Article

Didactic Interventions: The Voices of Adult Migrants on Second Language Teaching and Learning in a Rural Area in Chile

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Abstract: Research in Chile, regarding language teaching and learning, has focused on Spanish as a first language (L1). However, due to the growing influx and settlement of non-Spanish-speaking adult migrants, the significance of investigating language education within a second-language (L2)-context has surged. Accordingly, the objective of this study is to examine the implementation of a Spanish language teaching–learning program as an L2 from the learners' perspectives. The ultimate objective is to contribute to the advancement of knowledge in this field within the national framework. This qualitative, descriptive/interpretive study involves 10 adult Haitian migrants who do not speak Spanish and live in a rural area. These participants possess varying educational backgrounds and are situated within a vulnerable context. In pursuit of the objective, two focus groups were convened. The outcomes underscore the pressing need for comprehensive macro-level development, at the governmental level, to address the inclusion of migrants. This entails equipping educators with linguistic proficiency and theoretical and pedagogical expertise for instructing an L2 program. Furthermore, the inclusion of linguistic mediators, a judicious use of the learners' L1 as a pedagogical resource, and the implementation of strategies that cater to individual needs contribute to a more effective and inclusive teaching–learning experience.

Keywords: second language; adult migrant; teaching and learning Spanish; vulnerable; regional area; inclusion

1. Introduction

The world is currently experiencing an unprecedented era of human mobility, which presents novel challenges for fostering social cohesion on a global scale [1]. Consequently, there is a recognized imperative to steer migration policies toward inclusion and the maximization of social mobility opportunities for all, as recognized by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This agenda underscores the positive contributions made by migrants to overall developments [2]. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), there are around 281 million international migrants, with approximately two-thirds of them being employed as workers [3]. Chile is not exempt from this contemporary migratory reality. In recent years, there has been a significant surge in the migrant population, with the percentage rising from 2.6% in 2016 to 7.9% in 2022 [4].

The current state of migration in the nation, characterized by a rich tapestry of cultures and languages, diverges significantly from historical migration trends in Chile, which predominantly welcomed migrants from neighboring countries who shared linguistic commonalities. In contrast, contemporary migration encompasses a substantial presence of non-Spanish-speaking individuals (Some other languages include Mandarin Chinese, Portuguese, English, and German), resulting in a renewed sociocultural landscape of linguistic diversity within the country. This study focuses on Haitian migration, a demographic group

for which quantitative data are lacking, primarily attributed to their limited involvement in large-scale regularization processes. Despite this data constraint, official longitudinal statistics outline a consistent and exponential increase in the Haitian population residing within the country. This upward trajectory is particularly noteworthy, with numbers soaring from 50 Haitian individuals in 2002 [5] to a substantial 185,865 in 2021 [3], signifying a 169% increase. Regarding the demographic characteristics, the available data reveal that 64.1% of them are males, and 92.4% fall within the working-age cohort (Table 1).

Table 1. Haitian migration in Chile by gender and age, estimated by 31 December 2021.

Age	Men	Women	Total
0 to 19	3461	3559	13,136
20 to 39	43,868	27,188	144,470
40 to 59	404	278	27,375
60 to 79	42	69	793
80 and more	58	33	91
Total	119,068	66,797	185,865

Source. [3].

Chile has emerged as a recent migration destination for Haitians [6]. Consequently, there is a dearth of pre-established support networks within the country to facilitate the integration of this particular group. The absence of individuals from one's own country of origin in the host nation compounds the challenges of labor and social, cultural, economic, political, and educational inclusion [7,8]. This demographic confronts a dual dilemma: first, the task of inclusion into a culture distinct from their homeland, and second, the necessity of acquiring a new language, given that the majority of them do not speak Spanish [8]. Toledo [8] further emphasizes that the inability to communicate in the host country's language, combined with the economically disadvantaged nation origin, and the lack of documented educational backgrounds, renders this group exceptionally vulnerable within the host nation. Furthermore, for migrants with little or no formal education, the process of inclusion presents even greater challenges when compared to their more educated counterparts [9,10].

Languages serve as more than just a means of communication; they constitute a lens through which individuals perceive and categorize reality [11]. In Chile, the predominant language for communication is Spanish, acquired from birth and taught as a first language (L1) by educators who undergo comprehensive five-year university training for this purpose. However, when it comes to teaching and learning Spanish as a second language (SL2), there is a noticeable absence of pedagogical preparation programs, although there are a few available [6]. Furthermore, Chile lacks both; a linguistic policy that actively promotes the inclusion of non-Spanish speakers (NSS) and the recognition of the cultural contribution of those who have migrated to the country. Consequently, initiatives focusing on Spanish language instruction for second language (L2) learners, particularly within the Haitian community, have emerged in a reactive, voluntary capacity. These programs are often led by individuals or organizations, and their implementation is primarily localized, lacking government-level coordination or a systematic approach [6]. Similar patterns are observed in other countries, such as Greece [12] and Spain [13,14], suggesting that the integration of migrants remains an evolving global concern. In this context, the objective of this study is to examine, from the learners´ perspectives, the implementation of a Spanish language teaching and learning program as an L2. The aim is to contribute to the advancement of knowledge in this field within a national context.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Second Language Acquisition and Migration

The acquisition of an L2 pertains to a learning process that occurs after mastering one's L1. Nevertheless, distinctions exist in the acquisition processes between L1 and L2,

arising from the observation that, unlike an L1, learning an L2 for adults constitutes a task demanding effort and necessitating explicit learning mechanisms [15]. Achieving proficiency in an L2 throughout one's life is influenced by various cognitive, social, and motivational factors [16]. Ortega [17] highlights that multiple elements play a role in language acquisition, either facilitating or hindering the expected outcomes of learning a target language. In this regard, one's L1 serves as a facilitating element for comprehending meaning during the acquisition of an L2 [18–20]. The utilization of one's L1 in L2 instruction remains a contentious issue that is particularly emphasized in the context of teaching English as a foreign language [21,22], but some studies can also be found in the context of teaching and learning SL2 [23,24].

