‘English Opens Doors’ for young EFL learners in Chile:
Students in a public school experience communicative language learning with international volunteer teachers.
English as a foreign language is taught in schools around the world – levels of proficiency vary. Chile’s nation-wide low levels of English and its aim to become a bilingual country in the future, have led to the implementation of several educational reforms and strategies by the country’s Ministry of Education. One such initiative is the English Opens Door Program, that aims to improve English levels for students between 5-12 grades in public schools in Chile. Part of the program are (near)-native English-speaking volunteers who work on improving students’ communicative skills in Chilean classrooms for one to two semesters. This research explored young EFL learners’ experiences of working with an international volunteer in a communicative language teaching environment. In small groups, young learners discussed their experiences – covering cultural differences, teaching approaches and activities, and the importance of English in Chile and relevance for learners’ future. The objective was to explore learners’ experiences, and ultimately to evaluate the limitations and strengths of the volunteer initiative – the findings may serve as guidelines for teachers, volunteers, and stakeholders in the English Opens Doors Program and in the Ministry of Education. Data was collected using qualitative semi-structured group interviews, supported by students’ drawings, with a total of 32 young EFL learners from 5th and 6th grade primary levels in a public school in Chile. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the transcribed interviews. The results showed that, while the communicative English immersion environment comes with its challenges, the volunteer initiative is greatly appreciated by students for it provides a unique and fun language learning environment that motivates students to learn and practice English.
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1 INTRODUCTION

The importance of dominating English as a foreign language has been a topic of discussion in Chile for years. When in 2004 test results revealed that only 5% of students in eighth grade had reached the B1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (British Council, 2015, p. 20), educational reforms and strategies were implemented to improve the country’s English language skills. Developing adequate levels of English proficiency would at the same time be a way to better integrate Chile with the global economy and strengthen national and international competitiveness – a mission that has become a driving force for raising the low levels of English throughout the country. As a result, the English Opens Doors Program was created by the Chilean Ministry of Education to “improve the level of English for students between grades 5-12, through the definition of national English learning standards, a teacher training strategy, and classroom support for Chilean teachers of English” (EODP, n.d.).

Today, the national English Opens Doors Program is active throughout Chile, focusing on supporting schools in the public education sector because among those are the most vulnerable and disadvantaged school communities. The country’s wide gap between rich and poor affects the quality of education since access to typically better private schools largely depends on students’ socio-economic backgrounds (British Council, 2015, p. 9). In Chile, English language proficiency is seen as a way to better employment and thus to improving one’s social status and “quality of life” (British Council, 2015, p. 46). One way the English Opens Doors Program improves English language competences in public schools is by recruiting native and near-native English speaking volunteers who work as teaching assistants in Chilean classrooms, applying innovative communicative teaching methods to improve students’ listening and speaking skills; and most importantly, to give those students the same opportunities to interact
with (near)-native speakers of English as students in expensive private schools have, where native speaking teachers are often a norm (EODP, n.d.).

Volunteering to teach English as a foreign language abroad has become a popular way of traveling and experiencing another culture, while at the same time contributing to a local community in a meaningful way (Idealist, n.d.). Previous studies have explored volunteers’ and teachers’ experiences of teaching English as a foreign language, including those of volunteer teachers in Chile (Romero, 2012 & 2015; Harjanne & Díaz Larenas, 2017). As a former volunteer with the English Opens Doors Program in 2016 and 2017, my personal experience sparked interest in finding out how students experience working with international volunteers, because their perspectives have not been studied to the same extent as volunteers’ experiences. While the international volunteers contribute an important part to improving English language skills in Chilean public schools, my aim was to give a voice to those young learners of English, who are to be the new generation of Chileans equipped with the tools and abilities they will need to succeed in an increasingly globalized world (EODP, n.d.).

The knowledge I had gained from my personal experience about English language education in Chilean public schools, motivated me to provide a qualitative analysis of students’ experiences as they were working with international volunteers – ranging from their learning experiences in the classroom to their views on the importance of English and their emotions in a unique English immersion environment, among others. Although this research takes the form of a small-scale study, it is intended to offer a new perspective and provide results that are valuable on a global level for countries in similar situations like Chile, but especially on a local level to continue taking steps towards improving English language skills and providing quality education for all students in Chile.
The following content of this paper is divided into 7 chapters: key concepts, research questions, context of the study, theoretical framework, methodology, results and discussion, and conclusion. After explaining the key concepts, I have outlined the initial research questions as defined at the beginning of this research in chapter 3. In chapter 4, the context of the study, I have described the Chilean education system, with focus on English language education and the role of the English Opens Doors Program. Chapter 5 provides theoretical background on learning and teaching a foreign language (in particular English, using communicative teaching methods) and voluntourism, a growing trend to teach English as a foreign language in another country. Chapter 6 illustrates the methodology that was used in this research, including research design, data collection methods and analysis, as well as ethical considerations. In chapter 7, the findings of this study are presented. And in the conclusion in chapter 8, I summarize and discuss the significance of the results in relation to the English Opens Doors Program, providing suggestions for the volunteer initiative and for further research.
2 KEY CONCEPTS

In this section, key concepts that were used throughout this paper have been defined.

As defined by the Oxford Companion to the English Language, the terms teaching or learning of English as a foreign language (EFL) are “typically used when English is not a language spoken in the country where it is being taught” (2018, n.d.). As English is a world language, it is widely taught in schools, but in non-native countries it does not play an essential part in the average citizen’s daily social or professional life (Broughton et al., 1978, p. 6). English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as a second language (ESL) are sometimes used interchangeable, because the distinction between the two terms has become less clear: its usage might depend on country’s geographical, historical, cultural and political factors (Broughton et al., 1978, p. 7). In the context of this study, I have used English as a foreign language (EFL) to refer to all learners whose mother tongue is (in this case) Spanish, and who are learning English.

The Chilean education system is divided into a public and a private education sector. While private schools are run privately and funded through tuition, there are different types of schools in the public sector – the main ones are public or municipal schools (funded by the government, managed on the local level) and subsidized-private schools (run privately, funded through a voucher system and additional fees from families). In this study, research took place in a municipal school since the English Opens Doors Program with its volunteer initiative supports only the public education sector. “Public school” in this paper thus refers to municipal schools, if not otherwise stated. This type of school is characterized by lower quality of education (compared to private schools) and is attended by only one third of all students (NVC, Teaching Guide 2015, p. 4).
In Chile, **primary school** is the second level of formal education (after pre-school), consisting of 8 grades. Students can start 1st grade at the minimum age of 6 (Ministerio de Educación, 2017). During primary education, students develop an integral formation and, according to the General Education Law in Chile, this should include the development of positive self-esteem and self-awareness, learning to work individually and as a team, developing their responsibility and tolerance for frustration, thinking reflexively and developing creativity (Ministerio de Educación, n.d.).

In this research, students attending 5th and 6th grade were studied. In the context of the Chilean education system, both of those grades belong to primary education, which lasts from 1st through 8th grade (see above). Students in 5th and 6th grade are on average between 10 and 12 years old.

**International volunteers** are native and near-native English speakers coming from countries around the world who are recruited by the National Volunteer Center to work as teaching assistants in Chilean classrooms, specifically to improve students’ listening and speaking skills and to motivate students to learn and practice English (EODP, n.d.).

Finally, when talking about **students**, I refer to someone who “attends a school” and “one who studies” at any level from primary education to higher education (Merriam Webster, n.d.). I have also used the term **young learners** interchangeable – someone who “gain[s] knowledge or understanding of or skill” (Merriam Webster, n.d.) – because in the context of this study, data was collected in primary school levels from students or learners of English who are still young.
3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions presented here are the questions that were defined at the beginning of this research study, meaning they are not the final research questions. Due to the nature of this qualitative research, which is characterized by flexibility and openness to adaptations, and the decision to let the data drive the research, the research questions were not a firmly set concept but rather an evolving process as data was collected and analyzed (Ayiro, 2012, p. 20). The final research questions were adapted to fit the findings obtained from data analysis and they were reduced to three instead of the following four research questions for reasons such as reader friendliness and organization. The final research questions are presented in chapter 7, research results and discussion.

1. How do young EFL learners in a public school in Chile experience communicative language learning with international volunteer teachers?
2. How do those young learners experience the physical-, social- and emotional learning environment with an international volunteer teacher?
3. What kind of communicative language teaching methods were used by the volunteer from the learners’ perspective?
4. What do learners say about the relevance of English in their future?
The aim of this chapter is to describe the context of this study. It gives an overview of the Chilean education system, the country’s situation regarding English language education and the national English Opens Doors Program together with the National Volunteer Center initiative.

4.2 Education in Chile

Education in Chile is made up of pre-school education, primary education, secondary education (divided into the branches general, humanistic-scientific, technical-professional and artistic) and tertiary education (technical training centers, professional institutes and universities) (Ministerio de Educación, n.d., Trayectoria Educativa). Education is compulsory for 12 years, that is 8 years of primary education and 4 years of secondary education. While its system is similar to the ones in many other countries, Chile is unique in the sense that the proportion of primary students attending private schools is the fourth largest in the world (British Council, 2015, p. 8). Only one third of all students are enrolled in public schools, and at university level it is just 15%, which among all OECD member countries is the lowest level of public university enrolment (Vallejo Dowling, 2016, p. 1).

Chile experiences a wide gap between rich and poor, and its division has led to the country being listed as the most unequal one in a 2011-report by the OECD, stating that “the average income of the wealthiest ten per cent of the population was 26.5 times greater than that of the poorest ten per cent” (British Council, 2015, p. 9). Chile’s economy has experienced growth
over the past few years, but the country’s inequality concerning income and wealth is a constant challenge that also affects the education system: students in publicly funded schools score lower on the country’s national test SIMCE (System for Measurement of the Quality of Education) (British Council, 2015, p. 9), and often face larger class sizes, less-qualified teachers, and missing educational resources – access to quality (private) schooling is determined by parents’ financial situation (Kormos & Kiddle, 2013, p. 408).

This unequal system stems from the period of the military dictatorship under Pinochet in the 1970s, when later many sectors were privatized and a restructuring into market-oriented systems took place (British Council, 2015; Abrahams & Ríos 2017). Vallejo Dowling (2016) explains that “the Chilean educational system has been considered as a regulated market, one ruled by the principle of financial profitability” (p. 1). Today, the school system in Chile can be further divided according to the institutions’ sources of funding into three main categories – public, non-subsidized private, and subsidized-private schools (Valenzuela, Bellei & Ríos, 2014, p. 227). The latter being a school that is funded publicly and run privately (British Council, 2015, p. 19). Depending on the type of school, administrative and educational decisions are taken at the school level or the local municipal level. The 2015 Education Intelligence report on Education in Chile by the British Council explains the system as follows:

“In public schools run by municipalities, about half of the decisions about educational practices are taken at the school level and the rest at the local level, while decisions about learning resources and study programmes are taken by schools or school owners following the guidelines set by MINEDUC [Ministry of Education]. Privately managed subsidised schools, which enrol over 50 per cent of pupils, have complete autonomy, but those that receive the Preferential School Subsidy (Subvención Escolar Preferencial, SEP) must take part in initiatives for school improvement”. (2015, p. 10)

This school system allows private institutions to choose their students: to improve the school’s results, students from higher socio-economic backgrounds are selected, which, according to
the OECD (2014), leads to a lack of social diversity among the school population and consequently students are less able to benefit from that experience. The variance level for social diversity in Chile is much lower than in other countries: in Finland and Norway, for example, more than 89% of socio-economic variation is visible in schools (British Council, 2015, p. 19).

In continuation, the following section describes how this market-driven education system affects foreign language education in Chile.

