agency.

The Influence of Mexican Business on Higher Education

The vision of ANUIES partly stems from the interests of companies hiring university graduates, which spurs universities to provide for the labour demand from different sectors of society.

A study by the Mexican Institute for Competitiveness (IMCO) indicates that:

"…current programmes of study do not necessarily provide opportunities to improve student proficiency in English, as just over 50% of universities do not include English as a mandatory subject, and 60% do not require a second language to graduate, although 85% indicate that it is required to obtain a degree. To earn a bachelor's degree, 70% of higher education institutions require at least a B1 or B2 level (for a Técnico Superior Universitario – "Higher University Technician" - an A2 level is usually required)." (IMCO, 2014, 26)

Furthermore, (IMCO, 2014, 26), states that:

"…higher education institutions play an important role in formulating an educational policy for English teaching (p.26). While English proficiency tends to increase with a person's educational level, universities have not been successful in better preparing their graduates in these skills. Of those with professional studies, only 36.7% claim to speak English, and of them, just 29% say they speak it well."

It should be noted that knowing English is not synonymous with speaking English, much less speaking it well. Samperio and Domínguez (2018, 629 explain that "knowing English occurs at different proficiency levels"; they also add that "it is possible to know English without necessarily having that knowledge lead to coherent, clear, and fluent oral production that allows communication." For this reason, it is imperative for universities to strengthen English language teaching.

On the other hand, IMCO also suggests that Mexican universities should:

"…promote research and scientific publication connected with the rest of the world, encourage academic mobility, and develop students capable of pursuing postgraduate studies abroad. For this purpose, it is necessary to have teachers capable of teaching complete courses in English, have a [language level] assessment process upon entering university, and a mechanism for monitoring and improving proficiency in the language." (IMCO, 2018, 26)

Although the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) has made progress by recognising Cambridge English Language Assessment Qualifications to enter the Professional Teaching Service, coverage remains limited, which is why professionals with diverse profiles and a solid knowledge of English are considered to join as teachers to meet the demand.

In 2017, the Secretariat of Public Education launched an open invitation to fill 1,000 teacher training (primarily language development) positions in the national teaching colleges (las Escuelas Normales), of which only 646 were filled, to train future teachers for the teaching English and content subjects. The profiles of those who filled these positions were mostly English teachers, although other profiles from different fields met the requirements and obtained the positions.

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Toledo-Sarracino and García-Landa (2018), in their study of life at the border, point out that border inhabitants are communities that coexist and interact in a melting pot of cultures and languages. The border has become a sanctuary for foreign and emergent languages as a result of migration.

Gavaldón (1983, 68) notes that the presence of the English language is palpable on the border:

"The proximity to the United States shows that English is constantly practiced in Tijuana in commercial relations with tourists and in business dealings with Americans. In this way, we find an explicit manifestation of the relationship between the two cultures through verbal communication."

In this way, English can be considered the lingua franca of the border, without diminishing the other languages that have been integrated into the linguistic amalgam of this geographical space which, as Ramírez and Mendez (2022, 225) note, "has come about thanks to internal mobility and the immigration of various foreign population groups, many of whom had the final goal of settling in the United States but, for various administrative and political reasons, remained waiting on the border strip."

From this description of the international, national, and local language policy contexts, the teaching of foreign languages is valued, and the challenges that need to be addressed are described: consolidation of language teaching policies for English, strengthening of teacher training programmes and sociocultural practices, considering national and international frameworks and trends.

Therefore, we believe it is necessary to bring together foreign language teachers in diverse institutions, continue certifying teachers who train new generations of educators, and conduct research on foreign language teaching using a variety of methodological approaches. It is also crucial to ensure that teacher training programs respond to new needs and trends, as described by Sánchez (2018) in his works on teacher training.

Toledo, et al. (2018) and Moreno (2016) agree on the need for Mexican educational policies to be consistent and coherent with national education policy. This implies that linguistic status planning, which encompasses the functions of language use in different language policy spaces. This is also the case with corpus planning, which refers to specific linguistic manifestations such as spelling, modernisation, and standardisation, which must be aligned in our opinion. Additionally, there is language planning in the broader educational context and decisions about what images will be used in the materials or by the teacher to present the language pluriculturally and plurilinguistically. The former will allow for the integration of elements for teaching, assessment of student competence, and evaluation of curriculum and syllabus, curriculum design, materials development, and teacher training, while the latter will provide insights into the motivations behind those decisions, such as objectives, beliefs, attitudes, and ideologies (Ager, 2002). For these reasons, we believe it is essential to frame language policy proposals to support future educators in incorporating interdisciplinary thematic content in professional schools.