Generally, adult migrants are among those who face the most significant challenges when endeavoring to acquire an L2, primarily due to their diverse educational backgrounds at the onset of their language-learning journey [18]. Similarly, in accordance with the Critical Period Hypothesis [25], adults engaged in learning an L2 are considered less receptive to inputs compared to children. While adults may attain a proficient command of the L2, they might retain a foreign accent due to having surpassed the critical phase of neuromuscular learning functions [26], which it is not considered to be an aspect that interferes with communication. Another hypothesis that plays a role when learning a language is the Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis developed by Cummins (2000, as cited in [27]). According to this hypothesis, the linguistic skills acquired in one language, such as the learners' native language (L1), can be transferred to another language, the L2. This transfer occurs when L2 learning involves adequate exposure, and when there is motivation to learn it.

The process of acquiring an L2 can occur within formal, informal, or mixed-exposure situations [28]. Formal learning unfolds within a structured classroom environment, whereas informal acquisition takes place in naturalistic contexts devoid of specialized instruction, or in daily interactions within a classroom setting. Mixed learning encompasses both contexts: formal and informal [28]. For this study, an L2 "is typically an official or societally dominant language needed for education, employment, and other basic purposes. It is often acquired by minority group members or immigrants who speak another language natively" [28] (p. 4). In this sense, it is crucial to underscore that attaining proficiency in an L2 holds significant implications for migrants. It holds the potential to break down barriers that hinder linguistic progress among individuals immersed in the host society. According to Field and Ryan [29], the educational experience of adults who embark on the learning of an L2 can bestow a substantial advantage, particularly when compared to those who lack formal schooling. Nonetheless, it remains unclear which specific aspects of schooling confer benefits for subsequent language acquisition. Another point to consider, in the realm of applied linguistics, is age. It emerges as a pivotal determinant in L2 learning [30,31]. Consequently, both the age and the social context of a learner play crucial roles in facilitating language acquisition among adult migrants.

Building upon the aforementioned insights, Morrice et al. [32] emphasize the imperative of recognizing the diverse array of migrants, each possessing distinct capabilities, opportunities, and learning requirements. These nuances often go unconsidered, as the prevailing public objective often prioritizes swift labor market entry and rapid L2 acquisition. This perspective aligns with the observations made by Schepens et al. [31], who assert that successful communication in an L2 by adult learners necessitates the acquisition of syntactic structures, lexical elements, morphological paradigms, and phonological properties—an aspect that ought to be considered during the teaching process.

Consequently, the process of learning and acquiring an L2 exhibits varying levels of complexity contingent upon factors such as the learner's age, educational and cultural background, as well as their motivation to develop the needed skills for seamless inclusion into the host community.

As noted by Fritzler [33], the acquisition of an L2 encompasses not only knowledge and experiences but also actions and meanings. These elements collectively contribute to

cultural and social practices that emerge through intercultural exchanges and continuous evolution, rooted in new paradigms.

2.2. Spanish as a Second Language in Chile

Chile is recognized as a multicultural and plurilingual nation, with Spanish (or the linguistic variety of Chilean Spanish) serving as the de facto language and the primary language of administration [34]. It should be noted that Spanish is considered a de facto language, as it lacks official status, and there is no mention of language in the Chilean Constitution. Furthermore, Spanish is the predominant language of instruction in Chile, classified as the L1; therefore, it is an integral component of the national school curriculum, spanning both primary and secondary education. Within this educational context, teachers undergo a comprehensive five-year university-level training program geared toward instructing Spanish as an L1. However, this training does not encompass the pedagogical nuances required for teaching SL2. In regard to the educational and academic arena related to L2 teachers, it is restricted to a limited number of courses and diploma programs offered by tertiary education institutions [6]. In Spain, a situation analogous to that observed in Chile appears to be unfolding, where the educational system lacks the necessary resources for prospective teachers of SL1 to effectively instruct the language as an L2 to migrants [13].

The issue of SL2 education in Chile has gained prominence in recent years, marked by a significant surge in publications, research projects, conferences, postgraduate degree programs, and workshops dedicated to this field. This surge can be attributed primarily to the influx of Haitian migrants into the country. Consequently, various educational institutions, social organizations, and religious foundations have reactively emerged, offering courses primarily focused on teaching Spanish to this migratory group centered on adults. Regarding migrant children and adolescents who have enrolled in the Chilean school system, their numbers have quadrupled, increasing from 30 thousands to 113 thousand students between 2015 and 2018 [35]. Previous research on this demographic has predominantly concentrated on themes such as educational inclusion [36–38] and the right to education [39]. However, there is a notable scarcity of research addressing linguistic inclusion, with the few available studies primarily focusing on adults [8,40–42].

Sumonte Rojas et al. [6] provide an overview of the programs and courses developed in the country for teaching and learning SL2, categorizing them according to the framework proposed by Chua and Baldauf [43]. The first category, the micro level, pertains to programs that are formalized and possess a comprehensive curriculum for academic implementation. These programs are equipped with allocated budgets for instructional materials and employ specialist teachers who are hired specifically to teach the language. Adequate classroom space and technological resources are also made available. These programs are designed for individuals intending to study abroad or work in the country and, for the most part, their stay in Chile is not permanent. These learners are required to pay for the service [44,45]. On the other hand, the infra-micro level refers to courses designed to teach Spanish to Haitian migrants. These programs lack an annual budget and are often facilitated by volunteers who may not necessarily be language specialists. Classroom availability is not consistently guaranteed, and the curriculum is tailored to suit specific timeframes.