4.3 Foreign Language Education in Chile

“[K]nowledge of English in Latin America has reflected existing political and economic power structures”: Matear’s statement (2008, p. 131) expresses what studies on English language learning in Chile and other Latin American countries confirm – that there is a strong connection between learners’ socioeconomic background and their success in (language) learning, because the social background determines access to public vs. private institutions (Muñoz, 2008, p. 589). The quality of education, especially regarding foreign languages, is higher in private schools, which only the wealthiest can afford (Matear, 2008, p. 131). In the context of Chile – a country that is home to nine indigenous cultures that represented 9% of the total population in 2015 (Ministerio de Desarollo Social, 2017) – foreign language education is mainly concentrated on the learning of English. English is a compulsory subject for all students starting from 5th grade, and the minimum amount of instruction is 3 hours per week (often more in private schools). Schools can opt to start teaching English from 1st grade, but it is not (yet) required (Ministerio de Educación, 2018). English language education has been a topic of discussion for years. In El inglés abre puertas... ¿a qué?Análisis del discurso sobre la enseñanza del inglés en Chile, 2003-2006 (2008) (translated as: English Opens Doors… But
to what? Discourse Analysis on English Teaching in Chile, 2003-2006), Katharina Glas lists the following as recurrent themes in national discourse on English language education, all of which are valid to the present:

“1. The importance of English as a world language is highlighted.
2. There is great concern about the low level of English, both in students and in Chilean teachers.
3. It is necessary to improve the level of English in a large part of the Chilean population, in order to guarantee the economic development of the country. This idea includes the goal of improving the English of all school children.
4. To achieve this, it is necessary to renew the methodology of teaching English in schools. In this context, new technologies and the need for international assistance to improve the teaching of English in Chile are frequently mentioned”. (Glas, 2008, p. 113)

The government has high aims for its country regarding English language education: the National English Strategy 2014-2030 was introduced “to become a bilingual country in the future” (Gobierno de Chile, 2014, p. 6) by developing and strengthening English language competences and taking action in the areas “family and society, schools and students, initial and continuous teacher training and on English for specific purposes” (Gobierno de Chile, 2014, p. 9). The objectives of the National English Strategy reflect what Glas (2008) found to be a major reason for the teaching and learning of English in Chile – strengthening the country’s economic development (p. 114): “The general objective of the National English Strategy is to strengthen the proficiencies of the Chilean population in the English language, in order to accelerate the integration of Chile into a global world and therefore improve our competitiveness” (Gobierno de Chile, 2014, p. 11).
The situation of English proficiency in Chile in numbers

In 2014, when the National English Strategy 2014-2030 was published, results of the national learning outcome assessment system (Sistema de Medición de Calidad de la Educación, SIMCE) showed that only 25% of the 11th graders that were tested reached the “certified” categories A2/B1 in English (A2: 12%; B1: 12.6%), meaning that they were able to understand short simple texts and daily life conversations (Agencia de Calidad de la Educación, 2014; Council of Europe, 2001). In 2017, the National English Study (Estudio Nacional de Inglés), part of the Evaluation plan 2016-2020, was conducted to obtain information about students’ learning and for principals and teachers to make decisions based on that information and strengthen pedagogical processes. The study collects information about whether students reach the educational standards, which serves to evaluate the effectiveness of education policies and programs and to identify strengths and weaknesses on the national and regional levels (Agencia de Calidad de Educación, 2017). In comparison to the results from 2014, the National English Study 2017 indicated that 32% of learners in 11th grades reached the intermediate level A2/B1 (25% in 2014). However, since the National Studies test certain areas and grade levels and select only a part of the institutions throughout the country, less students were tested in English in 2017 (7,430 students of 137 schools, compared to 154,096 students of 2,656 schools in 2014) (Agencia de Calidad de la Educación, 2014 & 2017). Both studies tested the students’ reading comprehension and listening comprehension by having students read different types of texts and listen to audio recordings of short conversations between native speakers and then answer multiple choice and pairing type questions. The level of English was determined according to the European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001). The English Proficiency Index of 2018, which is presented by English First, reported that out of 88 countries surveyed with regard to English language skills, Chile ranks 46, still at a low proficiency level (English First, 2018).
The reasons for those low results are a combination of more than one factor – there are the learners’ socio-economic backgrounds, which have led to a segregation of public vs. private schools and influence learners’ motivation and achievement; geographical location to some extent; teachers’ competences; and teaching methods used in English classes. Both the SIMCE (2014) and the National English Study (2017) also look at the socio-economic background of learners. The results show that of all students of the highest socio-economic group, 83% reached the A2/B1 in 2014, and 85% in 2017; however, only 2% of students belonging to the lowest group reached that same level in 2014, and 9% in 2017. Kormos and Kiddle (2013) have found that there is a big difference in motivation between the higher and lower social classes in Chile (but not within the same groups) (p. 408); and the reason for that gap “might lie in the inequality created by the Chilean schooling system” that greatly affects the quality of education in public vs. private schools (p. 408). Kormos and Kiddle add that students coming from a lower social class had limited financial resources to study or use English at home, that they would rarely need English for future professional purposes, and that they were less optimistic about their English language competences than upper-class students (2013, p. 408-409).

Due to Chile’s geography and with the majority of the population located in the central regions around the capital of Santiago de Chile, learners in rural areas (often lower class students) are not provided with the same opportunities and resources as learners in urban areas (Kormos & Kiddle, 2013, p. 408). The 2017 results of the National English Study confirm that the percentage of students who reached A2/B1 level was significantly higher in the Metropolitan region (capital) compared to the rest of the country (Agencia de Calidad de la Educación, 2017).

While nowadays learning resources and technology can be used by students to practice and improve their language skills on their own, Kormos and Kiddle found that this is the case infrequently in Chile (2013, p. 409). According to Kormos and Kiddle, the reason might be the
“rather teacher-centred lessons and a reliance on outdated methods of teaching such as the grammar translation method in the Chilean education system” (p. 409), which has led to students perceiving the learning of English as an obligatory rather than an enjoyable activity. According to Abrahams and Ríos (2017), curricula, materials and progress maps provided by the Ministry of Education and insufficient preparation of teachers for classroom realities were to blame for students not reaching the desired language proficiency levels (p. 111).

After the unpleasant results obtained from the National English Study 2017, the Ministry of Education presented a new strategy that seeks to raise the level of English throughout Chile. The national plan “English in english” was introduced at the beginning of 2019, with the aim that English classes are conducted in English, because the main problem today is that English lessons are held in Spanish (Ministerio de Educación, 2019). According to information obtained from students, only 27% stated that their teacher would use English during the entire or during most of the lesson; and students whose teachers spoke English most of the time, obtained 11 points more on average in the National English Study 2017 (59 vs. 48, out of 100) (Agencia de Calidad de la Educación, 2017). Teachers’ language proficiencies also affect students’ learning: around 40% of English teachers have only an A2 certification, despite the required level for teachers in practice being B2; for teachers in training the required level has been raised to C1 (Agencia de Calidad de la Educación, 2017). As the main objective, the plan “English in english” states that all students in 5th and 6th grade should be able to have a conversation in English (Ministerio de Educación, 2019). Schools had already been able to offer English classes starting in 1st grade (which 57% of schools do), instead of the obligatory start in 5th grade, but at the beginning of 2019 the Ministry of Education presented for the first time a continuous curriculum from 1st to 4th grade. The goal is that by 2022, 80% of schools start English lessons in 1st grade (Ministry of Education, 2019). The Minister of Education summarizes the actions and strategies to improve English language education: "As a
Government we have proposed to advance in quality so that our children and youth have real opportunities for development in the future. […] We want our students to have tools that expand their opportunities. The command of English opens doors to professional growth, higher education and the job market” (Ministerio de Educación, 2019, February 7).

The following section presents another of the Ministry of Education’s initiatives to improve students’ levels of English. An initiative that takes action in the public sector of English language education and that plays a key role in this research study.

### 4.3.1 English Opens Doors Program in Chile

The English Opens Doors Program (EODP or PIAP *Programa Inglés Abre Puertas* in Spanish) is a national initiative by the Chilean Ministry of Education that was created in 2003 to improve English language education in Chile. According to its legal framework, the program’s aim is the following:

> The English Opens Doors Program was created in 2003 with the mission to ‘improve the level of English for students between 5th grade and 12th grade [~12-18-year-olds], by defining national standards for the learning of English, by providing professional teacher development and by supporting English teachers in the classrooms’ (Decree 81) (EODP, n.d.)

The program belongs to the General Education Division within the Ministry and works on improving the quality of education focusing on the public education sector. Up until 2015, publicly funded schools received EODP support and benefits upon voluntary inscription; in 2015, with a nation-wide educational reform, the English Opens Doors Program transitioned to support (vulnerable) municipal schools that have been selected into the project.
“Strengthening of the Public English Education” (Fortalecimiento de la Educación Pública-Inglés) (EODP, Volunteer Manual 2019, p. 3). Its aim is to enhance educational management on the local level and maximize participation of public school communities throughout the country (EODP, n.d.).

The EODP’s focus of action is on teachers and students – for whom the EODP provides a variety of resources and diverse activities which are implemented according to the requirements of each region. Initiatives for teachers, for example, include technical-pedagogical support, collaboration and networking opportunities, and constant professional development. Students can participate in English immersion summer and winter camps, take part in spelling and debate competitions, learn through English online courses, have access to various pedagogical activities, and practice communicative skills with international volunteers (see following section). In addition to English-centered initiatives, the EODP also offers study abroad scholarships for university students, and Mandarin Chinese courses. The initiatives in each region of Chile are promoted, coordinated and supervised by regional representatives of the English Opens Doors Program, and aim to increase interest and motivation for foreign language learning (EODP, n.d.).

The following graph on the next page shows the levels on which the EODP is active, and the next section explains in more detail the branch that is responsible for providing support from English-speaking volunteers, which is the so-called National Volunteer Center.
The National Volunteer Center

The National Volunteer Center constitutes one branch of the English Opens Doors Program. It was introduced in 2004 and is responsible for recruiting native and near-native English-speaking volunteers who support students’ learning of English by working as teaching assistants in publicly funded schools throughout Chile for a minimum of one to two semesters (National Volunteer Center, n.d.). The international volunteers work with students between 5th grade and 12th grade and focus on developing and improving learners’ communicative language skills (listening and speaking), because practicing those competences in regular English lessons with typically large numbers of students (up to 45) can be a challenge for the teacher (Matear, 2008, p. 139).

With the support of the volunteer, that issue is solved because a specific EODP teaching model must be followed during English lessons: the class is split into two groups (group 1 and group 2), and instead of all students spending the entire 90 minute class with one teacher, each group...
gets to work 45 minutes with the volunteer and 45 minutes with the their English teacher. After the first 45 minutes, both groups switch from one classroom to the other (EODP, Teaching Guide 2015, p. 7). That way, both the teacher and the volunteer work with only half of the students at a time, which allows for more quality time to practice the four core competences of English.

The volunteers who apply to the National Volunteer Center are typically young professionals or recent university graduates from around the world who either already have experience in teaching or an interest to do so (EODP, Volunteer Manual 2019, p. 5). Volunteers are selected through an application process, and once admitted, volunteers take part in a week-long orientation in the capital, Santiago de Chile, before being sent to schools throughout the country. Orientation week is conducted by the team of the National Volunteer Center (all former volunteers themselves), during which volunteers learn about the Chilean education system, cultural aspects and theory on teaching EFL, and practice planning and conducting lessons that focus on teaching communicative skills in an innovative and fun way (NVC, n.d.). Special attention is brought to establishing class structures and routines, managing student behavior through positive reinforcement, and using strategies to motivate all students, no matter their level of English (EODP, Teaching Guide 2015). Volunteers are provided with their own classroom and are expected to create an English immersion environment inside (and outside) of it, using English at all times, for students and the school community to benefit from this opportunity. According to the volunteer’s responsibilities defined by the EODP, volunteers teach for 24 hours a week, spend 4 hours on extra-curricular activities and 7 hours on lesson planning. In addition, the international volunteers participate and coach students in initiatives such as spelling and debate competitions, take part in summer or winter camps and are active in their Local English Teacher’s Network (EODP, Teaching Guide 2015, p. 10-11).
The National Volunteer Center is supported by the *United Nations Development Programme-Chile* and the English Opens Doors Program covers most costs associated with the volunteer initiative. This includes costs for recruitment, selection, training, health insurance, transportation within Chile, pedagogical materials and support for the volunteers, among others; the municipalities that receive volunteers cover the rest of the costs, which are related to stipends for host families and volunteers (EODP, n.d.).

Each year, the National Volunteer Center welcomes a great number of volunteers to Chile. Since its beginning in 2004 up to 2017, the English Opens Doors Program has received over 2,500 volunteers that support the teaching and learning of English (PNUD, 2017). In 2017, 173 public schools received international volunteers who came from over 35 countries, benefiting 37,000 learners of English (Ministerio de Educación, 2017, March 23). And in the following year, 2018, 187 international volunteers were received in municipal schools throughout the country, again supporting 45,000 students with learning English (Ministerio de Educación, 2018, August 6).

International volunteers have a great impact on the communities around them during their stay in Chile – at school, within their host families, and on the members of the local communities. Since the volunteer initiative targets especially vulnerable schools, often situated in rural and poor areas with students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, for many students it might be the first time they get to interact with a native English speaker or someone from another country. Matear (2008) concludes that those international volunteers contribute a great deal to English language education in public schools in Chile because they provide “opportunities for children to practise English with native speakers, to learn about other cultures, and to raise their aspirations, thereby to some degree counter-balancing the children’s cultural and educational deficit” (p. 141).
5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Having described the context of this study, this chapter presents the theoretical framework that was used and it is divided into two sections: Foreign language learning and Foreign language teaching. The first part, section 5.1, on foreign language learning in a globalized world, describes the reasons for learning a foreign language and discusses theories on the starting age for foreign language education. And the second part, section 5.2 is about the teaching aspects of foreign language education. This includes an overview of common teaching methods, a discussion on communicative language teaching (CLT) and an account on voluntourism and development volunteering – trends to teach English as a foreign language abroad.

