

International Journal of Human Sciences Research

PUBLIC POLICIES OR GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS? ARE THEY A CONTRIBUTION TO INCLUSION IN CHILE?

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Acceptance date: 23/09/2024

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Abstract: Given the importance of public policies for social transformation, the document explains why and under what circumstances they constitute a decisive factor in promoting or inhibiting social transformation. A policy is a propositional, intentional, planned behavior, not simply reactive, casual. It is set in motion with the decision to achieve certain objectives through certain means: it is a meaningful action. It is a process, a course of action that involves a complex set of decisions and operators: Politics is also a public communication activity. Hence, the purpose of this article is to be a guide in the understanding and analysis of what Public Policies mean, as well as to contribute to the understanding of their design and elaboration mechanisms. To have a clear and simple idea of what Public Policies are in a generalized context and the steps that must be taken to implement them.

Keywords: Public Policies, Quality, Social Transformation.

INTRODUCTION

The great task is to be a guide in the understanding and analysis of what Public Policies mean, as well as to contribute to the understanding of the mechanisms of design and elaboration of the same. To have a clear and simple idea of what Public Policies are in a generalized context and the steps that must be taken to implement them.

Given the importance of public policies for social transformation, the document explains why and under what circumstances they constitute a decisive factor in promoting or inhibiting social transformation.

Educational policies are those public policies that respond, to some extent, to social requirements in the education sector. The definition of public policies, however, has different approaches and is constantly evolving (Lahera, 2008; Espinoza, 2009). This evolution is linked to changes in our social,

cultural, political, economic and institutional environment. Thus, while in the last century decision making was exclusively state-led, with its power to create, structure and modify the public policy cycle, today the participation of diverse actors, consensus building and legitimacy in public affairs have become essential for governance in any territory.

From this approach, conceptually, it can be said that public policies “correspond to courses of action and information flows related to a democratically defined public objective; those that are developed by the public sector and, frequently, with the participation of the community and the private sector” (Lahera, 2008 p. 16). It is, in general, a set of interrelated options and decisions involving the establishment of objectives and the definition of the means to achieve them, in response to policy demands¹ (Kraft and Furlong, 2004; Fischer et al. 2007; Espinoza, 2009). From this perspective, public policies have to do with both actions and omissions. On the one hand, they involve an effort to deal with problems on which public-level actions are demanded and, on the other, they can be reduced to decisions to simply “do nothing” in relation to some aspect or social problem (Kraft and Furlong, 2004; Fischer et al. 2007).

In this sense, public policies are instruments of governance that shape policy, allocating winners and losers among citizens and interest groups, which often affect the policy cycle, participation and future demands (May & Jochim, 2013). Thus, and given that they serve both substantive and political commitments, public policies are ultimately a key component of politics itself (May & Jochim, 2013).

I.- WHAT DO WE UNDERSTAND BY A GOOD PUBLIC POLICY?

A public policy of excellence corresponds to those courses of action and information flows related to a democratically defined political objective, which are developed by the public sector and, frequently, with the participation of the community and the private sector. A public policy of quality will include orientations or contents, instruments or mechanisms, definitions or institutional modifications, and the forecast of its results (Gómez R. 2012).

Economic and social issues are so dynamic and interrelated, and the government activities that affect them are so numerous and interconnected, that accuracy in interpreting developments or predicting the results of any new intervention seems doubtful. In any case, it is also necessary to consider the danger of ideologization of public agenda items, or their analysis in contexts that are not specific or impossible to convert into real policies.

II.- EDUCATIONAL POLICIES IN CHILE

In the period from 2004 to 2016, important changes have been observed in educational policies in Chile. However, even though important achievements have been made, currently education remains the main challenge facing the country to become a more egalitarian and truly developed society.

Despite efforts, the educational system in Chile presents high levels of segregation and inequality that were installed due to certain practices such as shared financing and school selection. The existence of a co-payment discriminates families based on their economic capacity, and contributes to the increase of segregation in the country without contributing significantly in quality (Mizala and Torche, 2012; Bellei, 2013; Elacqua et al., 2013). Consequently, families do not have the possibility

of choosing the establishment they want their children to attend, but can only opt for those they can afford to pay for.