O'Donoghue (2015, 114) helps us conceptualize that "if we do not understand the value of English as a lingua franca and its close connection to the right to lifelong learning, we will not have the courage to fundamentally change the way it has been offered to Mexican children and youth up to now."

Ramírez and Sayer (2016) add that this valuing of English as a lingua franca in our country demands a critical eye on each context or region (Sayer, 2015) to avoid a faux implementation or homogenising of language policy nationally. Based on this premise, we cannot have students with basic competence in English if they do not have access to the foundations of the language and burgeoning national policy on English language teaching.

We observe that these language policy contexts and the underlying press discourse, present syntagms or terms that aggregate around economic benefits and personal, academic, and professional advancement, while at the same time denouncing the unfavourable conditions in various contexts.

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The objective of this research is to describe how the linguistic context plays out in terms of English language learning and teaching policy in Mexico and how different voices of the agents involved in planning are positioned within the discursive spaces of printed and electronic media.

Methodology

This research followed a qualitative documentary methodology, in which data were collected from 12 print and electronic press outlets with the widest circulation in the Baja California region, as well as national and international sources. Thirteen articles, including news reports or opinion pieces, were identified and analysed from the perspective of language policy contexts related to the teaching of English in Mexico, teacher training, and foreign language learning at the Mexico-US border in California. These issues were examined using the approaches of Guespin & Marcelessi (1986), Arnoux & Bein (2015), and Bardin's (1996) content analysis methodology during the period 2016 to 2022. We focused on the most relevant news regarding the English language.

Our Samples

For the analysis in this study, a corpus of 8,686 tokens was compiled, including, for example, titles, authors, article names, or the body of the text. These were integrated to deduce the intentions of the authors of news reports or opinion pieces regarding how the language policy landscape of English teaching in Mexico and at the U.S.-Mexico border is portrayed, using a content analysis approach of the sources. Three categories of impact were used: regional, national, and international.

The logical foundation for identifying the paragraph fragments analysed was based on the themes addressed, such as valid elements of language policy in English teaching, English teacher training, and Mexican legislation. The news reports were labelled with the acronym PIE (print and electronic press).

Regarding positioning, we understand it as an element related to voice, as a constitutive element of a dialogic relationship through which social opinion is constructed (Hyland, 2012). This articulation includes three elements: the sociocultural element, due to the importance of context in the production of meaning; the rhetorical structure of the text, due to the specific characteristics of the print or online press genre; and the intertextuality element, which involves recognizing the other's discourse while formulating one's own discourse within and through the other's discourse (Muñoz Ortega, 2022).

Our Analysis of the Results

International Voices

From an international perspective, we can observe the Spanish establishment newspaper *El País'* criticism of federal *Subsecretario de Educación* Jara's comment regarding a proposal to prioritise certification over teaching experience:

PIE06: "It's not enough to speak perfect English. It's also necessary to know how to teach it. In this second phase of the contest, [teaching] candidates must pass exams. And there are various options offered by the University of Cambridge: The Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT), [the now defunct] ICELT course, and the CELTA or the [higher level] DELTA exams."

These British tests assess English teachers' competence and teaching strategies. They include theoretical concepts of language teaching, lesson planning, and classroom management and their application in the classroom. According to this federal Subsecretario de Educación, appointed in 2015, teaching experience is not required to compete, but candidates must demonstrate the communicative and teaching competences. "We can't hire someone who doesn't know how to communicate or teach." He added that, although experienced teachers would have an advantage in this area, there might also be people who have not formally taught before, but do indeed have the ability.

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This comment is validated within the sociocultural context of educational reform, where teachers must be assessed and language programs evaluated according to international standards, such as those of the Cambridge qualifications that he mentions. In this case, the reporter of these comments legitimises the normalisation of "exam factory," as well as the role of language testing and teaching bodies such as Cambridge Assessment and the British Council in defining what it means for a person to "know English." It is interesting that the "gatekeepers" of English teaching in Mexico are not necessarily linked to the U.S. Embassy or to the standards of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), as one might expect given the context of the trade agreement with North American countries. This is due to, among other reasons, historical factors and the role of English language teaching in the diplomacy of these two English-speaking nations.