5.1 Foreign Language Learning

The word “foreign” describes anything that is “born in, belonging to, or characteristic of some place or country other than the one under consideration” (Merriam Webster, n.d.) – such as a foreign language. Globalization, or the interaction between and integration of people, industries, and governments of different countries, has greatly influenced our world’s political systems, international trade, economic development, information technology, the environment and cultures (Mullens, 2014). It is an ongoing process and a worldwide movement that has opened-up new opportunities and brought changes on many levels – including in the field of foreign language education (Lo Bianco, 2014, p. 312). Many countries provide language policy documents that state the benefits of learning a foreign language. In Europe, the Council of Europe advocates the benefits for foreign language learning, focusing on aspects such as intercultural understanding, social inclusion, linguistic diversity, and argues that “[l]anguages
are a fundamental aspect of people’s lives and the democratic functioning of society” (Council of Europe, n.d.). To help teachers and learners with the assessment of the language learning process, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages was introduced by the Council of Europe and is now a widely used guide throughout Europe and other parts of the world (CEFR 2018). In Chile, too, we find such language policy documents promoting foreign language education – and English in particular: the National English Strategy 2014-2030 (Gobierno de Chile, 2014) promotes the learning of English as second language and follows the aim to become a bilingual country, especially for economic reasons (see chapter 4.3). Johnson (2008) states additional reasons for people learning a foreign language, ranging from work or study purposes, to wanting to integrate oneself with another culture, fostering intercultural communication and strengthening cultural identity (p. 5). And among all foreign languages, as Ushioda & Dörnyei (2017) explain, English is especially affected by globalization because as lingua franca it is often considered “the must-have language of the world” (p. 451).

While studies in the field of foreign language education still focus mostly on English as a second language, there has been a shift in key areas studied, which is now early language learning (Nikolov & Mihaljević Djigunović, 2011). This is because more and more learners across different educational contexts are learning a foreign language at a young(er) age (Nikolov & Mihaljević Djigunović, 2011, p. 95-96).

Definitions that explain which age range is considered young vary greatly; but here is an example:

In the European context, a working group of the European Union member states agreed that pre-school children between the ages of three to six are called very young learners, whereas primary-school pupils between seven to twelve are young learners, although in certain contexts even 14-year-olds are included in the YLs’ group (Nikolov & Mihaljević Djigunović, 2011, p 96).
When discussing (early) foreign language learning, the starting age is a controversial topic. The concept of the age factor and the critical period of language learning are central points of the discussion. Both come from a hypothesis called critical period hypothesis (CPH), which was first made popular by the Canadian brain surgeons Penfield and Roberts in 1959, and then theoretically supported by E. Lenneberg and later by Chomsky (Muñoz, 2006, p. 1). The CPH theory argues that there is a specific period of age when it is easier to learn languages. After this time frame has passed (around the time when puberty begins), it becomes more difficult to acquire a new language, and even impossible to reach a native-like level when learning a foreign language (Muñoz, 2006, p. 2-3). According to the CPH, it is best to start learning a foreign language in childhood, up to the age of 10 (Muñoz, 2006, p. 1). The reason for this critical period is that the cognitive system in children differs from the one in adults: adults develop faster when it comes to the syntactical and morphological level of languages, whereas children may have the advantage of having less psychological and cognitive mechanisms and seem to learn a foreign language easier (Muñoz, 2006, p. 2). As Muñoz (2006) states, according to CPH supporters such as Long (1990), it is essential for learners to start foreign language learning before this critical period ends, even if that means just beginning to learn the language (p. 7). Muñoz herself asks critical questions concerning the amount of language input that is needed during that period to make for successful language learning, and emphasizes that “no consensus has been reached to date” regarding the age factor (2006, p. 7). Another study favoring an exposure to early foreign language education has been presented by Taylor and Lafayette (2010), which argues that students learning a foreign language early on would perform better in several school subjects than their peers who did not study a foreign language.

With this trend in foreign language education to best start at a young age, funding and equality are issues that play an important role. Nikolov and Mihaljević Dzigunović (2011) argue that in contexts where early language programs are offered by private sectors, it is mostly young
learners from socio-economically advantaged families who can access those programs (p. 105), which would lead to the assumption that “the implications of English being the world’s most important lingua franca are related to who has access to this currently precious commodity at the earliest possible time” (Nikolov & Mihaljević Djigunović, 2011, p. 113).

5.2 Foreign Language Teaching

When talking about foreign language teaching – and not specifically about English but any foreign language – the central focus is generally on the teacher, as contrasted to foreign language learning where the learner is in the center. Theory on foreign language teaching include, among others, discussions on teacher personalities, teaching styles, teaching approaches and teaching methods – all of which affect the quality of foreign language learning in one way or another and are choices that largely depend on the foreign language teacher. Dagarin and Andraka (2007), for example, state that the success of learning a foreign language starts with a good foreign language teacher, one who can be described as creative, flexible, tolerant, well-informed, open to new ideas, attentive to students’ needs, cooperative with colleagues, and competent in the foreign language (p. 12). As characteristics of foreign language teachers vary, so do teaching methods and approaches. While I provide an overview of some of the most commonly used teaching methods in foreign language classrooms in this chapter, I have focused on one specific method for its relevance in this study and that is the Communicative Language Teaching approach (CLT).
5.2.1 Foreign Language Teaching Methods

There are numerous teaching methods and approaches in foreign language education, some of which have been adopted around the world, but the choice for or against one approach or the other often depends on institutions, teachers and learning objectives (Hao, 2017; Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Some of the better-known teaching approaches include the Grammar-Translation Method, Audio-Lingual Method, Communicative Language Teaching, Task-Based Teaching, and Total Physical Response, to name a few (Hao, 2017; Swain & Lapkin, 2005). Different teaching methods focus on different competences, such as grammar, fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, and communicative skills.

The Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) is a classic method focusing on the aim to be able to understand literature that is written in a foreign language: students translate a text from their native language into the target language (TL), learning grammar deductively and memorizing vocabulary by comparing a word of the TL to the equivalent in their native language; there is little student interaction because the focus is on reading and writing (Natsir & Sanjaya, 2014, p. 59). Nowadays, TEFL focuses more on teaching communicative competences, and researchers found that at the beginning stages of foreign language teaching, the Audio-Lingual Method might be a suitable approach (Bidenko & Bespalova, 2017, p. 24). Students acquire new vocabulary and grammatical structures through listening, imitation and repetition of linguistic patterns and structures, which leads to the formation of audio-oral habits and finally to the ability for learners to produce their own text (Bidenko & Bespalova, 2017, p. 23). When teaching oral proficiency and introducing new vocabulary or sentence structures at the initial stage of language learning, Total Physical Response is a popular method to do so by combining speech with physical actions. This method is linked to a theory in psychology that states “the more often or the more intensively a memory connection is traced, the stronger the
memory association will be and the more likely it will be recalled” (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, p. 87). Thus, when repeating verbal input, such as verbs, over and over again combined with motor activity, it is more likely that the learner will be able to successfully recall the input later (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, p. 87). **Tasked-Based Teaching** has become a popular approach that moves away from teacher-centered lessons, and instead allows for learners to be active, interact with each other, and learn a variety of skills through learning by doing. As Andreia Costa (2016) explains, tasked-based teaching is an approach that supports the development of cognitive skills and foreign language competences at the same time by engaging learners in “real-world tasks”, providing a higher level of motivation than traditional language instruction (p. 109-110).

### 5.2.2 Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

With the growing demand for intercultural communication and an advance in research, during the last few decades Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has become a popular and indispensable approach in foreign language education around the world (Humphries & Burns, 2015; Ju, 2013). CLT is being applied on all levels, from kindergarten to university and adult education, and as its name suggests, it focuses on the development of learners’ communicative abilities in that foreign language (Littlewood, 1981; Cheng, 2015). Characteristic for CLT is that communication in the target language is purposeful and practiced through communicative activities such as games and role play; errors of form are tolerated because focus lies on fluency rather than accuracy; grammar is taught inductively; and the teacher acts as a facilitator and co-communicator (Natsir, 2014, p. 59). The teacher’s role is therefore to design meaningful activities that allow the learners to use the target language in context and should be designed as interactive tasks that are carried out in pairs or groups, based on authentic materials and
integrate cultural learning content (Moeller, 2015, 330). That way, as Littlewood (2007) explains, language instruction moves away from being teacher-centered and form-focused to learner-centered and meaning-oriented: “learners are expected to negotiate meaning without the direct control or intervention of the teacher” (p. 244). Besides the goal for students to be able to use the target language in real situations, CLT is also seen as a strategy to motivate students in the foreign language classroom by providing various activities that call for active participation rather than passive attention (Cheng, 2015, p. 706). While motivation is an advantage in foreign language classrooms and thus an argument for the use of the CLT approach, Littlewood (2014) lists a number of practical problems that teachers in many country face when implementing of CLT: among those difficulties are managing classes with a large number of students, teachers’ limited experience or ability using communicative skills, monitoring students’ use of the target language during group or pair work, contradictions between recommended communicative language teaching but required pencil-and-paper examinations, and the challenge to provide a learner-centered rather than a teacher-centered learning environment (p. 353-352).

**5.2.3 Teaching English as a Foreign Language abroad – a new trend?**

English is the international language of the 21st century: it is the third most spoken language in the world, but the top language where non-native speakers far outnumber native English-speakers (4:1 ratio in 2013), with numbers of non-native speakers rising (British Council, 2013). According to the British Council (2013), a quarter of the world’s population (1.75 billion) speak English “at a useful level”, and knowledge of English has become a basic key skill for personal and professional purposes around the world (p. 5). With a great demand, teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) – both native and non-native – can find
positions to teach around the world. But even though Levis, Link and Barriuso (2016) found that non-native teachers of English teach just as efficiently as their native colleagues (p. 918), institutions and students still often express a preference for native-speaking teachers, especially when it comes to teaching pronunciation (Li & Zhang, 2016, p. 89). Therefore, by being a native-speaking teacher of English, one has access to an abundance of offers for teaching positions: according to Marek Kiczkowiak on the British Council’s website, as much as 70% of teaching jobs advertised on tefl.com – the most popular job search engine for teaching English – are for native-speakers only (2014). Native-speakers of English have the advantage of finding teaching jobs abroad, even without necessarily holding a certification or degree for teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) as is often the case with volunteer programs (Jakubiak, 2016, p. 247). The number of TEFL volunteer programs are growing rapidly: as Jakubiak (2016) explains, English language voluntourism has become a trend where “one’s primary task is to teach basic, or conversational, English in settings that vary by placement” (p. 245), and adds that it is people from the Global North who teach English in the Global South (p. 245). Speaking about volunteering in general, one needs to make a distinction between two quite different types of volunteering: there is voluntourism on the one hand, and development volunteering on the other hand (McGloin & Georgeou, 2016). Voluntourism refers to a combination of traveling and volunteering, where “participants expect both to be entertained and to help others” (Liston-Heyes, 2016, p. 283). It is a form of travel that is organized and sold by agencies or tour operators in the Global North, promoting development of poor communities that form “part of the photogenic landscape” as unique and authentic experiences for adventurous travelers; furthermore, special skills or expertise are not needed and volunteering takes place over a short period of time, as little as one week (McGloin & Georgeou, 2016, p. 406). McGloin and Georgeou (2016) argue that voluntourism “is an economic activity driven by profit occurring within an unregulated industry and operating without any
accreditation process” (405). The mayor difference of development volunteering is that volunteers need to commit for a much longer period of time, which ranges from anywhere between a few months up to years. Volunteers are involved on broader social, political and economic levels and include government-funded programs (cf. EODP, National Volunteer Center, Chile) (McGloin & Georgeou, 2016, p. 405). Skills and prior experience of volunteers are relevant because a central aspect is to contribute to a process of social change by engaging with and adding value to a local community (McGloin & Georgeou, 2016, p. 405). What are typically similar in both cases of volunteering, are the motives for participation. On idealist.org – a website where one can find jobs, internships, and volunteer opportunities around the world – the benefits of international volunteering are stated as follows:

Traveling to a different country to volunteer your time, skills, and energy offers adventure, an opportunity to explore your curiosity about a certain part of the world and support an organization’s efforts to make things better in their community (Idealist, n.d.).