The Chilean Ministry of Education acknowledges the educational and linguistic requirements of both migrant children and adolescents as well as adults. Consequently, it actively promotes a set of general guidelines aimed at incorporating an intercultural approach into educational practices [46]. Despite these efforts, there is currently no curriculum offering specific directives to facilitate the implementation of these guidelines at the school level. Therefore, in response to the imperative to address migration-related challenges, schools have independently formulated and executed reception initiatives based on their own learning, thereby facilitating the inclusion of recently arrived individuals in the country [47]. For adults who have not completed primary and secondary education, the Ministry of Education facilitates their educational integration through a program known as the Education of Young People and Adults. Similarly, for young children, the Ministry

provides general guidelines [48], allowing the educational system to implement measures in accordance with its understanding of this new challenge facing society as a whole.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Method

The study follows a qualitative methodology, focusing on investigating the perception of learners regarding the process of acquiring an L2 within a migration context. The primary objective is to delve into the subjective interpretations and understandings held by learners concerning their educational experience in this specific intervention. This qualitative approach seeks to uncover how learners conceptualize, represent, and attribute significance to the teaching and learning of an L2, all while considering their unique migratory circumstances [49,50]. The rationale behind choosing qualitative methodology stems from the project's overarching aim and objectives. It aligns with the objective of identifying and comprehending the qualitative attributes and characteristics of symbolic meaning associated with the participants' experiences [51,52].

It is important to note that the methodological limitation of the study is that the results cannot be generalized and applied to all migrants who have arrived to the country. However, generalization is not the main purpose of qualitative research [53]. Instead, qualitative research aims to explore individual experiences, provide a deeper understanding of the social interactions and offer insight into particular cases, something that quantitative research cannot fully achieve.

3.2. Context and Participants

The educational intervention program involved, in total, 50 adult Haitian migrants from two cities located in rural areas of Chile. These participants were seeking to achieve proficiency in Spanish. Their ages ranged from 22 to 52 years old (mean age = 34.8 years old and SD = 8.8 years). The educational background of the participants was diverse: 15 of them had completed primary education, 29 had studied secondary education, and 6 had pursued university studies (5 of whom did not complete it). The data provided in this research align with the participants' self-reported educational levels, as many of them lacked documents that could verify their reported educational backgrounds.

Out of the 50 learners, 10 of them voluntarily agreed to take part in the focus groups (4 men and 1 woman in each group), including the students who performed the best in the diagnostic test. Their ages ranged from 22 to 40 years old (mean age = 29.5 years old and SD = 6.32 years). In relation to their educational background: three of them completed their primary education, five finished their secondary education, one pursued university studies without completing the program, and one successfully completed university studies. The chosen areas for this study exhibit sociocultural diversity due to the amalgamation of urban and rural contexts. They are also culturally diverse, primarily due to the arrival of various migrant groups attracted by employment opportunities, especially in agricultural activities. Additionally, these rural areas rank first and second in terms of the number of Haitian residents in the entire region, with a majority of them being men (70%). The sample is intentionally non-probabilistic. In this sampling method, subjects are chosen for the focus groups based on their significance as sources of information, guided by predetermined criteria [54]. The rationale behind selecting this sample lies in the irregular attendance of learners, as not all of them would have been exposed to the majority of the curriculum implemented. This irregularity in attendance is also highlighted by Toledo [8]. Consequently, it became necessary to establish specific inclusion criteria or a participant profile [55]. In this context, the program's learners were approached regarding their availability and interest in participating in a focus group. The inclusion criteria were twofold: learners had to demonstrate their willingness to participate and provide evidence of having attended at least 80% of the program. The learners who agreed to participate were the ones who best performed during classes.

3.3. Data Collection

The data collection technique employed in this study consisted of conducting two focus groups after the educational intervention. Their purpose was to facilitate controlled discussions among a group of individuals who convene at a designated time to explore a specific topic [56]. In this research, the focus was on understanding the participants' perceptions of the SL2 educational intervention. This approach aims to encourage dialogue whereby participants exchange ideas and express their opinions, without necessarily aiming for consensus [54,57]. The focus groups were conducted by one of the researchers within the classroom where the educational intervention took place, based on the students´ day and time availability. A set of questions, validated by a panel of experts and subsequently approved by the Institution´s Scientific Ethics Committee, was used. These questions pertained to the students´ perspectives on the implementation of the SL2 program. Although both Spanish and Haitian Creole were proposed as discussion languages, the participants themselves chose to use Spanish. This choice is noteworthy as it underscores their strong interest in demonstrating their language learning progress, even if their speech might contain grammatical errors or limited vocabulary. This reflects their genuine need and eagerness to learn and utilize the language effectively. It is important to highlight that learners, LMs, and teachers in charge of the instruction signed their informed consent. To enhance learners´ comprehension of the informed consent, it was delivered in Haitian Creole. This study is part of a larger project, namely the Fondecyt Iniciation Project, Reference N° 11190448.