The homogenising discourse of international standards in the Spanish newspaper article reporting the Subsecretario's comments coexists with the overwhelming reality of the shortage of English language teachers with the linguistic and teaching competencies necessary, or the teacher training, to expand English language teaching coverage in Educación Básica nationwide, a fact reported by the Mexican Web site *Infobae*:

PIE08: Teachers who teach English to primary school children will not need to master the language to teach it in their classrooms because soon they will have access to a digital platform that will allow students to learn "almost" autonomously. The Subsecretario announced that Educación Básica teachers will teach English using a technological tool in development at the time.

Thanks to this technology, teachers would only need to guide students through a digital platform that will allow them to learn almost autonomously. "Of course, we will teach English to all teacher trainees in the national training colleges who want to learn, but we don't have time to wait for them to learn before they can teach," stated the politician.

Faced with the reality of having to implement foreign language policy, based in turn on the supposed need for English in public schools, the proposal for a "miracle tool" is born; one that will supposedly teach English to both teachers and students and which seems to be an attempt garner cultural, political, and linguistic capital.

The regrettable consequences of this project are described in the works of López Gópar (2013, 2014); López Gópar et al. (2009); Ramírez and Sayer (2016); and García-Landa (2021). The institutional discourse positions the establishment as the enabler of this miraculous technology, and, as such, as "saviour". It also reveals that providing this invaluable tool, which requires no effort from the teacher, allows her and her students to advance their knowledge (linguistic, presumably, and under a version of the antiquated, linear, transmission model of education) at their own pace, and to go as far as they wish. However, the pace of teachers, presumed to be slow, is not the pace of institutional timeframes, which means there is not enough time to "wait for them to truly learn the language" (much less teach it), as teaching a foreign language supposedly "requires no science"—it is enough for teachers to be "partial speakers", with the definition of an imaginary "complete" speaker ironically absent in the discourse, making it as such "incomplete", the CEFR descriptors reframed in terms of familiar language level hierarchies.

We observe how the international voice highlights the nature and challenges of implementing English language teaching in Mexican Basic Education, framed within a dual discourse of "educational quality" and "educational failure"

National Voices

We will now analyse the discourse of agents in language policy planning in the national press, focusing on teacher training and questioning the status of English in speaker perceptions.

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The Mexican newspaper *El Universal*, in the opinion of one of its journalists, highlights the benefits of Mexicans living near the border compared to the average Mexican national regarding learning English. From their perspective, anchored in their ideology of the English language and their experience as a resident in the area, the average Mexican has an instrumental motivation for learning English, while those living near the border have an intrinsic motivation due to the daily use of the language in that context:

PIE02: "Mexicans [in general] only learn English to get a better job, earn a higher salary, and even then, only a small percentage speak or practice it… Here at the border, we are fortunate because by living in a geopolitical space, we receive many free U.S. services, like radio and television. Plus, we are a city of migration, which allows us to learn English, French, or Mandarin Chinese for free."

The journalist also criticizes the limited use of the language in the daily lives of Mexicans nationally, emphasising the conditions and contexts that facilitate practising the English language that come from the migration phenomenon on the border with San Diego and Calexico. This discourse challenges national language policy by contrasting the value of English (as an obligation) within the academic and professional spheres with a focus on the appreciation of it as linguistic and multicultural capital (or even as a "treasure", to use the word Jacques Delores used with regard to education in 1996). Seeing language(s) as a treasure empowers the speaker, giving them the "possibility" (to use a growth mindset term; the MCER does not contain any "Cannot do" statements after all) to be "social agents" (MCER, 2018, 27) in a pluricultural and plurilingual space. The Pandemic's role as a catalyst to making the world even more pluricultural is now evident, especially in the corporate sector, as miscommunication on pluricultural teams abounds. Though one might question the degree and depth to which the journalist does use French and Chinese in their daily living and working together with speakers from these communities (in this sense "multicultural" or "intercultural" – if English is the only foreign language used - may be a better term), the pluricultural scenario they advocate (and as described by the CEFR) is indeed that envisioned in the educational reforms mentioned above. The necessary conditions to facilitate this space do not seem to be have been created across all regions of the country, and not only in the obvious rural areas. The gentrification process that many urban populations in Mexico have experienced, such as in Mexico City or San Miguel de Allende, to give two examples, or Tulum, in the state of Quintana Roo, (fast becoming a suburb of Playa del Carmen), has also been due to migration, though principally from the North. This migration seems to be creating the *multicultural* conditions typical of cities such as London or New York, as opposed to the pluricultural context described for the competency of "Facilitating the pluricultural space" in the Companion Volume of the MCER (Council of Europe, 2018, 123).