Volunteering or teaching EFL abroad is a way to immerse oneself with a new culture, gain cultural awareness and new perspectives, and help improve quality and situations on different levels. Universal characteristics of a successful volunteer are flexibility, patience, openness, commitment, and humility; and the awareness that “[w]hile volunteering abroad will likely be one of many profound and enlightening experiences for the volunteer, for the host community, the volunteer’s presence may be an impactful and rare event. All of the volunteer’s actions, good and bad, will be scrutinized, and their effects will be magnified and remembered long after the volunteer leaves” (Unite for Sight, n.d.).
The following chapters outline this study’s research process, explain the methods that were used to obtain data, and finally present the findings and interpret how young learners in a Chilean public-school have experienced the international volunteers’ communicative EFL classes.
6 METHODOLOGY

6.1 Qualitative Approach

A qualitative approach was chosen to study how young learners of English as a foreign language in a public school in Chile experience communicative language learning with their (near)-native international volunteer. This study aims at understanding and portraying the perspectives of students, and a qualitative research design offers the guidelines to do so: much literature, including Johnson and Christensen (2008), state that qualitative research is about what the sociologist Max Weber called “empathetic understanding” of participants’ viewpoints (p. 36). This understanding requires the researcher’s direct involvement with the participants – in this case with the young EFL learners – by interacting with them when collecting data that usually comes in form of words and pictures obtained from observations, in-depth interviews and focus groups (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). To get a detailed picture of the learners’ communicative language learning experiences with their international volunteers, data was collected from a rather small number of participants and the research design (such as research questions and methods) was kept flexible and emergent throughout the research process, which, according to Ayiro (2012, p. 24), are all characteristic of qualitative research.

While there are various data collection methods in qualitative research, Horner (2000) explains that group interviews are among the most common and most effective ones when working with adolescents and children. This is because “[c]hildren between 11 and 14 years of age, who are undergoing the developmental transition from child to adolescent, tend to be reticent when talking with adult strangers; however, they are more relaxed and willing to share perceptions
when discussions are held with a group of peers” (Horner, 2000, p. 510). Following that advice, participants of this study were split into smaller groups, and data was obtained by using two data collection methods: group interviews (verbal method) and drawings (visual method). Not only is the use of multiple methods an effective characteristic of qualitative research (Cresswell, 1998, as cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p. 173), especially when researching children’s experiences it is “a valuable approach that does not merely duplicate data but also offers complementary insights and understandings that may be difficult to access through reliance on a single method of data collection” (Darbyshire, MacDougall & Schiller, 2005, p. 417).

Finally, it is not only the research participants that are key to the research process, but also the researchers themselves. Since in qualitative studies the research process is more open and flexible than in quantitative studies, research questions or data collection methods can change anytime throughout the research process (Ayiro, 2012, p. 20). Thus, the researchers need to be prepared to modify initial positions, and also be aware of their background knowledge and experiences, which, according to Cohen et al., are what give rise to qualitative research (2007, p. 173). Those experiences influence the research because as Ayiro (2012) and Ezzy (2002) both state, “the personal experience of the researcher is an integral part of the research process” (Ezzy 2002, as cited in Cohen et al., 2007, p. 153) and “[the researcher’s] interpretations cannot be separated from their own backgrounds, history, contexts, and prior understandings. (Ayiro, 2012, p. 21). This research derived from personal interest and my own experience from working as an international volunteer with the English Opens Doors Program, teaching English to young learners in a public school in Chile, using language immersion and communicative learning methods. This personal experience has inspired me to focus on the receivers of this volunteer initiative, namely how the students working with international volunteers experience this form of communicative language learning. As explained above, as a researcher I am
bringing personal experience and background knowledge to this study and I acknowledge that there is a change of bias. Explained by Marilyn Lichtman as “a preference that inhibits impartial judgement”, bias can be controlled by careful work and reflection (2013, p. 21), which was applied throughout this research process.

6.2 Research Design

The purpose of this study was to find out how young learners of English as a foreign language in a public school in Chile experience communicative language learning with their international volunteer teacher, who had been sent to the school by the National Volunteer Center as part of the English Opens Doors Program initiative. According to Cohen et al. (2007), the choice of methodology and design of the research depends on the research purpose (p. 78). And since this study was to look at children’s experiences, interviewing the young learners was an appropriate choice, as Seidman (2006) explains: “If the researcher is interested [...] in what it is like for students to be in the classroom, what their experience is, and what meaning they make out of that experience [...] then [...] interviewing, in most cases, may be the best avenue of inquiry” (p. 11). To support the data gathered from the interviews, there was also visual data being collected in form of drawings. Combined, those two methods of data collection (i.e. verbal and visual method) provide “rich descriptions in words and pictures that capture children's experiences” (Greig, Taylor, & MacKay, 2007, p. 138).
6.3 Data Collection: Access and Permission

Having set up the research design, there is yet another essential part to be considered before starting the data collection – gaining access and permission to do so. Various researchers state the importance of that step, such as Bell (1991), who highlights that the researcher first needs to contact an appropriate official, explaining the aims and possible benefits of the research to gain permission and informed consent early on (as cited in Cohen et al., 2007, p. 55). Wellington and Szczerbinski (2007) reaffirms that it is essential to communicate the reasons for a study and making clear its extent and demands – what does the researcher need and what is expected from participants (p. 53). Thus it is inevitable for the researcher to present a concrete research plan with all relevant characteristics to the people involved (Wellington & Szczerbinski, 2007), and to establish oneself “as a credible person doing a ‘worthy project’ (Woods, 1986, p. 23)”, all the while staying committed to one’s responsibilities of conducting the research “ethically and reflectively” (Wellington & Szczerbinski, 2007, p. 53).

Due to the nature of this study, the data collection was designed to take place in Chile [abroad], and the key factors that needed to be taken into consideration were permission and consent from all participants, access to the location, schedules and time-management. A few months prior to the start of data collection, I contacted the National Volunteer Center (NVC) by e-mail, who – being responsible for recruiting international volunteer teachers and placing them in public schools throughout Chile – confirmed interest and permission for this study, and were able to assist in contacting a location by providing information and connection to other officials who would be in involved in this study, such as the regional representative of the English Opens Doors program and the school’s principal.
The requirements for selecting a setting for data collection, according to the research design, were for the school to teach the primary levels 5th and 6th grade (i.e. 10-12 year-olds), to be working with an international volunteer at the time of data collection, and to be situated in the Valparaíso or Metropolitan region in Chile (due to practicalities related to travel arrangements). The choice of the setting was made by using a non-probability sampling strategy, meaning that a particular group was targeted, and knowing that it would not be representative of the whole population (Cohen et al., 2007, p.51). This sampling strategy is often associated with qualitative research methods (Wellington & Szczerbinski, 2007, p. 51), and is frequently used in small-scale studies like this one, where one school or a few groups of students are being studied (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 113). Non-probability sampling was chosen to select a setting for data collection because, while it is cheaper and less complicated to set up, it “can prove perfectly adequate where researchers do not intend to generalize their findings beyond the sample in question” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 113). According to Wellington and Szczerbinski (2007), the type of this sampling strategy was guided or directed, because the setting was suggested by “a knowledgeable guide or an ‘expert’ in a field” (p. 51) who also helped with access (in this case, the National Volunteer Center).

6.4 Data Collection Instruments: Group Interviews and Drawings

Having gained access to a suitable setting and permission by all officials involved to conduct this research, data collection took place during three days in summer of 2018 at a municipal school that teaches students at primary and lower secondary level and is situated in the Valparaíso (fifth) region in Chile. After being welcomed and introduced to the school facilities by the principal, data was obtained from working with students in fifth and sixth grades, using
drawings and group interviews as my method for data collection. As the research process in qualitative research is flexible and emergent (Ayiro, 2012), phases of the process such as research questions, methods of data collection, or sampling of participants may change once the data collection has started (Ayiro, 2012, p. 20); The researcher needs to be flexible and able to adapt to issues that might arise throughout the research process, and as Cohen et al. advice, to “use what is appropriate” (2007, p. 183). This section describes the methods that were used and explains how the initial research plan was adapted during data collection to best answer the research questions.

6.4.1 Group Interviews

| 11 group interviews were conducted, involving a total of 32 students from fifth and sixth grades (10–12-year-olds), lasting between 15 and 25 minutes. |

The largest part of the data that served to answer the research questions was collected by interviewing the young EFL learners in small groups. Researchers who have conducted studies with children state that group interviews are a common and effective qualitative research method used with children and adolescents (Horner, 2000; Morgan, Gibbs, Maxwell, Britten, Julkaisussa, 2002), especially if one wants “to gather detailed information about participants’ experiences, insights, or beliefs about a selected topic” (Horner, 2000, p. 511) – as in this case about the learners experiences in the communicative language learning setting with the international volunteer. Conducting interviews in groups “stimulates an individual's memories of personal experiences and generates group interpretations that are grounded in lived experiences”, explains Roberts (1997) (as cited in Horner, 2000, p.512).
As mentioned earlier, middle school children tend to be shy when talking to adult strangers, but more relaxed in a group of peers (Horner, 2000, p. 510). I aimed to minimize my status of being that adult stranger by introducing myself to the young research participants when I first arrived at the school, and then again right before data collection by including a short ice-breaker activity within each group to get to know each other.

Data collection with the young learners was scheduled during their class’ ninety-minute English lessons and had been communicated with the responsible teachers in advance. On day one, the initial plan for the data collection was carried out, meaning I was working for ninety minutes with half of the students of one class, the same students who form a group when working with the international volunteer, and then with the other half of that class during the next English lesson of ninety minutes. The choice for working with half of the students at the same time was influenced by my limited amount of time at the setting of data collection. After doing an ice-breaker activity with the first half of participants, I then separated the students into smaller groups of four to five participants, as a study on methodological issues in conducting group interviews with children aged 7–11 years suggests: “four or five participants are probably ideal” (Morgan et al., 2002, p. 8). Morgan et al. (2002) explain that larger groups would make an interactive discussion more difficult, due to possibly too much noise which then would lead to difficulties when transcribing the interview (p. 8). When separating the students into smaller groups, I did so by assigning numbers from 1-5 to the students and then having those with number 1 form a group, those with number 2 form another group, and so forth. Due to the generally large number of students in Chilean classrooms, that led to the formation of four smaller groups in total and greatly affected the problem that Morgan et al. (2002) mentioned previously: even though the individual groups themselves were small, the noise level in the background while interviewing one group was too high for the voice recording device to properly capture what was being said. As the only researcher, I was on my
own working with the students and it was difficult to monitor the rest of the participants while conducting group interviews. Having learnt from day one, I reflected on my sampling method for data collection and, as common and often necessary in doing qualitative research (Wellington & Szczerbinski, 2007, p. 23), I modified the number of participants the following days: Given the time frame at the setting of data collection, instead of working with half of each class at once, I chose only eight students in the classes that remained, who would then form two small groups to be interviewed. Even though that resulted in the data being reduced to half of the original amount (to 32 students instead of 51), the quality of the group interviews ended up being much higher due to almost no background noise and participants being able to concentrate better. While the number of samples had been modified during the data collection, the rest of the set-up had stayed the same throughout the data collection process. Those aspects had been well thought-through, paying special attention to the importance of the social context when working with children, which includes the setting of the data collection, the composition of groups and seating arrangements, peer influence on the group dynamics, and managing the groups during the interview (Morgan et al., 2002, p. 9).

The setting of the data collection is important as it can affect how comfortable participants feel during the interview, which might have an influence on the outcome of the data. In this study, data collection took place at the young learners’ school, in the school’s Centro de Recursos de Aprendizaje or C.R.A. (Center of Resources for Learning) – a space that provides students with room for reading, learning, sharing and just being: there is a library, computers, (board) games, big tables, and sofas. During my time at the school, I observed that the C.R.A. was being used enthusiastically by students of all ages during long and short breaks in between classes. By taking the young learners there for data collection, I assured that students were already familiar with the setting, because according to Kennedy, Kools and Krueger (2001) a new and unknown setting, paired with the (unfamiliar) experience of being interviewed, can provoke anxiety in
some children (p.186). Given the pleasant environment in the C.R.A., I was hoping to reduce what Scott (2000) notes as a challenge when conducting interviews at school: that the atmosphere in schools creates an inevitable “test-taking mentality” (as cited in Morgan et al. 2002, p. 9). But there are ways to take away the hierarchical power structure adult-child that is common in school settings and create a more relaxed atmosphere. Morgan et al. (2002) suggest the use of first names and state that “[s]eating arrangements can also help promote an atmosphere of equity” (p. 9). During the group interviews, each group of students was seated around a big table, enabling eye-contact and interaction among the participants, and I, the researcher, sat with the group while interviewing them. During the interviews, it was important to manage the groups: as stated in Horner (2000), the researcher needs to be aware of turn-taking and managing dominant participants and encouraging shy students. This can be challenging, but one of the advantages of working in groups is that “participants can be empowered in the interview process. The power imbalance between adult researcher and young participants is reduced as the group shares responsibility for responding to interview questions or reflecting on issues that arise in the discussions” (Morgan & Krueger, 1993, in Horner, 2000, p. 516). How did I engage the young learners? I followed the strategy to use non-verbal feedback, such as nodding or raising eyebrows, to support quiet participants, and to ask probing questions, as for example, Could you tell me more about that? (Horner, 2000, p. 514). At the same time, I directed questions to each student, asking how they experienced this and that, giving all students an opportunity to participate and managing (too) dominant students (Asbury, 1995, in Horner 2000, p 514). I applied those strategies to manage groups, and for the interviews to be successful, I informed the young learners who participated in my study about permissions and consent (see chapter 6.7) and introduced expectations that were discussed at the beginning of the data collection – following Gibson’s advice from “Conducting focus groups with children and young people: strategies for success” (2007): according to the author,
it is really important to establish some ground rules with young participants that address the aim of the discussion and why the participants have been invited to participate; then the interview conversation itself, such as speaking up and turn-taking; and of course an explanation of the recording method and equipment, and with that the verbal permission to do so (p. 479).