Intervention

(1)   Program for Teaching Spanish as a Second Language in a Migratory Context (ESL©M)

The educational program for teaching and learning SL2, targeting non-Spanish-speaking migrants, was designed based on prior experiences, as well as national-level research on the area [8,40,58–60]. As these students are adults, the Critical Period Hypothesis [25] is taken into consideration in the design of the intervention. This involves greater emphasis on pronunciation practice, listening activities, and morphosyntactic skills. This approach aimed to advance and solidify teaching methods that facilitate the acquisition of an L2, regardless of the migrant's native language or country of origin. Spanish is acquired, taught, and learned as an L1 in Chile; hence, it is a challenge to teach and learn it as an L2. This program is guided by two academics; one of them specialized in the teaching and acquisition of Spanish as L1, and the other had expertise in teaching an L2. This form of collaborative work represents one of the initial instances experienced in Chile. The instructional team responsible for teaching the program is integrated by six teachers undergoing training in SL1 (three in each city) who voluntarily agreed to participate in this program. In general, the SL2 programs that have arisen in Chile are predominantly led by volunteers who are not educators or whose profession is not directly linked to language instruction, as observed in the instances of Rubio and Rubio [61] and Toledo et al. [60]. Two linguistic mediators (LMs, one in each city) were also involved. The LM emerges as a significant figure in the teaching–learning process of an L2 and serves as a bridge between speakers [62]. LMs are defined as individuals who serve as intermediaries, bridging the gap between L1 and L2 in both formal and informal educational settings, shaped by the convergence of culturally recognized backgrounds [41]. Serra and Vila [63] highlight that the LM should possess competencies in both languages (in this case, Spanish and Haitian Creole) as well as professional pedagogical skills. In this particular context, the observation made by Serra and Vila is partially met; while both LMs are fluent in both languages, they lack pedagogical expertise. One of them is a nurse, while the other has a tourism guide certification. Additionally, one of these mediators has prior experience in language instruction, having been involved in programs within the country dedicated to teaching Haitian Creole to staff members of public institutions [41,58].

(2)   Pre-Intervention Phase: Contextual Understanding

Preliminary work sessions were conducted with the teachers responsible for guiding each session and the LMs. These sessions aimed to share insights into the cultural facets of Haiti and the theoretical approaches to the teaching and learning an L2. Liddicoat and Scarino [64] emphasize the importance of initiating language acquisition processes, particularly for languages other than one's L1, with a foundation of cultural knowledge among all participants involved in the educational endeavor. Consequently, one of the LMs assumed the role of sharing significant aspects of her language and culture, and one of the academics was in charge of sharing L2 teaching and learning approaches. These pre-intervention sessions served as a cornerstone for the program, as they enabled the instructors to embark on the process of constructing an understanding of the other based on shared linguistic and cultural references [58]. Vilà [65] underscores how this approach contributes to preparing all stakeholders to communicate effectively in a pluralistic society, without necessitating the relinquishment of one's own cultural identity. This cultural knowledge facilitates program adjustments, explicitly incorporating components related to both the host society and the Haitians´ culture.

(3)   Educational Intervention Summary

Upon commencing the educational intervention, the first session begins with the presentation of the intervention conducted collaboratively with the LMs. It is a critical component aimed at establishing a foundation of trust [65]. This trust-building process is fundamental to facilitating the acquisition of SL2 during the educational intervention.

The program spans two months with a two-hour meeting held weekly. Prior to the commencement of the program, a diagnostic test is administered to assess the four linguistic skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening (the specific results of this test will be outlined in a forthcoming article). The design of the diagnostic test adheres to the guidelines established by Dimova et al. [66]. As per these authors, the diagnostic test offers valuable insights for both educators and students. It serves to pinpoint students´ strengths and weaknesses, and, equally importantly, it enables the curriculum to be tailored to meet the specific needs of the students [66]. The evaluated individuals demonstrated a Spanish language proficiency ranging from pre-A to B2, as per the Instituto Cervantes Standards [67]. Notably, five students were assessed at the B2 level. In light of this information, the program was adapted accordingly.

The curriculum design relies on themes distributed across pedagogical units, predominantly integrating linguistic knowledge with a secondary emphasis on cultural understanding. These units are centered around everyday topics like family, work, and the city. In essence, the curriculum aligns with the context and needs of the students, emphasizing authentic, coherent, and meaningful educational practices [40]. As an illustration, the primary focus of the family unit centers on leaning on it through the use of vocabulary and linguistic elements that enhance conversational proficiency. Similarly, within the cultural component of this unit, the intention is to exchange typical family customs prevalent in both the students' home country and that of the instructors. Each session is structured in three distinct stages (Figure 1).
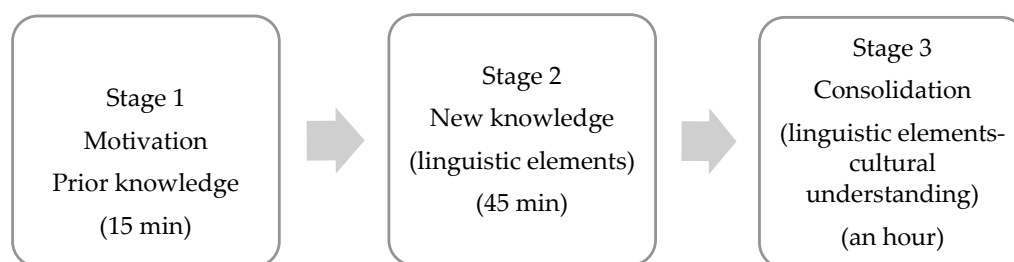

Figure 1. Session stages.

In stage 1, aimed at fostering motivation and revisiting content covered in the previous class, a mime game is employed. During this activity, students are tasked with deducing and expressing, either in writing or speech, the actions (verbs) demonstrated by the teacher. This activity has a duration of 15 min. The pedagogical unit is structured in accordance with the Presentation, Practice, and Production (PPP) methodology, suggested for students at basic levels of proficiency in the target language; this approach involves the teacher offering ample scaffolding to facilitate the learning process [68]. To begin the session, one of the instructors clarifies the class topic and outlines the specific learning objective. Subsequently, the vocabulary associated with family members is introduced using a handout (Appendix A), identifying each one of them (Figure 2).

| Pedagogical Unit: Me and my family |
| Objective: The students will be able to introduce themselves and their family members |

Presentation Family members Personal pronouns Possessive pronouns	**Practice** How do I introduce myself and my family?	**Production** Introducing myself and my family

Figure 2. Pedagogical unit structure.