As mentioned above, the most recurrent theme in Mexican press discourse regarding English language learning is the challenge of teacher training, as well as the political challenges of implementing the various reforms. The institutional actions taken to address these challenges are often criticised, as we shall see below. An interesting interpretation of the discourse analysed, however, is that it may indeed be beliefs (especially teacher beliefs) about what foreign languages are *for* that will be the deciding success factor in the implementation of the MCER in Mexico.

The Challenges

One of the key national challenges is the availability of enough English teachers at the elementary school level to meet demand. National newspaper *Excélsior* discursively legitimises the concrete actions to address this taken by the SEP (Secretariat of Public Education) to overcome these difficulties:

PIE07: "Teachers will be able to teach the English language without knowing it, supported only by a platform," the head of the SEP, Esteban Moctezuma Barragán announced this afternoon. "We are conducting very in-depth research on teaching English through platforms where the teacher directs the teaching, and the child learns English without the teacher necessarily having to speak it, because what they need to do is have the child follow along on the platform. Once we have resolved this, we will gladly present it to you," explained the Secretariat of Public Education.

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Two key aspects regarding foreign language policy emerge from this stakeholder's statements. Firstly, there is the hope placed in technology, and secondly, the scientific backing ("very in-depth research") that seeks to legitimise the decision and how it was made. However, two discursive elements reveal its weakness in that the scientific backing is operating in a space and time that has not yet materialised: "We are conducting research" and "when we have it resolved, we will gladly present it." This echoes the critique from the Spanish newspaper *El País*, as well as with scientific studies that evaluated the policy as unfavourable, along with the public non-existence of the "in-depth" promised research report.

This language policy seems detrimental both to teachers and students with regard to learning and public spending. Humans learn in a spiral, which is why the CEFR proposes breaking with linear syllabi as part of the "paradigm shift" it eschews (Council of Europe, 2001,5). Language learning technology uses a linear learning model, due to the binary nature of machines. It is paramount to note that no institution has to have their policy be within the European framework of best practice. There are no repercussions of not adopting the CEFR beyond poorer learning and wasted money. If Mexico does not want a "real paradigm shift" (Council of Europe, 2018, 26), it does not have to adopt the CEFR. This platform may indeed be different, but if the CEFR is the framework for Mexico (and the SEP has de facto stated that it is), it would seem that it is an unwise spend or that it needs more teacher and less platform. Or simply it could clearly be stated that the CEFR is not for Mexico and that a more appropriate frame is needed. The debate on this would be stimulating and useful, efficiencies in spending could be achieved and teachers and learners would know where they were going.

Teacher training emerges once again as one of the key tenets in the implementation of the new English syllabi and the de facto substitution of teachers by technology will not solve the problem. This proposal of "do not worry, technology (not teachers) will revolutionise learning" exacerbates problems already faced by teachers in that their work is undervalued in different states, as exemplified by the newspaper *Milenio,* based in the Northern industrial city of Monterrey:

PEI09: "The teachers of PRONI, established in 2009, are excluded from the goal of revaluation [sic] or, as it is called in Spanish, the '*revalorización del magisterio.*' Since the National English Program's inception, they have subsisted under precarious working conditions, without benefits or contracts that provide tenure or seniority. They are only given agreements that recognize them as 'specialized external advisors,' not as teachers, even though they teach a second language, work like any other teacher, prepare classes, materials, submit evidence, and grades."

An example of the commitment referred to by the writer is that even, during the confinement of the Pandemic, these teachers continued to fulfil their remote teaching duties), and without a clear foreign language policy. The systematic exclusion of teachers from the institutional system is evident, stripping them of their agency in the discourse around their profession and effectively blindfolding them professionally by providing no clear language policy. By labelling them "specialised external advisors" without the rights afforded to "real" teachers or a place in the organizational hierarchy, but with all the obligations, two problems are highlighted: first, the lack of seriousness of the proposals in the reforms, and second, the disempowerment of ELT teachers and the devaluation of their work and of the profession in general.