In this study, the group interviews were semi-structured, which, as Cohen et al. (2007) define, is a type of interview “where a schedule is prepared that is sufficiently open-ended to enable the contents to be reordered, digressions and expansions made, new avenues to be included, and further probing to be undertaken” (p. 182). Horner too emphasizes the element of flexibility of semi-structured (group) interviews as there will be topics that “arise naturally” during the group discussions” (2000, p. 513). When preparing the interviews for data collection, I did, as Cohen et al. suggest, specify and write down in advance the topics and prepare specific questions that would cover each topic (2007, p. 353). During the interview, my notes served as guidance – I decided on the sequence and wording of the questions depending on how each interview progressed and could therefore keep the interviews fairly conversational (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 353).

The interviews were conducted in the students’ mother tongue, Spanish, to ease their nerves and facilitate communication. When I decided on the type of questions I would ask during the interviews, I considered the following: while young learners are used to answering questions in the classroom, they can find it challenging to formulate responses to open-ended questions and the answers they give tend to be monosyllabic (Dixon & Stein, 2000, in Horner 2000). However, “when asked to describe specific events or activities, they give complete, descriptive responses” because “[t]his communication style reflects their relative lack of experience with generating open responses instead of fact-based or descriptive recall of actual events” (Horner, 2000, p. 511). With that in mind, and at the same time fitting the research questions, questions
for the group interviews were designed to aim at descriptions of events and activities, for example *Do you remember when the international volunteer first arrived? How was that, what happened that day?* The interviews began with a general “discussion starter” about working with the international volunteer – a question that made it easy for all the students of the group to say something (Horner 2000 p. 514). (See appendices for the list of guiding questions I had prepared in advance) All students had agreed for their interviews to be audio recorded, which allowed me as the interviewer to concentrate on the conversations, maintain eye-contact and add non-verbal cues to engage with the young learners and create a relaxed interview atmosphere. (Wellington & Szczerbinski, 2007, p. 63)

6.4.2 Drawings

15 Drawings were collected from the same students that participated in the group interviews and were mostly created in groups. Drawings were selected according to their relevance in this study.

The previous section describes the use of group interviews as an instrument to understand how young learners in Chilean public schools experience communicative language learning with an international volunteer. The data gathered from those interviews was crucial to effectively answering the research questions. In addition, the verbal output from the interviews was supported by visual data in form of drawings produced by the young learners *before* starting the interviews in small groups. Approaching the data collection by creating drawings, served as an introduction into the research topic. Students had the choice to make a drawing either
individually or by working together as a group; the guidelines were broad to support creativity – any ideas related to English language learning with the volunteer or in general were accepted, given that the content was appropriate. The students were given time to brainstorm and get started on their drawings before I began interviewing the first group of participants. Some groups were still working on their drawings while being interviewed, which was not a problem because it provided the young learners a focus other than the interviewer and facilitated communication with the students (Gross & Hayne, 1998, p. 174). Their drawings were used to aid the interview process by “breaking the ice, prompting memory, improving the flow and content of the discussion and helping establish rapport and shared understanding” (Rouse, 2013, para. 1). It needs to be clarified that the reason for including visual data in this study was not to analyze what the learners’ drawings mean, but rather focus on the young learners’ explanations of their drawings (Driessnack, 2005, p. 420). Driessnack (2005) summarizes my choice by explaining that drawings can be used as a “method for communication with children, shifting the focus from what the children draw to what the children say about what they draw” (p. 420). That way, it was possible to connect the group interviews to the students’ drawings and explore topics further if needed.

6.5 Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative research, in terms of the methods and analysis that researchers adopt, is characterized for being highly interpretative. Other than in quantitative data analysis, where logic and statistical tests rule the process, there is no one rule to analyzing qualitative data. Cohen et al. define the process of qualitative data analysis simply as “making sense of data in terms of the participants’ definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories and
regularities” (2007, p 461). And adds that “how one does it should abide by the issue of fitness for purpose” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 461); it depends on what the researcher wants the analysis to do with the data.

Since the aim of this study was to provide a detailed account of young learners’ experiences regarding English language learning with an international volunteer in a public school in Chile, a thematic analysis was an appropriate fit. In this section, I will explain the reasons for my choice and continue by describing the data analysis process of the group interviews that I conducted at the school.

**What does thematic analysis do, and what is it used for?**

First of all, it is important to note that a thematic analysis of data is used in many different qualitative data analyses, but as Braun and Clarke (2006) point out, it is “a very poorly ‘branded’ method, in that it does not appear to exist as a ‘named’ analysis in the same way that other methods do (e.g., narrative analysis, grounded theory)” (p. 6). Thematic Analysis (TA) is less established as an analysis on its own and lacks the amount of theory that other types of analysis have received. But there are researchers who work with the thematic analysis and provide theory and application for when and how to use it (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Fitting this study, I have chosen the thematic analysis approach as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Thematic analysis is useful for when a researcher wants to organize and describe the data in (rich) detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 6), and to present experiences and realities of the research participants (p. 9). As Yin (2011, as cited in Castleberry & Nolen, 2018) describes, “it provides a richer, deeper understanding of the meanings that people place on actions, events,
and relationships” (p. 808) – in this case, providing an understanding of young learners’ experiences in the English language classroom in Chile. As its name suggests, in thematic analysis one looks at the data for themes, which “capture[] something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represent[] some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 10). The difference to other qualitative methods that look for themes is that thematic analysis is less bound to theory (as compared to grounded theory or thematic discourse analysis, for example) (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 8), and thus more flexible. While this flexibility can be an advantage, it means that the researcher needs to make choices and discuss those in a transparent manner (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 9.) This starts even before identifying themes: first, the researcher needs to decide which approach will be appropriate for the study – an inductive approach or a theoretical approach? (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 12) I chose to work with the inductive approach, which is driven by the data itself because the researcher’s aim is to provide an understanding of the (possibly under-researched) field or does not yet know participants’ views on that topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 11). According to Patton (1990, as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2006), the themes in the inductive approach are strongly linked to the data (p. 12), and thus the research questions may change throughout the research process. The theoretical approach, on the other hand, is suitable for researchers who are studying a specific research question or who are interested in only part of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 12).

Another choice a researcher needs to make, according to Braun and Clarke, is on which level the themes are analyzed: in this study, I decided to organize and describe the data on a semantic level, only looking at what young learners have said and leaving apart any underlying ideas or assumptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 13). Having made the choice for an inductive and semantic approach, I then followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006) outline of six phases that are characteristic for doing thematic analysis (p. 16).
Step 1: Becoming familiar with data

The first step was to become familiar with the data, which was reading and re-reading the group interviews and looking out for themes related to the learners’ experiences about communicative EFL learning with the international volunteer (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 12). I had time to familiarize myself with the interviews already while I transcribed the group interviews. It is stated that transcribing interviews, especially group interviews, is an extremely time-consuming process, because having several participants talk at the same time, one needs to spend extra time to identify voices and make out any interruptions (Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008, p. 294; Smith & Davies, 2010, p. 149). I agree that the process of transcribing my group interviews was exactly like that, but it did help me to become familiar with the data. According to Horner (2000, p. 510), “[d]ata analysis begins during the focus group session as issues emerge in the context of group discussions”; during the group interviews I was already able to probe further whenever interesting themes came up in relation to the research questions or in general. I did not have anyone with me to take additional written notes during the interview, which is often recommended for group interviews (Smith & Davies, 2010, p. 149; Kennedy, Kools & Krueger, 2001, p. 186). Since I was the only researcher, I decided that managing the groups through social interaction and attentiveness was more appropriate in that situation. My reason was, as Cohen et al. write, “to have the interviewer make notes during the interview, […] could be highly off-putting for some respondents” (2007, p. 364). Instead I took a minute after each interview to jot down any thoughts I had before moving on to the next group. I transcribed the interviews verbatim form – meaning everything the participants said, plus punctuation for easier reading, contractions and additional remarks such as [laughs], but no details such as sentence stress or intonation, which is perfectly sufficient for thematic analysis according to Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 17) – and I did so with the help of the transcription program f4transkript: the advantage of using this program was that while listening
to the audio file, it let me play, pause, rewind and jump forward by just pressing a designated key (F4, F3 and F5) on the keyboard. I transcribed the interviews in that same program and then saved them in a word processor. There was also the option to control the volume and the replay speed, which was helpful to slow down the interviews and catch everything that was being said. When reading through my transcripts, I already marked the parts that stroke me as interesting with a pencil.

**Step 2: Initial coding**

From those parts that I had underlined with a pencil, I then produced codes by using different colors and highlighting aspects that belong together. Austin and Sutton (2014) define coding as follows and explain what to look out for:

Coding is the process by which raw data (e.g., transcripts from interviews and focus groups or field notes from observations) are gradually converted into usable data through the identification of themes, concepts, or ideas that have some connection with each other. It may be that certain words or phrases are used by different participants, and these can be drawn together to allow the researcher an opportunity to focus findings in a more meaningful manner. (p. 439)

Braun and Clarke (2006) add that coding can be done “by writing notes on the texts you’re analysing, by using highlighters or coloured pens to indicate potential patterns, or by using ‘post-it’ notes to identify segments of data” (p. 19). The coding can be done by using a program, but I opted for doing it manually, working on the transcriptions that I had printed out beforehand, and also highlighting codes in the word processor because it would be easier to rearrange the codes later.
Step 3: Identifying themes

When searching for themes (based on the previously identified codes), it was up to me to determine what exactly a theme is because there are no strict guidelines to how many times a pattern must occur for it to be a theme; the key is that the theme captures an important element relating to the research question(s) (Scharp & Sanders, 2018, p. 117; Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 10). By reading through my list of codes, I began to arrange them in groups according to their similarities and thus forming broader themes. At this stage, I was working in the word processor to easily drag and paste codes to different sections of themes. Since my aim was to remain as objectively as possible throughout the research process, the themes I formed were data-driven, that is I did not focus on obtaining answers just for the previously outlined research questions but rather kept an open mind for the research questions to evolve from emergent themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 18). At the end of this phase, I had a collection of various themes that were made up of the codes, and some of the themes were rearranged into subthemes.

Step 4: Reviewing themes

Having arranged the themes into groups I reviewed them several times and rearranged some of them to make sure everything was well connected and made sense. In their six-step guidance, Braun and Clarke advice that “[d]ata within themes should cohere together meaningfully, while there should be clear and identifiable distinctions between themes” (2006, p. 20).

Step 5: Naming and describing themes

Because it does not make sense to name the themes while still rearranging them, Braun and Clarke (2006) put this step towards the end of the analysis process (p. 22). Austin and Sutton (2014) add that this process of giving “the words, phrases, or pieces of text meaningful names
that exemplify what the participants are saying […] is referred to as ‘theming’” (p. 439). At this point, my data had been arranged and organized and I followed Braun and Clarke’s guidelines to now analyze and describe the aspect of each theme in a few sentences and then connect all of them: “As well as identifying the ‘story’ that each theme tells, it is important to consider how it fits into the broader overall ‘story’ that you are telling about your data, in relation to your research question or questions (2006, p. 22).”

**Step 6: Reporting the results**

The final phase was to present and discuss the results of the previously worked-out themes (see chapter 7). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), this write-up should be done in a way that in the end it presents a “concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive, and interesting account of the story the data tell” (p. 23). In presenting the results, I included quotes that illustrate the main aspects of each theme in relation to the research question. I did so not only to “keep the flavor of the original data”, as Cohen et al. (2007, p. 462) argue, but also to provide evidence of the data and convince the reader of the validity of this research analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 23).

As a concluding remark on this data analysis, it should be noted that the drawings of the students were not analyzed, they rather served as an introduction to facilitate communication during the interview process and are included to illustrate the results of the group interviews. Furthermore, the data analysis was not a straightforward process going from one step to the next, but rather a moving back and forth between the different stages as needed (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 16). I am aware that qualitative research is interpretative and that the researcher might influence the analysis process because he or she is responsible for organizing the study from beginning to end; therefore, I was cautious in all the decisions I made and remained
reflective throughout the process of analyzing and evaluating the data (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 469).