So much so that social programs have become a mechanism of social control, through which the most powerful actors exert a strong influence to legitimize perspectives and ideologies in areas of poverty.

Economic policy is highlighted because it is not possible to analyze social policy without relating it to economic development, and vice versa. The phenomenon of increasing poverty has led to a decline in the standard of living of certain population groups, marking strong social differences. But this increase is not new and it is not stopping.

Campaigns are based on the use of polls as a proxy for less spaced voting; and on one-sentence-a-day communications, pseudo-events and the privilege of television images. The government will usually have more material with which to put itself in front of the public and will have achievements to showcase, while the parties remain in limbo until the next election. This trend may contribute to the decline of political parties.

Governments must specify the programs in public policies for their period. This determination is an effective way of not giving many people what they want. Typically, there are no optimal public policies, but a range of possible solutions. There is no guarantee of choosing the best public policy. But it is the duty of governments to choose courses of action.

It is convenient to distinguish between the public program and the government's agenda, sometimes because demagoguery inflated the program and, in any case, because it aims at choosing optimal sequences, cascading effects, political and economic moments. A central activity of an interest group is to succeed in incorporating its own alternatives to agenda items that others have made prominent. This affects the policies under consideration, even if it does not affect the respective agenda.

A medium-term strategic vision is required that adequately combines the political and technical dimensions of public policies. To this end, a “road map” for government management should be institutionalized and periodically evaluated and updated. The prospective analysis function should become a formal routine in the management of the Executive Branch.

It is a reality that the role of government and business in Chile has undergone major structural transformations that have changed the landscape of the economy and politics during the last decades, making it necessary to implement new policies:

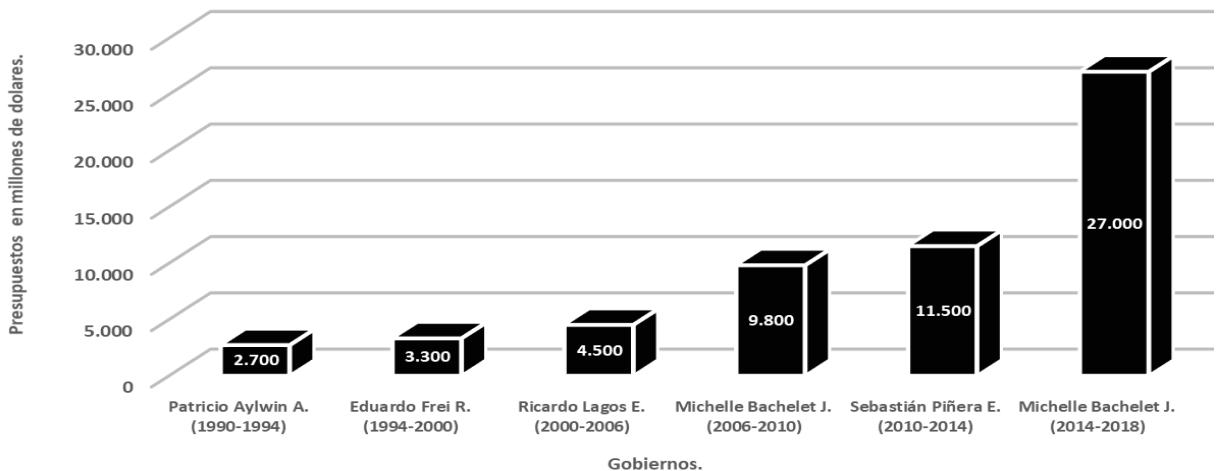
- Governments, in taking constitutional and political responsibility for many of the social and economic problems affecting individuals and social groups,

have tended to shift the emphasis from “politics” to the “public policy” axis.

- Such problems demanded a solution on the part of governments; it was necessary to look after social welfare.
- Politics is a concept, as opposed to public policy, more related to the issue of power (and its legitimate use) in society.

Now, we can have the policy: “Satisfaction of the educational needs of school-age youth sectors with a high degree of vulnerability”. For such public policy can be generated programs that support the development of these, but today the lack of fiscal resources prevents the development of educational projects of the government of the day, contradictorily investment in education in the last decade has been increasing, which is not reflected in the quality of education in the country.