Institutional Actions Taken

One of the actions most present in the discourse is the creation of spaces for the professionalisation of English language teachers, which aligns with the discursive context of seeking "quality" and "excellence," as well as the standardisation of teacher knowledge. The most frequently used genre in the discourse is the announcement of available resources, as well as work and study opportunities for teacher professionalisation. In this context, *El Imparcial/Frontera*, based in the northern state of Sonora, states:

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PIE03: During the presentation of the Estrategia Nacional de Inglés, in the courtyard of the government buildings, it was announced that degree programs at the national teacher training colleges for English teachers at the Preschool and Primary levels would be created – this already exists for Secondary level – but it will be in the 2018-2019 school year when at least one such program will operate per state. It was also reiterated that there are already over a thousand positions for English teachers in the Escuelas Normales [national teacher training colleges], primarily to attend the language development need of the young teacher trainees. The call for applications was to be launched the following August.

Regarding the challenges of implementing long-term educational strategies, it was acknowledged that despite the change in federal administration, the hope was that this initiative to improve the English language level of teachers would continue. However, they recognized that the final outcome remains uncertain, as it will be part of the 2018 [election] debate. "Mexicans will decide whether they want to continue with this model (of education)."

The SEP also announced that, for the first time, English instruction would be introduced to Telesecundaria (televised secondary school) and Telebachillerato (televised high school) students through multimedia materials. It highlighted that the transformation of English teaching, in line with new curricula and study programs, would be encouraged**.**

Once again, the use of technological resources for educational reform in language teaching is emphasized as the saviour that will bring "transformation" to the ELT field, aligned with the institution's six-year plans. However, the completion of this transformation would only be possible if the public votes for this model of education – that is, for the political party proposing it: "Mexicans will decide if they want to continue with this model..."; at the polls, in other words. Educational reform is thus placed in the hands of Mexican society, not the institution responsible for it; a kind of unspoken referendum and with no clear guidance on how to make an informed decision. The project is scheduled for one year to coincide its end with the end of the 6-year presidential period, its continuation to be confirmed, with the voters to decide if the results after one year are valid and the project well-implemented, and controls in place to confirm if this model of promoting student autonomy with technology as the driver rather than technology being part of a mix of strategies driven by the students and guided by the teachers would be any different from the *Encylomedia* and tablet projects of the previous *sexenios* that quietly left the situation as unchanged as that it had promised to change. There is a further disclaimer on the part of the politician that only somebody experienced in managing projects will notice: if there are no results after the initial year, or at least some expected indicators, it will be difficult to identify what to do and who will carry it forward.

We also see the criteria for hiring English teachers for the language development of trainee teachers in the Escuelas Normales announced in the Mexican business magazine *Expansión*:

PIE05: "To apply, firstly, you must have a certification from the University of Cambridge (Proficiency or Advanced). If you do not yet have this, the SEP will cover the cost of this exam for the first 1,000 applicants who register. You then must demonstrate that you possess the necessary teaching skills for teaching English, which means you need these documents: TKT (Teaching Knowledge Test), ICELT (In-Service Certificate in English Language Teaching), or Delta (Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). If you do not have these yet, do not worry: you can participate and complete the required paperwork throughout the process.

You must send your CV with a photo — a maximum of two pages in PDF — highlighting your academic experience, preferably in language teaching, including course instruction, seminars, workshops, tutoring, etc., as well as your professional experience in the public or private sector.

Additionally, a letter of intent, written in English, is required to explain why you want to be an English teacher and the impact you believe English language acquisition will have on the training of elementary school teachers (*normalistas*).

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The English language knowledge test counts for 30%, the teaching skills test for 40%, and a third assessment, which verifies intellectual skills and ethical-professional responsibilities, will make up the remaining 30%. This test consists of 120 multiple-choice questions **to measure communication, study, reflection, and continuous improvement skills."**

It is clear that whoever wants to apply must be legitimized by Cambridge's standards, both in language proficiency and teaching competence. The status of Cambridge English Language Assessment as a stakeholder in educational policy is highly consolidated. There is an implicit commercial agreement between the SEP and British ELT, indicated by two discursive elements in this announcement: the offer to cover certification costs for the first 1,000 applicants and the possibility of obtaining teaching certification – but only from the Cambridge English Language Assessment brand distributed by the British Council in Mexico– either before or during the hiring process. This promotes a certain brand as legitimate above the other national and international certifications recognised by the CENNI vis-a-vis language certification and teacher training at Instituciones de Educación Superior (IES). This impacts decisively on the ideology of stakeholders in the planning of foreign language policy, particularly the gatekeepers involved in hiring those to teach English to the *normalistas*.