6.6 Reliability and Validity of the Research

The objective of this qualitative study was to understand how young EFL learners in a Chilean public-school experience communicative language learning with an international volunteer. In contrast to quantitative research, which usually tests hypothesis, using statistical instruments to provide reliable evidence, a qualitative research that aims at understanding participants’ experiences and behavior cannot assure this reliability (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018, p. 807). Qualitative research is highly interpretative because, as Cohen et al. explain, “[t]here is no one single or correct way to analyse and present qualitative data” (2007, 461). The researcher is the key instrument in a qualitative study and his or her background, presuppositions and own interpretations affect the research process on all stages (Ayiro, 2012, p. 20-21). To make a qualitative research as reliable as possible, it is imperative for the researcher to be aware and acknowledge his or her own bias and to also report how it might affect the research (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 80). As a former international volunteer working with young learners in a public school in Chile myself, there is no doubt that I bring personal experience and background to this study, and my interest was what led to the research proposal. I was aware from the beginning that I had strong assumptions about the results of this study, but I did my best to treat the data objectively and was mindful about how my own bias can influence the results. I aimed at following Corbin and Strauss’ advice for a qualitative researcher to “walk a fine line between getting into the hearts and minds of respondents, while at the same time keeping enough distance to be able to think clearly and analytically about what is being said or done” (2008, p.
To further increase reliability, I critically reflected on the research methods I chose for collecting and analyzing my data, and I ensured that each step of that process, such as the assigning of codes and themes, was appropriate, transparent and reported according to reality (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018, p. 813-814). Furthermore, I included direct quotations of participants, without identifying their personality, to demonstrate credibility in processing of the data and to provide transparency for the readers of this study (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018, p. 813). Regarding validity – as advised by Cohen et al. (2007) – I made sure to use adequate resources for my study and to choose appropriate methodology to analyze the findings of the data. I avoided selecting some parts of the data over others and aimed at creating an honest and rich representation of the findings.

Finally, it must be noted that the findings of this research cannot and were not intended to be generalized. Cohen et al. (2007) state that due to the nature of qualitative studies, and as is often the case in small-scale study that look at only one school, the data that was collected does not represent the entire population (p. 113) because “individuals are unique and largely non-generalizable” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 20). The research possibilities of this study were limited, but I argue that the findings prove perfectly adequate and add voices of individuals to our current knowledge (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 113; Ayiro, 2012, p. 16).

6.7 Ethical Considerations

When conducting research in the field of education, there are various ethical issues must be considered carefully. Ethical issues arise at each phase of the research process – from the research purpose to contents and methods, over reporting and outcomes (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 51) – and the researcher is responsible that the research is reliable and follows the ethical
research guidelines to protect the rights of all participants involved. This section explains the steps I took to ensure that the research was carried out complying with the ethical principles and guidelines throughout the entire research process.

Addressing ethical considerations in qualitative research begins in the planning phase, when obtaining permission for the research and gaining access to the setting: to work within in the research guidelines and codes of practice, the researcher needs to follow the key issues of informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality and privacy (Cohen et al., 2007, p 51). Prior to starting the research, permission for this study was obtained from the National Volunteer Center, after presenting a detailed research plan in written form. Access to the setting of data collection was gained through official channels, involving the NVC and a representative on the regional level: my letter of intent had been sent to the principal of the school to check possible interest for participation in this study prior to arranging a face-to-face meeting through e-mail. In the meeting with the principal, I explained again the purpose of this study and provided details and answered questions concerning the data collection, such as methodology, instruments, and materials. The principal was fully informed about what was going to happen, how and why, and gave permission for the students to participate in this study.

Since the participants were children, ethical guidelines on informed consent differ across research literature: While Fargas-Malet et al. (2010, p. 177) point out the assumption that children were not capable of giving informed consent and thus needed to be done by an adult, others, such as Munford and Sanders (2004), prioritize children when it comes to decision-making over participation in a study because children were “competent and capable individuals” (p. 479). First of all, informed consent as defined by Diener and Crandall (1978, as cited in Cohen et al., 2007) is “the procedures in which individuals choose whether to participate in an investigation after being informed of facts that would be likely to influence their decisions” (p. 52). For a participant, in this case the students, to be able to give informed
consent, it is important that they (1) are able to make a responsible decision, (2) voluntarily and freely decide to take part or not, (3) are fully informed, and (4) comprehend the situation and procedures of the research study (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 52-53). Considering those aspects for this study, obtaining informed consent took place on two stages as explained by Fine and Sandstrom (1988, as cited in Cohen et al. 2007, p. 54): First, permission was sought form an adult responsible for the child, which can either be a parent but also a teacher or others, depending on the situation. In this case, permission for the young learners to participate was obtained from the principal, and parents were informed through a written communication sent by the school administration (see Appendix 1). It was decided to not obtain consent from the young learners’ guardians because data collection took place during the learners’ regular English lessons and no risks were involved by participating in this study (Finnish National Board on Research Integrity, n.d.). The second stage of obtaining informed consent when working with children, according to Fine and Sandstrom (1988), was to seek consent from the young learners themselves and provide each of them with the opportunity to refuse to participate, no questions asked (as cited in Cohen et al., 2007, p. 54). This is important because informed consent is not just about agreeing to participate in the research but at the same time it implies “informed refusal” and participants can leave the research at any time during the data collection (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 52). I can see how it has been argued that “after gatekeepers [the school staff] have given consent it is difficult for a child to refuse to take part” (Backett-Milburn & McKie, 1999, p. 394), which is why I made sure that I communicated clearly all information regarding this study and data collection at the beginning, and I took time within each group to explain once more that students could freely decide to participate or not, that this study had nothing to do with school-work, and that data would be confidential. Students expressed their informed consent verbally.
Regarding anonymity and confidentiality, it needs to be stated that even though face-to-face interviews can never guarantee participants’ anonymity, so Cohen et al. (2007, p. 64), I would say that in this case it was possible because due to the relatively large number of participants and not obtaining students’ names during data collection, I as the researcher am not able to identify the participants by the responses they provided (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 64). The only information I had were the grade levels of participants (5th or 6th grade). During the transcription phase, which I did by myself to further ensure anonymity, participants could therefore only be labeled as student 1, student 2, etc., and any other names mentioned, such as teachers or volunteers, were immediately replaced by a code or description, such as “the volunteer”, at the time of transcribing. I can assure that no names of participants are reported in this study. The audio files, transcripts, pictures of drawings and other documents related to this research were systematically organized with labels that make sense only to me, and then safely stored and protected on my personal computer (Smith & Davies, 2010, p. 147); back-ups were made in another private location. Once this research is completed and evaluated, I will permanently delete all audio files, transcriptions, and pictures of drawings.

In the next chapter, the results of the data analysis are presented. Cohen et al. state that “[e]thical problems in educational research can often result from thoughtlessness, oversight or taking matters for granted” (2007, p. 62). From the very beginning of this research to collecting data, analyzing and reporting the results and writing this research, it was a priority to adhere to ethical guidelines, and I paid careful attention to report all information appropriately by strictly following the principles of conduct to avoid misrepresentation and plagiarism. Research integrity, as defined by the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (2012, p. 28-29), was applied throughout the entire research process.
7 RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

How do young learners in a Chilean public school experience the English Opens Doors Program’s volunteer initiative that was introduced to improve students’ communicative English language skills? That was the driving question of this research and the findings thereof are presented in this chapter. The chapter is divided into sections, exploring students’ experiences and opinions in relation to the three final research questions, which have been changed slightly in comparison to the questions posed at the beginning of this research.

1. How do young EFL learners in a public school in Chile experience communicative language learning with international volunteer teachers?

2. What kind of communicative language teaching methods were used by the volunteer from the learners’ perspective?

3. What do learners think about the relevance of English in their future?

As the learners’ experiences are described, direct quotations from the group interviews have been included to represent participants’ voices and illustrate the points they made (quotations were translated from Spanish into English). While I gathered an extensive amount of meaningful interview data, I limited the use of learners’ quotations to the core statements that best represent participants’ experiences. The majority of students shared similar experiences; I also made sure to represent individual voices. Students are named S1, S2, S3, and S4 (because there was a maximum of four students in each interview group), combined with the letters a-e, referring to the interview groups that were formed, and numbers 5 and 6, standing for the students’ grade levels (5th or 6th grade). So, for example, S2b5 stands for student number two.
of the group labeled as group b, belonging to 5th grade. The volunteer’s name and gender is replaced by an X.

7.1 How do young EFL learners in a public school in Chile experience communicative language learning with international volunteer teachers?

The aim of this first research question was to present learners’ experiences related to working with an international volunteer. *Experience* is a broad term that can cover a wide range of topics and my intention during the group interviews was to not limit students’ perspectives in any way. In this section, I provide a detailed account of the aspects that came up during the interviews, all of which fit the dictionary definitions of what an experience is: “something personally encountered, undergone, or lived through” (Merriam Webster, n.d.), and “an event or occurrence which leaves an impression on someone” (Oxford Dictionary, n.d.). Following, students’ experiences are grouped and presented in categories to make for a clear structure and overview.

*Students’ first impressions*

As explained in chapter 3, for students who get to work with an international volunteer as part of their English classes in a public school, it might well be their first encounter with an English-native speaker, or any foreign non-Spanish-speaking person from outside of Latin America. This new intercultural experience has left an impression on the majority of students, who recounted moments of shyness, confusion, surprise, and interest – often related to the “foreigner’s” physical appearance, which stroke the young learners as a notable difference compared to the average Chilean person.
At first everyone was shy (S2d6).

We were a little nervous because we didn’t know X [the volunteer’s] name, where X came from, and (s)he was talking in a strange way because we didn’t understand much (S1c5).

We were all impressed because X almost didn’t fit through the door (S4d5).

We asked how tall X was because it caught our attention that X was that tall (S2e6).

X told us that (s)he had been to many countries (S1e6).

Especially during those first moments of getting to know each other, the volunteer had students’ full attention as they carefully observed their new teacher’s every action. This attention, which international volunteers naturally carry with them due to their foreignness, is an asset that, if maintained, has been found to positively influence foreign language learning (Cheng, 2015).

**Students perceive cultural differences**

Students clearly noted cultural differences as they first met the volunteer, and while working together in the classroom. The cultural aspects that the volunteer brings into the classroom is an exciting element for students and, more often than not, students perceived that as an opportunity to practice English and to interact with someone from another country:

Yes, it’s really cool because X speaks English and comes from… (S1c5)

It’s like a new teacher of English has arrived and everyone wants to have a turn [to interact with X] at the same time. And it gets a little intense (S2d5).

It’s very exciting because X also speaks [other foreign language] apart from English (S2e6).

It’s strange and I like it … I like listening to how they speak in another language and how they pronounce (S2d6).
I think it’s the same, the only difference is that X talks in another language (S3a5).

The few students who did not express excitement about working with someone from another country who does not speak or use Spanish, relate their feelings to the difficulties they experience in the English immersion environment that the volunteer had created (further detailed later):

It’s very strange because I struggle a lot understanding X, because sometime (s)he starts to speak whatever in English, and I go blank (S1a6).

Unique learning environment

Besides bringing cultural aspects to the classroom, the international volunteers create a learning environment that students have likely not experienced in a school setting before. The volunteers, who are trained by the National Volunteer Center, follow a teaching model that moves away from traditionally grammar-loaded English lessons and is designed to practice listening and speaking skills by engaging students in games and activities that are conducted using one hundred percent English language. To facilitate communicative language teaching, classes are split into two groups that switch between the teacher and the volunteer, reducing the number of students to teach for both. I have found that students experience this teaching model and the volunteers’ interactive English lessons as a welcome change to regular classes and point out the communicative focus of the volunteer’s lesson:

It’s good because that way we get to have a different class … it’s fun (S4d5)

The good thing is that we don’t have to write anything (S3d5); We don’t need our notebook (S2a6).

X speaks mostly English, so we get used to it … of 100% English, it’s maybe 1% Spanish (S1e6).
We learn more because for our teacher it is very difficult to teach all of us, so it’s better to separate the groups and the volunteer teaches first one group and then the other (S3b5).

Part of this unique learning environment is the classroom set-up. Students have commented on the advantages of having a different seating arrangement in the volunteer’s class. Instead of the traditional set-up in rows, chairs are arranged in a U-shape.

We sit in a half-circle (S2a5); There are no tables, because with chairs alone we are able to see better as X teaches (S2d5).

It’s better because X is in the middle and all of us can pay attention without having someone in front of us, because all of us are able to see equally well (S4d6).

As students have noted, paying attention to what is going on in class is a lot easier given the circular seating arrangement. This is because all students are within the action zone – that area of the classroom where “the most interest, excitement, and class participation takes place” (Falout, 2014, p. 279). Furthermore, the U-shaped seating arrangement in the volunteer’s
classroom affects interpersonal dynamics within the class community and helps create a positive learning environment (Falout, 2014, p. 275).