The students engage in collaborative learning using the provided worksheet, verbally practicing the family vocabulary. Subsequently, the instructor illustrates this by inscribing the names of her own family members beneath each corresponding drawing, prompting students to replicate the exercise. Following this, the lesson progresses to an exploration of pronouns (Appendix B). Through this process, simple sentences are constructed, enabling students, in the final stage, to articulate introductions encompassing themselves and their families, for example, ella es tu mamá. In the last stage, students gather in pairs, introduce themselves and their family. The group of students identified at level B2 collectively engaged in the same unit. Nonetheless, the tasks assigned to them possessed a heightened level of complexity. This included tasks such providing detailed narration, employing complex sentence structures, and engaging in a fluent conversation with one of the teachers, regarding their personal and family activities. Then, the teacher shares activities that a Chilean family generally does on weekends. Simultaneously, students contribute to the discussion by sharing their own experiences. For instance, a custom, within the learner community, involves attending church on weekends, reflecting the religious nature of their local context.

Throughout each session, learners undertake their assigned tasks individually. Collaborative group work (2, 4 or 5 learners) is sporadically encouraged, with the limitations imposed by the COVID-19 situation. The group assignments aim to foster cooperative efforts among learners, enabling them to collectively tackle tasks and enhance their oral expression in Spanish.

3.4. Data Analysis

The data analysis followed the content analysis approach [69], and was supported by the NVivo 11 software. To analyze and derive meaningful categories, the researchers adopted the methodology proposed by McIntosh and Morse [70], which employs an inductive search based on categorization as the primary analytical tool, leading to theoretical construction. The initial step involved a thorough review of the transcripts, guided by the central question: What do the data tell us? [71], with a focus on the research objectives. This process generated a substantial number of codes. Subsequently, the researchers identified

similarities among these codes, grouping and regrouping them as needed. This iterative process facilitated the development of descriptive and explanatory categories centered around key themes. The final phase of analysis involved theoretical elaboration, aimed at comprehensively analyzing the implementation of the SL2 educational program from the learners' perspectives. To enhance the reliability of the analyses, the researchers initially applied their coding strategies independently. They subsequently convened to employ a negotiated agreement approach [72], ensuring consensus in the interpretation of the data. It is noteworthy that the researchers possessed an equal level of expertise in the subject matter being studied, which bolstered the rigor of the analysis.

4. Results

4.1. General Overview

Table 2 presents the deductive global category that serves as the starting point for the analysis. Subsequently, two initial inductive categories emerge, representing the curricular development and the social context established by the participants. These initial categories serve as the main contexts from which perceptions develop. The primary categories that stem from these initial categories are presented in alignment with the coding of the interviews, which constitute primary-level documents [55]. In other words, they reflect the discourses that emerged during the focus group discussions. Each speech is identified by the following format: the focus group and its number (FG1–FG2), followed by the interviewee number (I1), resulting in FG1–I1. This format ensures a clear reference to the source of each statement within the analysis.

Table 2. Systematization of qualitative results.

Global Category	Initial Category	Descriptor	Primary Category
Perception of SL2 teaching and learning	Curricular Development	Category that gathers information about the implementation components of the program.	Teachers Learning strategies Linguistic mediator
	Social Context	Category that collects information about the individual social context of the participants.	Literacy Quality of life Learning environment factors

4.2. The Perception of SL2 Teaching and Learning

4.2.1. Curricular Development: Teachers

This primary category pertains to the efforts made by the instructors responsible for teaching SL2. This instructional team involves Spanish teachers in training and Haitian LMs. It is necessary to keep in mind that the training of prospective Spanish teachers focuses on Spanish as an L1. They attend a regional university, they are in the final year of their professional training, and they do not receive specific training to teach the language as an L2. The SL2 program is implemented using a co-teaching approach, wherein three teachers are present in the classroom, accompanied by an LM, as mentioned earlier. The co-teaching model is advantageous as it allows for simultaneous attention on the students' needs and facilitates smoother progress in Spanish language acquisition. For the learners, this approach translates to effective learning in mastering linguistic skills in the language. When tasks are assigned, one of the teachers provides instructions, while the others move around the classroom to address any questions that may arise.

> *The teachers are excellent; when they teach us, we understand because they are so effective. Having three teachers in the room is really beneficial because if I have a question about what one teacher is explaining, I can easily call another teacher and seek clarification. This way, I do not have to wait because sometimes everyone has questions at the same time. (FG1–I1)*

The teachers are genuinely concerned about our progress, and they put in a lot of effort to help us communicate effectively in Spanish. (FG1–I3)

The learners' remarks underline their deep appreciation for the teachers' work and the vital roles each teacher plays in facilitating co-teaching within the classroom, ultimately enhancing their language learning experience. They highly value being instructed by teachers who possess a mastery of all linguistic components of the target language. This proficiency assists them in achieving proficiency in the standard language, which, in the learners' words, is characterized by its formal and correct usage—precisely the form of Spanish they hope to learn. Furthermore, the learners commend the environment of respect and equality that prevails in the classes. They note that participants feel encouraged to engage with questions, comments, and proposals, with the assurance that each intervention is considered and heard by all participants. This environment of inclusivity and active participation is actively fostered by the teachers, enhancing the overall learning experience.