It may have also stigmatised those not holding these certifications, as they would not be considered legitimate candidates. Classroom experience would not be important as the indisputable authority on standards would dominate. Besides the legitimate certification, the applicant must also pass a rigorous selection test for language and teaching knowledge, all under the banner of quality and excellence.

A critical stance on this official discourse is presented by the left-wing *La Jornada* newspaper, using the metaphor of "epistemicide", the systematic destruction of systems of knowledge not adhering to a dominant paradigm:

PIE04: "Learning in English transcends the limits of coexistence between languages; it involves thinking and coding learning in English, not while appropriating or practicing it – that would be more logical – [and under this proposal it is] ... for entire days, up to two or three, [in the case of] some subjects on the curriculum, such as science or mathematics. A move to increase the number of hours of a foreign language [on the curriculum] replaces one worldview with another. It is an epistemicidal threat that cannot be taken lightly; languages are not just oral and written expressions in a strict sense, they are systems of thought that also express ways of life. When they die, they take with them knowledge and ways of constructing knowledge that can only be manifested and lived within their linguistic dynamics."

The word "epistemicide" expresses the force and totality of a feared experience portrayed for the reader as the killing of thought, identity and traditions from within, from the local perspective of how knowledge is processed. Knowledge in Mexico is, even now, assumed to be transmitted from an "expert" teacher to passive students. Using AI for research or products is seen by many as "cheating", because the data a person needs about the world is meant to be memorised. From this perspective cognitive development in English at school in Mexico, places Spanish at a supposed risk of extinction, because under this monolingual epistemological model, the human brain must hold all the data it needs about the world with no reference tools allowed; there is not enough "room" for more than one language. The traditional arguments used by reactionary cultures worldwide to stop alien languages encroaching on and possibly undermining the hierarchy of normal discourse are used with force and without basis as they are more powerful when imposed as a zero-sum game. Under this model, bilingualism or plurilingualism can, at best, leave the learner with a shallower mastery of Spanish. It is thus the direct opposite of how an Indonesian, to give just one example of a populous explicitly plurilingual culture, would see the world and diametrically opposed to the CEFR's celebration of linguistic diversity. In Indonesia, it would be seen as highly disadvantageous to the person to speak fewer than 3 Indonesian languages (local, the reginal and the national). Rather than seeing plurilingualism as a possible trigger of cognitive dysfunction, the average Indonesian would see speaking many languages, starting with rich diversity of national languages, and possibly adding English, or Mandarin Chinese, or the dominant dialect of Malaysia as useful and culturally enriching. The "Spanish-under threat of extinction" worldview ironically pays lip service to the "paradigm-shift" in learning and teaching described in the 2001 CEFR document and in the 2018 CEFR document, while at the same time holding

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an opposing attitude to keep psychological dissonance at bay. A growth mindset opens doors, this way of looking at the world keeps them firmly shut. This may be valid, but if the decision is uninformed, unseen opportunities may be lost forever as the rest of the world moves forward and gets familiar with working together, and Mexico sits on its own.

It is ironic that *La Jornada*'s call to protect Mexico's adopted mother tongue (L1) of Spanish also sidelines a minority of **millions** who have an indigenous language as their L1, along with knowledge and perspectives that have survived over thousands of years. These have been gradually eroded by education in Spanish, their L2. There were just over 1.79 million speakers of Nahuatl as a mother tongue in 2020, most of them in Mexico, and there are 66 other indigenous languages in Mexico with a total of just over 350 different linguistic forms. Mexico's linguistic diversity is recognised by UNESCO in their *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger* as part of their global efforts to preserve linguistic diversity. These languages were only officially recognised by Mexico in 2003. Spanish is the 68th national language under the decree of that year and it is not listed in the UNESCO's atlas. The pluricultural and plurlinguistic competencies necessary to celebrate the diversity of human language (much of it on their own doorstep) are not present in the average monolingual Spanish-speaking Mexican. None of the enthusiasm, inclusion, and growth mindset of the polyglot who speaks 10 languages and is busy learning a new 11th, unworried about losing their L1 or experiencing any sense of identity crisis is evident. In this sense, *La Jornada* should not be worried because teachers and parents will ensure that the child remains monocultural. While this is not George Orwell's depiction in *1984* of a Big Brother dictatorship's reduction of the dictionary to one single word that will cover everything you will need to say or think, the ecstatic support of a linguistic "less is more" is the same. Complex language is required for complex thought. Bilingualism or plurilingualism would produce more complex thought, not less of it. The code switcher in Tijuana knows this.