**Motivation for learning**

A message that was repeated across all groups of students that I interviewed, was that classes with the volunteers were conducted in a way that was more motivating compared to their English teachers’ or other subject teachers’ classes (for some of the students it had already been their second time working with an international volunteer and higher motivation was stated in both experiences). Students expressed being motivated because of the volunteers’ teaching style, the dynamic and interactive activities, and the before-mentioned classroom structure. Research has shown that motivation is an important factor for learners in foreign language classroom settings, and Dörnyei and Csizér (2005) argue that intercultural contact – as when working with the international volunteer – would be a powerful tool for influencing learners’ motivation (p. 28).

*Our teacher is also nice and does activities and all, but with [the volunteer] it’s motivating because one knows ‘yeah, cool, we will do this and that!’ and X motivates us to learn English (S4e6).*

Another aspect that provided additional motivation for learners, is a special reward system that volunteers are advised to use during lessons. This system allows volunteers to manage student behavior through positive reinforcement and giving out rewards for individual students and the entire class; it also provides immediate feedback for students in visual form and can help to create a positive classroom environment. Students have described their volunteer’s reward system as follows:
When we behave in class or do well in activities, we receive a star. Because here on the wall in the back, the volunteer has [a poster with] 6°A, 6°B,... all the courses, and (s)he goes ‘Okay, this course did well today – one star!’ (S2d6).

And just like X, with the former volunteer we had a cactus with stars (S3e6).

If we get a star, we have to put it [on the chart] (S3b6).

It’s fun because when we win a star, we all start applauding and X is happy and that’s why we all strive for a star (S4d5).

If we have, for example, 10 stars, then X will speak to us in [another language] and that motivates us to get even more stars (S4e6).

Students recounted the volunteer’s expectations that constituted “behaving well in class”. Those included no eating, no playing with toys or phones, paying attention and raising one’s hand, participating in activities and treating each other with respect. By reinforcing positive behavior, the volunteer can keep students engaged and focused on the “goal” of winning a star. And just like attention, motivation plays an important role in shaping learners’ attitudes towards the target language and in successful foreign language learning (Huang, 2011, p. 187).

Classroom routines facilitate learning

Students’ motivation might also be positively influenced by introducing a class routine and sticking to it. I found that students know exactly what types of activities or exercises they will
do at which point during the lesson: after greeting each other and working through a warm-up, which always includes practicing saying the date, learners know that next, the volunteer will go through class content, explaining the following activities, and then it is time for games and other fun activities, to which learners will be looking forward.

*It’s fun because when we arrive, we start with ‘Hello’, ‘Today is...’ and then a variety of fun activities, different games (S2b5).*

*First we say, ‘Today is Monday, ... 2018’, and then we continue with activities, sometimes many activities in groups on the whiteboard and various fun things (S3c5)*

*The date is the easiest part! Because that’s what we always practice. We always start with that. With the date, with ‘hello’... (S1b6)*

*Then X starts explaining to us what we will do next, and then we start with ‘Simon Says’, for example, or games on the board (S1a6).*

Having a class structure helps the volunteer organize the lessons and makes learning easier for students (Shvidko, 2014). As Shvidko (2014) advises, for young learners in an EFL environment, the foreign language lessons (especially in this case with an international
volunteer) can be an intimidating experience, therefore providing learners with a routine and regular activities helps them get used to the language learning situation.

**Challenges**

While the aspects that have been discussed above – unique learning environment, cultural exchange, reward chart and class routines – are experienced positively by the majority of students, they also bring certain challenges with them, resulting in some learners experiencing difficulties, frustration, and lack of motivation. Students have brought up those challenges during the group interviews, expressing their struggles with English and dislikes regarding behavior in class.

**Language barriers**

When talking to students in small groups, I had made sure to create a positive atmosphere within the groups (no test-taking mentality with right and wrong answers), that would allow students to share thoughts and experiences without feeling the pressure to answer in a certain way. During the interviews, it was noticeable that there were a few learners who were not happy in the volunteer’s class. I found that the main reason for their reluctance to engage, “behave” and take part in classroom activities might be the frustration they experience in this new English language immersion environment.

*The volunteers don’t explain anything, only sometimes, they speak in English all the time. Our teacher speaks in English but then right after (s)he explains in Spanish what (s)he just said in English [...] We still don’t have that development in English (S1a6).*
*X speaks to us in English, but we don’t know all the words in English (S2c5).*

*I didn’t understand anything, and I kept explaining but X didn’t understand [Spanish] and I didn’t understand the volunteer’s words (S3d5).*

*It’s very difficult because X starts to speak like [blablabla] and doesn’t understand any Spanish (S2a5).*

Even though a relatively small number of students – mostly students in 5th grade – experienced the language barriers as a hindrance to fun language learning (and individuals’ learning background in not further known), it is important nevertheless to point out how a volunteer’s way of communicating with young EFL learners can affect the learning experience, especially in an immersion environment with teachers who do not speak the learners’ native language.

Other learners who also recounted struggling with understanding the English-speaking volunteer use strategies to overcome those language barriers:

*We have a ‘translator’ [fellow classmate] in class who helps us a lot when we don’t understand the volunteer (S2b5).*

*We ask X (S4c5).*

*On the wall where the whiteboard is, the volunteer has ‘hello’, ‘how are you’, and all those words and for example when X writes something on the board, we have the pronunciation there next to it (S2d6).*

*We don’t understand but then X sees our faces and (s)he explains it better (S2c5).*

**Class Activities**

With the international volunteer, students get to know a variety of new activities. None of the learners expressed a dislike for a specific classroom activity. Again, struggles are likely being
related to lack of motivation or difficulties in understanding and following instructions in English, but not to activities per se:

*We sit down in a half-circle, and the volunteer starts teaching, teaching, teaching... and sometimes I get bored, bored... It’s not fun, just when there are activities to stand up. But sometimes we just sit in a half-circle and (s)he starts to ask things* (S2a5 – expressed struggles with language barriers in previous section)

*Yeah, activities are okay, it’s just that English doesn’t motivate me, math motivates me...* (S4d6)

The volunteers follow the head teachers’ lesson plans in terms of learning content but can fill their lessons with dynamic and interactive activities using their creativity to practice communicative skills with students (see research question 2 for a detailed account of volunteers’ teaching methods).

**Classroom Behavior**

The other aspect that some learners noted as frustrating during the volunteer’s lesson was inappropriate behavior of classmates and the volunteer’s struggles to manage those learners.

With *inappropriate behavior* I refer to how students described those situations: shouting in the classroom, not participating, playing with “slime”, taking others’ belongings without permission, and chatting and interrupting the volunteer and students who are eager to participate. Learners who were negatively affected by those interruptions commented on how they did not like when the volunteer had to warn some students, and explained that this resulted in not earning any stars on the reward chart:

*What I don’t like is when X has to spend time warning students and cannot teach well without being interrupted* (S3b5)
We didn’t win a star because there are some classmates that misbehave… (S2c5)

Others, who were maybe part of creating interruptions, referred to the volunteer’s reaction as a negative learning experience:

Some don’t like working with the volunteer … because (s)he warned them and said ‘Silence!’ (S4d5)

Whatever students’ behavior in class, they argue that there is a difference between the volunteer’s lessons and their teachers’ lessons in terms of classroom management:

The difference is that with our teacher they don’t misbehave, but with the volunteer they do because our teacher is not there (S2b5).

Students experience the English lessons with the international volunteer as a “break from regular classes” (see previous section) and might view the volunteer as less of an authority due to a more interactive and energetic learning environment, and the encouragement to play and move around. One learner, however, argues that it has more to do with patience:

But our teacher is not like the volunteer because (s)he IS patient, and the volunteer is not. When we’re chatting, when we’re laughing, when we’re making fun… with our teacher we can do that because (s)he IS patient, (s)he endures it! (S1a6)
Enthusiasm: Extra-curricular activities and culture

As stated earlier, the number of students who were not as excited about the volunteer’s English lessons were far less than students who LOVE it (S3b6). One student said that a highlight was participating in the “Spelling Bee” competition – another initiative organized by the English Opens Doors Program.

![Drawing 7: Spelling Bee competition](image)

The volunteer’s foreign background and international experiences instilled enthusiasm in students to learn more about other cultures, which unfortunately came a little short during volunteers’ lessons:

*I would love if each year someone from a different country came* (S4e6)

*Yes, because we want to know how it is [in other countries]* (S1e6)
The first time X did [talk about home country], but then not anymore. Now (s)he focuses more on teaching us English (S2d5)

The practicing of communicative English language skills in the volunteer’s classroom was experienced as a motivating, diverse and fun learning experience, and the volunteer’s dedication is acknowledged and appreciated by young learners:

*I really like when X works with us because classes are fun and (s)he always starts like this ‘Todaaaaay iiiiiis...’ [laughs] (S4d5)*

*They [the volunteers] do more activities with us, it’s like all we learn is through activities, fun games, and basically it’s the same [as with the teacher] but with competences and so on. And one is more motivated to learn because, for example, when we need to remember the clothing, X is excited and cheers us on ‘Remember, remember!’ [imitating volunteer’s excitement] (S2d6)*
They [the volunteers] are the people who help you improve your English or who help you practice English (S3e6).

7.2 What kind of communicative language teaching methods were used by the volunteer from the learners’ perspective?

This second research question provides an understanding of how the volunteer teaches communicative skills in English, explained from the learners’ point of views. That includes descriptions of the volunteer’s teaching approaches, teaching style, activities and examples.

The international volunteers’ role is to help Chilean English teachers and their students with improving learners’ communicative English language skills. The volunteers assist the teachers as they split the class in two groups and take half of the students to a more learner-friendly ESL environment, one that has been decorated accordingly with posters, maps, flags, or anything else that creates a positive, language immersion environment. That way, learners are surrounded by the target language and both the volunteer and the teacher can teach the same content more efficiently as the number of students is reduced by half. With the volunteers, students have commented that they would not need any writing utensils because the focus is on practicing the content that is introduced in the teachers’ lesson, but in a communicative way.

*It’s all about communicating... we never bring our notebooks because the thing is that we learn to speak in English with the volunteer; for writing we are with the teacher (S4e6).*

*Our teacher teaches the same content as the volunteer but it’s just that s(he) [the teacher] explains it in more details (S2d6).*
It’s like, our teacher introduces us to the verb ‘to be’, and X works on it with us, reviewing and practicing it, but through activities and games to learn it (S4d6).

And there’s not just one class for reviewing but two. For example, in one lesson X reminds us of the animals and in the second lesson we review animals and a little bit of clothing. And then the next class (s)he continues to review a little more (S2d6).

**Communicative teaching methods**

What types of activities does the volunteer chose to practice listening and speaking competences and to meet the learning objectives? To practice students’ speaking skills and pronunciation, the volunteer has introduced warm-up exercises at the beginning of the lessons that will get learners speaking right away. This warm-up includes greeting each other and practicing saying the date out loud. Students state that this was part of every single class: it has become part of a routine that learners find easy.
We greet and X always begins with the date: we say it all together, and then (s)he picks anyone to repeat it again (S1a5); ...and I always raise my hand to say it [the date] (S2d5)

We start with the date. It starts with the volunteer saying the date in English, and then we all repeat it. And then (s)he says ‘You!’; and we say it by ourselves (S1a6)

The date is the easiest part, because it’s what we always practice (S3b6).

What students explained as a regular repetition of spoken content can be identified as the audio-lingual method, which is used to acquire new vocabulary or sentence structures and practice those by listening, imitating, and repeating – until learners are able to produce it on their own (Bidenko & Bespalova, 2017). Another activity through which students have practiced their oral skills implies the same concept of listening and repeating spoken content but is combined with physical movement and actions, facilitating memorization. This method
is known as **Total Physical Response (TPR)**, and students illustrated how they practiced giving directions that way:

> Now we are learning directions and X teaches us the words on the whiteboard and then (s)he says ‘turn around, turn left, turn right’, and then we stand up and repeat and move like this [showing directions] (S2d5)

Having given learners the basic vocabulary that is needed for giving directions, the volunteer moved on to have students apply this newly acquired knowledge:

> X drew three squares and a stickman on the whiteboard, and we had to speak and give directions to make the stickman arrive at its destination (S2a5).

Total Physical Response is also the concept behind an activity that practices animal vocabulary and behind most students’ favorite activity – “Simon Says” – that practices listening skills. Both activities require the volunteer to first teach or review the vocabulary by having students repeat the word and do the action at the same time.

> A classic is ‘Simon Says’ with body parts! (S)he says, for example ‘Simon Says touch your nose’ and we do the action. If we lose, we have to sit down (S1a6).