At the national level, the Chilean Ministry of Education provides curricular guidelines for the teaching of SL1 to students who have naturally acquired the language. Consequently, teaching SL2 has posed a significant challenge for educators involved in the inclusion of migrants through SL2 instruction. Several difficulties have emerged in this context, including the need to adapt theoretical and practical knowledge to a diverse reality. As primary L1 teachers, they instruct based on a theoretical framework that diverges from the one associated with the L2. Consequently, the instructional materials are also chosen in alignment with this theoretical foundation.

4.2.2. Curricular Development: Learning Strategies

In this primary category, learners express a preference for individualized learning as a teaching strategy. They associate this preference with the heterogeneity of competencies among students within the classroom. Learners believe that forming groups may hinder the learning outcomes, especially for those who are more advanced in their language skills. They observe that some of their classmates progress at a slower pace, and that knowledge levels vary. Consequently, working individually is seen as respecting each person's unique learning rhythm, and enables progress in tasks. Additionally, learners highlight the significance of receiving feedback from the teacher on individually completed tasks. This entails that upon the student´s completion of the assigned task, the teacher not only reviews the answer but also collaborates with the student to analyze the reasons behind that particular outcome. They perceive that successfully completing assigned tasks without external support contributes significantly to their sense of progress, self-satisfaction, and confidence in their educational journey. Individualized learning allows learners to take ownership of their learning process and achievements.

I prefer to work individually because that allows me to think. I construct sentences on my own, without anyone telling me how to do it or offering assistance. I find that I can think more effectively on my own rather than in a group, and my teacher can provide feedback on whether it's correct or needs improvement. (FG2–I3)

Not all my classmates have the same pace, and not everyone comprehends what the teachers are teaching quickly. So, I learn better when I work on my own. (FG1–I4)

These statements highlight the learners' preference for individualized learning, citing benefits such as enhanced critical thinking, autonomy, and the ability to accommodate varying learning speeds and levels of understanding among their peers. Although individual work was not the sole teaching methodology employed, the class scheduling and planning prioritized and encouraged this strategy as a precautionary measure to mitigate potential health complications during the pandemic. In relation to the learning materials used, such as guides, videos, games, and presentations, these were all custom-created by the teachers, as there was not a specific textbook available. Upon consulting the learners, they emphasized the significant value to the guides to foster a mastery of Spanish grammar. While the learners expressed a keen interest in mastering the syntax of the language, they also

expressed a need for a more communicative approach that includes pronunciation practice. Pronunciation, in particular, was identified as one of the more challenging components of the language for them.

> *We need more practice in communication and pronunciation. Haitian Creole is quite different in terms of communication and pronunciation; it has different sounds. (FG2–I5)*

4.2.3. Curricular Development: Linguistic Mediators

In this primary category, as mentioned before, Spanish teachers, who are responsible for teaching the language, present no knowledge of the language spoken by the Haitian learners and have little familiarity with Haitian culture. This deficiency poses challenges in certain aspects of teaching the L2. In this context, LMs play a crucial role as intermediaries between the two groups, bridging the gap between their respective societies. The LMs are fluent in both languages, Haitian Creole and Spanish. This linguistic and cultural proficiency enables them to facilitate effective communication and understanding between the learners and the teachers, contributing significantly to the success of the SL2 program.

> *Having a fellow countryman/-woman in the room [Haitian LM] is very beneficial for us. Sometimes, despite the teachers' best efforts to make us understand everything, there are moments when we still struggle to comprehend. In those situations, she explains things to us in Haitian Creole, which helps us grasp the concepts without slowing down our learning. It enables us to progress more rapidly. (FG2–I4)*

The LMs have resided in the country for approximately five years, which means they not only have a command of the language but also possess valuable knowledge about the local context. This contextual knowledge becomes particularly relevant when the class materials include concepts or references that might be unfamiliar to the learners. For instance, in one of the work guides, there was a reference to the concept of a stop sign that the students did not understand. In this case, the LMs were able to explain that there is no equivalent concept of a stop sign in Haiti, which was challenging for the learners to grasp because they did not have contextual knowledge meaning. The linguistic mediator´s ability to bridge these cultural and linguistic gaps is invaluable in helping learners fully understand the material. The students acknowledged that working with Haitian mediators has significantly expedited their learning process. The LMs support the L2 learning, in the understanding that the learners are exposed to inputs tailored to their interlanguage [73], along with corrective feedback in a relationship of greater trust compared to the one they might have with the teacher in charge of the class.

> *It is really beneficial to have them in our class because there are words that we do not understand, and she [the Haitian LM] knows more. She tells us what these words mean in Haitian Creole, which makes it much clearer for us. We don't waste time trying to figure things out, she does her job really well. She is a great help. (FG1–I3)*

The learners also emphasized the considerable linguistic differences between their L1 and Spanish, which has a notable impact on their learning process. Once more, LMs support in bridging linguistic and cultural gaps, enabling the learners to make rapid progress in their language acquisition journey. The students' linguistic repertoire in the Spanish language is limited. While some researchers [74,75] advocate against the use of the learners' native language (L1) in the process of acquiring an L2, arguing that it does not necessarily promote mastery of the L2, in this specific context, this data suggest that the use of the L1 not only facilitates learning but also enhances learners' motivation. In fact, the practice of using two different languages within the classroom, known as code-switching, is a natural phenomenon that supports communication, teaching, learning, and reflection in bilingual and multilingual contexts [76]. In this case, code-switching is a valuable tool that aids in bridging language gaps, promoting comprehension, and maintaining learners' engagement and motivation.