In the following final section of the analysis of the discourse, we will look at what happens at the regional level in terms of foreign language policy to see if these three contexts of international, national, and local voices exhibit trends in common coming from certain causal factors which we should highlight when considering a national language policy for Mexico.

The Local or Regional Voice

La Jornada's protectionist argument for the 68th national language of Mexico is reinforced in the discourse of *Semanario Zeta* when reporting a proposal to expand the teaching of English as a foreign language:

PIE01: "In order to promote the adoption of the English language in preschool and primary schools, where it is only taught as a subject in 9% of schools, we implement it using a conversational approach," said Javier Fernández Aceves, coordinator in the State Educational System.

The coordinator says that they do not aim to implement "academic" English, but rather for the language to become a natural and practical response to fill various spaces where Spanish is normally spoken. As an example, he mentions changing the menus in school cafeterias and various signs from Spanish to English to familiarize students with the graphic aspect of English as well. The irony that understanding signs and menus falls under the CEFR mode of reception rather than interaction (where conversation falls) is lost, momentarily, on the coordinator, one should respectfully assume. However, setting aside any desire to promote conversation in English and addressing the issue of the teaching of other subjects through English, he says that teachers who speak English would be needed; possibly a suggestion that this is a challenge too difficult to overcome. His solution is not as technological as the solution presented in the Estrategia Nacional de Inglés, but reduces or eliminates the need for teachers, and ignores the call of the CEFR for foreign languages to be learned to create speakers who have the agency to effect social change, English will not encroach on the cognitive development of the child in Spanish. It will be a little less foreign, having a presence in familiar homeland spaces, but a "fast food English", kept out of the classroom and relegated to the cafeteria (instead of *sándwich de jitomate*, the English equivalent with a picture, just in case the word sandwich is not understood, and tomato, a "cool" word for shopping visits to San Diego). Is this a "less is more" language policy to shut off the tap of the Mexican brain drain? With English as the language of international scientific research and development, most of these scientists in other countries and not

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mother-tongue English speakers, it will certainly make it more difficult for Mexico's young scientists to communicate with the rest of the world by placing an extra layer of difficulty for them to have a place on the world stage in the future. However, the proactive few who do manage to learn the English for science and technology at their own expense, as well as the corresponding complex language structures not found in one-word plus a picture signage, *and* win a government scholarship will, at least, be able to order a hamburger in whatever country they decide to study, a tasty inheritance bequeathed to them by the education system when they were children.

Voices And Perspectives of the Online Press in the Context of Foreign Language Policy

The public voice of the left in the international arena, marked by the economic value of English in the global space, reveals a struggle between the perceived legitimacy of international testing body Cambridge Language Assessment accredited by the British Council, in supposed representation of the CEFR, and the SEP's own inclusive framework of CENNI, which benchmarks a variety of tests against a national scale of levels, (a scale also benchmarked against the CEFR), and institutions of higher education (IES). The public voice of the right bets, once again, on technology to bring about the miracle of teaching and learning English, regardless of the context or the teachers available to effect any change.

At the national level, characterized by the discourse of modernization, educational quality, and efficiency, the leftist voice denounces the teaching of other subjects on the curriculum through English as "epistemicide", asserting the predominance of Spanish as the language to set the paradigm in Mexico. This is against a backdrop of a Mexico with 68 official languages, in which the community has a right to interact in its various languages and cultures, and English as a lingua franca (ELF) would be a door to communicate with hundreds of nations worldwide, and a backdrop in teachers deprived of their right to a recognized professional identity, labour rights, and participation in decision-making based on their teaching experience in specific contexts. The lack of effective teacher education hinders this process, as the teachers themselves do not assume agency in their own professionalization and are ironically unable to make any informed decisions or form a professional identity. For this reason, in the absence of real political language policy strategy at a federal level, or the will or understanding of the importance of language policy necessary to set one, the stage is set for foreign language policy planning on a micro-level, involving teachers and educating them, to enrich that carried out at a regional and national level. The right-wing voice continues to place its hope in the teaching of English through technology, with scientifically questionable bases, and grounded in the neoliberal ideology of English as the only language with cultural and linguistic capital, hijacking the Cambridge Language Assessment brand and CEFR language levels as unconditional backing and ignoring the fundamental proposals for international understanding of the Framework.