> X divides us in two groups. Then X shows someone an animal and says ‘This one’. Then one has to imitate the animal and one of the two groups has to say which animal it is, and then there are points (S4d6)

**Teaching approaches**

As this last example shows, the volunteer designs activities to be carried out in teams or groups, and competitions are often part of the lessons. Group work enhances cooperative learning and can help shy students not to feel too exposed in a learning environment where communication
makes up a big part, but participate as part of a group (Azizinezhad, 2011). Students have explained that they work in groups nearly all the time; either in smaller ones of about four students per group, or all of them split up in two groups.

*In groups, or sometimes in pairs (S2a6)*

*In groups! In groups like we are now, to make teams (S1b6)*

*For example, if there are ten people, it’s five here and five there (S2d6)*

They stated that the reason they formed groups was because activities were often carried out as **friendly competitions**, just like the competition for stars among the courses.

*X also divides us in groups, and we get in lines and X says a word and we have to run and write it on the board. And if one group makes a mistake, the point goes to the other group (S4b6)*

*In groups we had to quickly write as many verbs in English as possible, and the group had to help the person whose turn it was (S3c5)*

Competitions and **physical activity** are used to keep learners engaged because they need to concentrate and think quickly as they run to the whiteboard and complete tasks. Even though they are practicing grammatical structures or vocabulary, for example, learners experience those type of activities as fun and motivating.

*We do many fun activities on the whiteboard, in groups, for example, we had to write with a marker the verbs without ‘-ing’ (S2b5)*

*We had to write the body parts on the Simpson character” (S4d5) “Two lines, X quickly said a body part and we had to run and write ‘finger, hand, head’ where it was and then put a number to it (S2d5).*
According to the students, apart from a few single words, the volunteer uses English during the entire class period. International volunteers are not required to know Spanish to work with the English Opens Doors Program. That way, the young learners get to experience a target language immersion environment.

_X says everything English because (s)he is missing the words [in Spanish] to tell us what it is about (S1d5)._ 

_When X explains something, (s)he does so by saying and pointing with the hands like this is that and so on (S2d6)_

According to Chappell (2014), giving instructions for activities in the target language and modeling what learners are supposed to do is a key strategy in communicative language teaching (p. 4).

**Teaching style**

Finally, students have commented on the volunteer’s teaching style, which reflects dedication as a volunteer who helps improve English communicative skills in a public school in Chile:

_I think it’s easy because (s)he teaches us well (S2b5)_

_X speaks to us slowly, so we are able to understand (S1d6)_

_X is fun! Classes are happy, easy and a little challenging (S4e6)_

_X tries to make class more fun for us, so we understand better, and that’s why one is motivated to go work with X (S1e6)_
7.3 What do learners say about the relevance of English in their future?

At this point, the young learners of English that participated in this research are attending 5th and 6th grades in a public school in Chile. Studying English as a foreign language is compulsory in both of those grade levels. This final research question was to find out how the students feel about learning English as a foreign language: What is it that motivates them to study English, or is there anything at all? Will English be a required competence for their future? How about the need for English in Chile according to the students’ perspectives? Having interviewed 11 groups of learners and analyzed that data, it became clear that there were three aspects that serve to answer these questions.

First of all, it turned out that Chile’s preoccupation with English language education and its national discourse on the importance of English as a world language (Glas, 2008, as mentioned earlier), is also present in young learners. Students have expressed the necessity for learning English because of its status as a global language and its use worldwide. The following statement represents one student’s voice, but speaks for the majority:

*English is essential, because it is used in many countries and, for example, if you don’t speak someone’s language you can speak in English and they will understand you* (S2d6)

At a young age, students realize, or have been made aware, that English proficiency is an important skill to be obtained. During the group discussions, the young learners stated three reasons for why it is important to learn English as a foreign language – communication, travels, and future professions.
It helps to speak to people from other countries (S1d5); I can communicate with people in English because in some countries they also study English (S3b6)

I would also like to be able to understand the people that speak English (S1d5)

I say that English is the most important because if we want to travel to the United States (S1d6); In the USA, if they speak to you in English, you can answer in English (S3b6)

Because when you grow up you can be entrepreneur or mayor (S2a6)

Students’ arguments for learning English are reflected in the government’s objectives, which address the need for improving English language skills throughout Chile, focusing especially on communicative competences, international connections and global integration, and competitiveness on the job market (as discussed in chapter 4.3). The influence of the USA is represented in the discussion among learners as they highlight it as the travel destination. Most likely because it is the nearest dominant anglophone country, as stated in Matear (2008, p. 131).

Besides mainly general incentives to learn English, a few learners shared their personal motives:

When I grow up, I want to be an English teacher, but at university (S1c6)

I want to learn English because this is my dream: I love both baking and English, and that’s why I’d love to go to the U.S. and open a cake shop there (S2d5).

In the end, when we discussed the situation of English in Chile, it became clear that opportunities to get in contact with English outside the classroom are rare – at least for that age group. But some students noted that English would be useful as that geographic area has
become a destination for immigrants from countries were Spanish is not the native language, such as Haiti:

*I would like to be able to understand the people that speak English... for example the Haitians. They speak to you and you don’t get anything... (S3bd)*

*It happened to my dad when people from Haiti spoke to him and my dad didn’t understand them.*
8 CONCLUSIONS

Having had the opportunity to teach communicative English skills as an international volunteer in a Chilean public school, this study was inspired by and developed from that personal experience. I was given the chance to experience first-hand what it means to teach English as a foreign language in the public sector of the Chilean education system. I faced the challenges that came with it and celebrated the successes, such as students’ learning process. While I was well aware of my biased position in regard to this research study, I worked hard to ensure that young learners’ voices were represented truthfully and honestly, without leaving any experiences aside. Throughout the research process, I carefully considered and justified the decisions I took. I believe that is how I was able to successfully answer the research questions and to provide a meaningful report of young EFL learners’ experiences with an international volunteer teacher in a Chilean public school.

This concluding chapter presents a summary of the research results, its implications, and recommendations for the English Opens Doors Program and for further research topics.

8.1 Summary of Results

The results of this research indicate that the groups of young EFL learners that have been working on their communicative language skills with an international volunteer teacher experience this new language learning environment as a motivating initiative and welcome change to “regular” English classes, but one that brings challenges with it.
While interacting with someone coming from another country who speaks little to no Spanish was intimidating and confusing at first, students’ attention was quickly drawn to the cultural aspects related to the international volunteer teacher. The students’ interest in learning more about the volunteer’s background and home country, combined with a variety of dynamic classroom activities in a non-traditional learning environment, had provoked enthusiasm for learning English with the volunteer; but many expressed the wish for more culturally oriented lessons. The communicative teaching methods that were used by the volunteer were based on group work, physical activity, and friendly competitions to keep learners engaged and motivated. The reward system was an additional factor for motivation. Students’ appreciated the student-centered classroom set-up, because the seating arranged in a U-shape made it possible for all learners to see equally well in be within the action-zone.

The opportunities that came with this interactive learning environment also presented challenges: some learners expressed frustration that the volunteer rarely used the learners’ native language during English lessons. The learners who therefore struggled with understanding instructions in the target language, were less motivated to work with the international volunteer, which affected classroom behavior and was lamented by students.

Others embraced this new challenge and found ways to overcome language barriers by asking for help from classmates or clarification from the volunteer who, according to most learners, made lessons fun and dynamic to facilitate communicative English language learning. When asked whether they would like to continue working with international volunteers, all but a few students expressed a loud and enthusiastic “Yes, absolutely!”.

Outside the classroom, students explained, situations in which English was encountered were rare. The young foreign language learners see English as an essential skill for being able to communicate with foreigners in Chile and around the world, and especially when traveling to
the USA; however, these are not necessarily personal incentives for language learning. Few students commented on English being important in their future professional lives.

8.2 Implications of Results and Recommendations

The aim of this study was to explore the other, much less studied side of a perspective that has received much attention in the past few years: instead of looking at volunteers’ teaching experiences abroad, the overriding objective was to find out about students’ experiences when working with international (near)-native English-speaking volunteers. This research started out as a topic that was inspired by my own experience as a volunteer with the English Opens Doors Program. But over the course of this study, this research became more than “just” a project of personal interest: When I had been working with young learners in a public school in Chile myself, I saw first-hand how students were experiencing CLT in a different set-up and their positive reactions to it. During the data collection of this study, I could relate as students recalled memorable lessons, discussed challenges, and talked about their favorite experiences. I was eager to present their perspectives in this paper in a way that would provide an authentic understanding of learners’ perspectives. But I was aware that my own bias could influence this research study, especially the outcomes. I therefore paid special attention to keep an open and objective mindset and stay true to learners’ words.

What can be concluded from the findings of this study is that learners appreciate working with an international volunteer: the communicative and energetic learning environment was felt as motivational and beneficial for improving English language competences. To further enhance learners’ overall positive experiences – and to minimize the struggles that were part of it – the following recommendations might want to be considered and communicated to the new
international volunteers, as they will be trained by the National Volunteer Center as part of the English Opens Doors Program:

- Students are enthusiastic about the cultural aspects of working with an international volunteer and they are easily motivated if cultural content is included in English lessons. As surprisingly many learners across different groups have expressed the wish to learn more about the volunteer’s home country and culture, it should be considered highlighting this opportunity because cultural aspects can be explored in many ways and creatively combined with language learning objectives. The NVC recruits many near-native speaking volunteers from non-native anglophone countries, and as a former volunteer I fell into that category. Speaking from and reflecting on my own teaching experience, I would like to suggest that especially those volunteers make an effort to include their background and culture in their lesson plans: coming from a country where English is not the native language, one’s culture might feel a little less important, but students are more than eager to hear about it – especially so if it is related to a traditionally non-English speaking country.

- Adapting one’s lessons to learners’ interests – such as cultural knowledge – will help to keep students engaged and consequently help to manage issues related to classroom behavior, which came up in this study.

- And finally, to minimize the language barriers that led to frustration in some learners, it cannot be stressed enough for volunteers to adapt their target-language speech to learners’ levels: drastically reducing the speed, cutting out unnecessary and difficult words, and using body language and exaggerated gestures will aid learners’ understanding.
Those recommendation will likely serve any international volunteer working in a Chilean classroom; But since this research was a small-scale study, the findings can unfortunately not be generalized to all students working with a volunteer from the English Opens Doors Program.

In order to develop an understanding about young EFL learners’ experiences on a greater level, this research study should be carried out in more schools that are part of the volunteer initiative. In addition, it would be valuable to conduct similar research with students in municipal schools that are not and never have been working with an international volunteer, to obtain a comparison of experiences of teaching methods and approaches in the Chilean EFL classrooms, which could serve as incentives for future educational reforms. A further possibility would be to extend this research to EFL learners’ parents, who are known to be important stakeholders in early foreign language education. Exploring parents’ experiences, hopes and ideas for their children’s foreign language development could provide additional data for improving English language education in Chile.

If the results of this study were regarded as fruitful by the National Volunteer Center and by representatives of the English Opens Doors program, I would hope that they would be taken into consideration as the Ministry of Education continues to design strategies and initiatives to improve communicative English language skills among young learners in public schools in Chile.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX 1: Guiding Questions for Group Interviews (translated from Spanish into English)

Social environment (methodology, activities,…) 
1. Do you remember your first class with the international volunteer? How was it, what did you do?
2. What do you usually do in class? (writing, listening,…?)
3. How are the classroom activities? (in pairs, groups, individually…?) Can you give examples?
4. Can you tell me if there is any difference between the volunteer’s lessons and your teacher’s lessons?
5. How does the volunteer grade you at the end of the semester? What are the expectations?

Physical environment (classroom, atmosphere,…) 
6. Do you remember when the volunteer first arrived? How was that day, what happened?
7. How is the volunteer’s classroom? Can you describe it? How is it different from your own classroom or other classrooms in the school?

Emotional environment (appreciation, experiences,…) 
8. How do you feel when it’s time for class with the volunteer? And during the class?
9. What do you like about class with the volunteer?
10. Is there anything you like better with your main teacher? Or something that you don’t like as much with the volunteer?
11. What do you think are you learning when working with the volunteer?
12. What do you think is easy in the volunteer’s class?
13. What activities or things do you find more difficult? How do you manage difficult activities?

The importance of English (language, culture, future,…) 
14. What do you think about English? Is a subject you like or do you prefer other subjects?
15. Do you think you will need English in the future? What for?
16. I never had a teacher from another country, so could you tell me how it is to have a teacher that is not from Chile?
17. Would you like to continue learning English with a volunteer or do you feel like this experience is enough just once?
INFORMACIÓN : Visita de Angloparlante de Austria

Señor(a) Apoderada (o), comunicamos a Ud. que durante dos semanas la Srta. Anna Baldinger realizará su Tesis sobre “La apreciación de las alumnas respecto al trabajo de Voluntarios Angloparlantes en Chile”, en los cursos 5° A, 6° A y 6° B.

Ruego a Ud. tomar conocimiento.

Atentamente,


La Dirección