4.2.4. Social Context: Literacy

In this primary category, it becomes evident that the learners' prior educational backgrounds, specifically the education they received in Haiti, vary considerably. Some learners completed primary education, while others pursued secondary or even university education (though this latter group is a minority). Regardless of their educational level, these individuals bring with them a wealth of information, prior knowledge, and linguistic awareness that continues to evolve and enrich their learning process [77,78]. Consequently, it can be inferred that these learners possess a level of critical thinking and questioning skills, and they are not starting as a blank slate [79]. This is further evidenced in their observations about languages in the country, where they note the existence of two types of Spanish: informal Spanish (colloquial) and formal Spanish (standard). Their awareness of these language variations indicates a level of linguistic sensitivity and engagement in understanding and adapting to their new linguistic and cultural environment.

I want to learn the Spanish of the Chileans, but the formal one—the one the teacher speaks—because I can learn the other type of Spanish on the street, without studying. (FG2–I1)

For the learners, formal language plays a crucial role in their employment prospects. They recognize that being able to communicate formally, especially during job interviews, can significantly impact their ability to secure employment more quickly and at higher wages. Additionally, learners who have completed university-level education expressed that their level of schooling has an impact on their ability to learn a second language, in this case, Spanish. They observed that their classmates who have completed only primary studies might face greater challenges in the language learning process.

If a person did not go to school, or attended very little, it is more challenging to learn anything. (FG1–I4)

This discourse aligns with the Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis (Cummins, 2000, as cited in [27]), considering that the learners in this study are exposed to L2 learning in a formal setting, and they exhibit motivation to acquire the L2, despite their individual circumstances that led them to participate in this course.

4.2.5. Social Context: Quality of Life

In this primary category, the importance of learning Spanish for the participants is multifaceted, ranging from learning it out of obligation to sheer necessity. These varied motivations align with the findings of Ávila Muñoz [11], and ultimately converge on a common goal: to enhance their quality of life for themselves and their families. For some participants, mastering the target language is not solely about finding employment but also about securing long-term job stability, which they recognize is essential for improving their overall quality of life.

I think, Jacques, you must learn Spanish well to communicate with people. It is also crucial for my job; I could risk losing my job if my boss gives me an instruction and I do not understand it. (FG1–I3)

For some participants, the fundamental goal was to integrate fully into Chilean society, to become active members with equal rights and privileges as the native citizens. These rights encompass education, employment, culture, and social inclusion, as well as the absence of discrimination. Regarding educational rights, participants were aware of the agreements between Chile and Haiti that recognize primary and secondary education. However, these agreements do not extend to university studies. Unfortunately, many of them lack documents that can validate their educational backgrounds, which means that those who wish to continue their studies often need to start at the primary level. This situation results in a significant disparity in educational levels among adult Haitian migrant students, distinguishing them from other migrant groups [6].

4.2.6. Social Context: Learning Environment Factors

This primary category pertains to the learning environment factors where learners find themselves, which, according to their statements, can either facilitate or hinder the acquisition of the L2. This environment is influenced by various factors, including age, motivation, employment status, the social group with which one interacts, the length of stay in the country, and gender.

The participants suggested that older individuals might encounter greater difficulties in learning Spanish, which they attributed to their cognitive capacity compared to younger individuals. They also noted that some Haitian migrants who have been in Chile for more than five years still struggle to speak Spanish, often due to age-related challenges or a lack of motivation. These individuals tend to speak Haitian Creole because they primarily interact with fellow Haitians who share their native language. This situation highlights the fact that, even after several years in the country, some Haitians have not effectively acquired Spanish language skills. In contrast, younger Haitian migrants who work and interact with Spanish-speakers find it easier to integrate with and communicate in the host society language. Employment status becomes a significant factor in language learning, as it promotes daily interactions in Spanish-speaking settings.

> *My compatriots in Chile who live only with Haitians, speak only Haitian Creole, it is more difficult for them, even though they have arrived many years ago, but I work with Chileans, so I talk with them. (FG2–I1)*

The motivations of the Haitian migrant community in Chile to learn the Spanish language, particularly in a formal context, vary among individuals. Some students express a desire to access higher-skilled job opportunities and pursue careers beyond low-skilled positions like construction, cleaning, and agriculture. They aspire to develop a broader skill set and believe that acquiring Spanish is essential for achieving these goals. On the other hand, for another group of students, entering the workforce is paramount. Consequently, their primary interest is not focused on understanding the language at an academic level, but rather on a professional one. This reflects a more pragmatic approach, where language acquisition is viewed as a tool for securing work and ensuring understanding of contractual obligations. The participants also noted that gender dynamics play a role in language learning. In a society with significant gender disparities, it is often the men who attend language classes, while women may accompany their partners to classes but have limited interaction with Chilean society. This highlights the need for addressing gender inequalities and ensuring equitable access to language education opportunities for all members of the migrant community [80].

5. Discussion

The learners' perspectives on the process of teaching and learning SL2 provide valuable insights that should be taken into account when designing and implementing future L2 teaching programs in contexts where L2 education is relatively new. One crucial aspect highlighted by the learners is the importance of having teachers who possess a strong command of the target language, and the pedagogical knowledge to teach it. But, it also requires theoretical and cultural knowledge to teach SL2 effectively. While the teachers in this study had experience in teaching SL1 to native school students, the complexities of teaching it as an L2 to migrant, vulnerable, and adult learners require specialized training and awareness. Preparing teachers to address the unique needs and challenges of this context would lead to more successful and professional outcomes. This aligns with the recommendations of Carmona [81], and Níkleva and García-Viñolo [14], who emphasize the importance of teacher preparation in areas such as communicative competence, intercultural understanding, innovative pedagogical approaches, and the creation of a trusting learning environment. Thus, the curricular development of an L2 teacher training program for migrants should prioritize teacher training to ensure that educators are well-equipped to meet the diverse needs of learners in these contexts.