Finally, at the regional level, the left reinforces the representation of epistemicide by proposing to replace Spanish with a weakened "fast-food" English as the language of interaction in the primary education system in spaces where there is little cognitive focus and assuming the supposed "will" of planning stakeholders—teachers and authorities—in accepting this ideology without question. The right, under the ideologeme of "English leads to economic and academic success," comes up with two proposals for creative inclusion, but they fail to stipulate clear or fair labour foundations because they do not fundamentally value the teaching of English as a foreign language. English is a superficial add-on, a nice to have, the wilted lettuce, if you will, in the soggy hamburger that is a neoliberal education.

Conclusions

Upon analysis of the positions on national education policy regarding the teaching and learning of the English language from a foreign language policy perspective, it is necessary to examine current trends in this field, and in the places where educational and language policies are enacted. Our analysis of electronic and print media, which promote actions carried out by the state in favour of students at all educational levels, is significant in showing the blurred actions of Mexico's linguistic reality in terms of foreign language teaching. In this context, we draw the following conclusions:

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In all opinion articles published by Mexican newspapers between 2017 and 2022, the promotion of the actions of the education system in the teaching of English and teacher training is highlighted. Despite Mexico's efforts to support teachers, the lack of a unified language policy across all educational levels has limited its effectiveness. Additionally, the lack of follow-up has made it difficult for teachers to meet the requirements established by institutions. The need to adapt to new English language teaching trends that emerged during the Covid-19 pandemic is evident, especially emphasized professional development in international ELT discourse over the last few decades.

The news articles and opinion pieces analysed fulfil the informative purposes of describing the current language policy on English in Mexico, in line with the linguistic scenarios specific to English language teaching. In this regard, it is necessary to articulate national strategies developed from the highest levels of the Mexican educational system in support of Mexican teachers who teach foreign languages. This would benefit everyone, especially Mexican youth, in creating a country that equips its inhabitants with global competencies.

It is necessary to update the regulatory frameworks and legislation concerning English teaching in Mexico at all levels to meet the demands for quality assurance in foreign language teaching. This would be reflected in the provision of more effective learning syllabi, teacher training, and the systematic assessment and certification of the language for both teachers and students.

English teacher training programs must be improved at all educational levels, in both the private and public sectors.

It is recommended to promote the use of existing professional development programs at affordable costs for teachers who cannot pay for training and increase awareness of self-access (much is already available for free), as well as an understanding of the value of action research to inform teaching practice. The real driver for a clear language policy will come from the teachers themselves. Textbooks and international exams are created based on their expectations, and national language policy can be too.

It is essential to create synergy between federal and state agencies so that all educational institutions develop support programs for teachers to raise the proficiency level of English and the teaching competence of foreign language instructors.

The conclusions presented here stem from viewing the linguistic educational scenario as a fundamental element for the proper functioning of a coherent and participatory language policy, with academia generating new ways to regulate and implement English syllabi for the benefit of the student community.

Currently, the Mexican education system does not carry out coordinated actions across the different levels of language policy planning: local, regional, and national. This leads us to reflect that, in Mexico, the state must re-engage with foreign language teaching policies, aiming to include universities and non-governmental organizations that manage language policy in embassies and consulates. Consequently, articulating actions in favour of English language teaching with the support of the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) and the 32 states in the Mexican federation must also involve the business sector, civil organizations, and associations of foreign language professionals.

In light of this, those who train human talent in foreign language teaching must have a say in decision-making processes that help implement language policies not only at the border but also throughout Mexico. Without a doubt, language policy is lacking in the context of the Mexico-United States border, where no coherent, structured, and consistent foreign language education policy aligns with the reality of its speakers.

Therefore, it is necessary to consider elevating the levels of training in the field of foreign languages at the university level to have highly qualified professionals. Additionally, the university should be seen as the appropriate academic space to generate new ideas, design strategies, and create proposals that support the nation in developing sound public policies on English and the teaching of other languages to build a plurilingual, pluricultural and inclusive society, which already has 68 official languages and in which English

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could be not a 69th, but a strong bridge to understanding and cooperation with the world beyond Mexico's borders.

Declaration of Competing Interest

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Author Contribution

The authors declare that this paper is a reflection of the expertise of all of them in the language teaching field and language policy in Mexico during the last two decades.

Conflict of Interest

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