Teachers should have extensive knowledge about bilingualism in order to better understand and support those they will work with [82].

As outlined in the preceding text, it is evident that these teachers are primarily equipped for instructing their L1 rather than an L2. Within this framework, it is recommended that Spanish language teacher training programs incorporate curricular activities tailored to address this specific field. Alternatively, it is proposed that the creation of enhancement courses should be aimed at enabling these instructors to acquire both theoretical knowledge and the practical skills necessary for effective engagement in an SL2 teaching–learning environment.

Another important aspect is the inclusion of LMs. In this research, LMs were demonstrated, indeed, to be a valuable pedagogical strategy in L2 teaching programs, especially when dealing with migrant populations who have significant linguistic and cultural differences from those of the target language and culture [40,58,59]. In accordance with Serra and Vila [63], the LM is expected to possess a mastery in both the target language and the language of the students, in addition to pedagogical skills. However, in this research, it is observed that the LMs lack these pedagogical skills inherent in teachers. Simultaneously, the teachers exhibit a lack of awareness concerning the students´ language and culture, a contrast to the LMs who possess this knowledge. In this context, the collaborative group (teachers and LMs) that guides each session becomes a cohesive unit, providing the curriculum with the requisite knowledge to positively influence students learning—a quality highly valued by the students themselves. Thus, LMs serve as an essential bridge between learners and educators, aiding in the facilitation of effective communication and comprehension. Moreover, the importance of personalized support and tailored strategies for individual learners cannot be overstated. Recognizing and addressing the diverse needs and backgrounds of learners is essential for establishing a positive and inclusive learning environment [83].

In relation to the use of the learners' first language as a pedagogical resource, this is aligned with research findings in similar contexts [18]. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach to using the L1 in L2 classrooms, there are situations where incorporating it can enhance the learning process. This is particularly valuable when the L1 is significantly different from the target language, as it can aid in clarifying complex concepts, providing explanations, and ensuring learners understand instructions and content effectively.

Regarding the program´s evolution, it receives positive evaluations from learners. Nevertheless, occasional negative aspects tied to the social context in which they are immersed may potentially impede their learning process. Kyrligkitsi and Mouti [18] mark the various requirements that lead migrants to learn the language; these are related to the discourses of the participants of this research, where the learners often perceive learning the language as a necessity rather than an opportunity, viewing it as an essential tool to fulfill basic requirements such as finding and securing employment and accessing public services. This perspective aligns with findings from other studies that emphasize the practical and survival-related motivations driving migrants to acquire a new language [83].

As such, understanding the history and context from which learners come from is indeed crucial in designing effective language acquisition programs. Recognizing that many migrants face significant challenges and barriers, including vulnerabilities and gaps in their educational backgrounds, is essential for program developers and educators. By comprehending these challenges and motivations, language acquisition programs can be tailored to address the specific needs and goals of the learners. This might involve developing curricula that focus on the practical language skills needed for daily life, employment, and accessing education and essential services. Hence, the analysis conducted in this study reveals that learners exhibit a positive disposition toward the program's development. Nonetheless, there are instances where their attitudes become less favorable due to the individual context in which they find themselves, potentially hindering their learning route. Thus, fostering a positive learning environment that motivates and supports learners is vital. Providing resources, such as LMs who bridge language and cultural gaps,

and considering the social context of each learner can contribute to more effective language acquisition programs. It is essential to acknowledge that, for many migrants, language learning is not merely an academic pursuit, but a means of empowerment and integration into their host society.

In conclusion, it is important to acknowledge that the field of SL2 teaching and learning is still in its early stages of development in the country. Therefore, further theoretical and empirical research in this area is essential for its growth and refinement. There are several avenues for future research in this domain. Firstly, it would be valuable to conduct in-depth investigations into the learners' preferences for formal language over informal/colloquial language. While learners express a clear preference for formal language, it is essential to understand the reasons behind this choice. Informal language, although considered incorrect by the learners, is a linguistic variety prevalent in Chilean society. According to Chaput et al. (2015, as cited in [11]) and Regan et al. [84], it is possible to establish that colloquial language, as mentioned by the learners, is composed of linguistic elements and functions that generate social cohesion among the community and distinguishes them from more general linguistic communities. A failure to grasp this language could potentially isolate migrant groups from this social cohesion, prompting them to reject learning or using colloquial language.

The advancement in curricular development should not be limited to preparing learners for linguistic mastery of the language but should also encompass the encouragement of preserving their own language and culture. At the same time, this advancement has to be supported at a macro level (government) by offering curricular guidelines and specialized Spanish teacher training programs. Culturally responsive teaching approaches should be integrated, incorporating the experiences and knowledge of learners into their learning processes [85,86]. A pedagogy grounded in cultural responsibility acknowledges the roles of both educators and learners in co-constructing their learning experiences through intercultural competence, effectively serving as agents of change [87,88].

The absence of governmental public policies to support the language domain exacerbates difficulties for learners. In this context, the current proposal is expected to transition from the micro to the macro level [43]. This implies that the instruction of SL2 should not solely rest on local institutions, such as educational institutions and/or religious groups, but should instead be integrated into a broader state linguistic policy [6]. It is essential to recognize that establishing an inclusive society, where all individuals have equal opportunities and conditions, is a shared responsibility that involves both migrants and the host society. This collaborative effort, between migrants and the host society, is crucial for achieving successful integration and social cohesion [58].

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Institutional Scientific Ethics Committee of Catholic University of Maule (protocol codes N°224/2019 and N°73/2021), for studies involving humans.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

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Appendix A

Appendix B

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