Presupuestos sector educación periodos presidenciales 1990-2018.



Source: Own elaboration with data Centro de Estudios Mineduc, 2017.

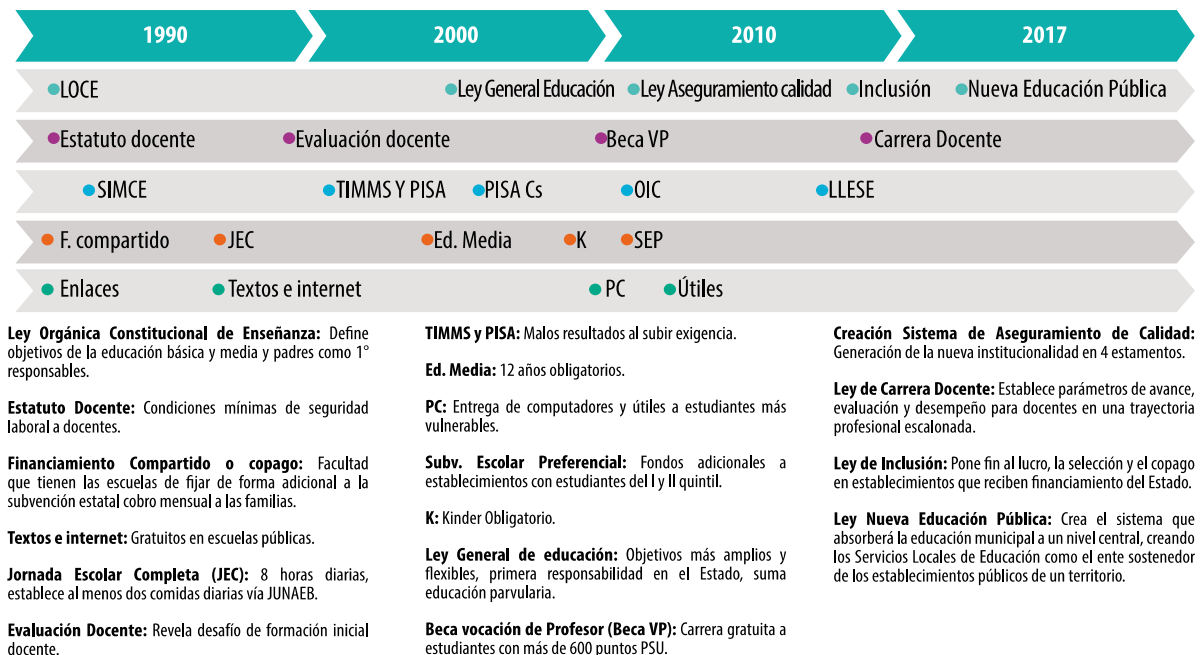
During the governments of Eduardo Frei Montalva and Salvador Allende, educational reforms were a priority and deserve to be highlighted. For example, the increase from 6 to 8 years in the basic education cycle, and to 4 years in the case of secondary education. In this period there was also a great expansion of coverage and educational opportunities (Oliva, 2010). The more contemporary phase

of the history of educational policies in Chile can, in turn, be divided into two periods of analysis: the military dictatorship and the governments in democracy.

In the first case, during the 1980s, a profound educational reform was initiated under a logic of competition, as summarized in Figure 1 below. On the one hand, the administration of public schools was transferred from the

central level to the country's municipalities. On the other hand, a demand-side financing system was introduced through a monthly subsidy (voucher) per student attending the school. The figure of the “educational holder”

was created, who assumes, before the State, the responsibility of administering a school or high school according to the subsidy law (García-Huidobro, 2007).



Gráfica 2 – Línea del tiempo de las políticas educativas chilenas recientes
Fuente: Fundación Chile, Centro de Innovación en Educación (2018).

• After the last 40 years of reforms, a regulatory framework and a set of educational policies have been installed that emphasize diverse principles and follow often antagonistic motivations: from competition to collaboration, from selection to inclusion, and from the imposition of external support to the creation of internal capacities.

According to Munby and Fullan (2016), it implies a great challenge and at the same time a great opportunity for middle leaders, who on the one hand,

“they can stay as victims of a fragmented system with top-down policies or they can work for change. The idea is not to be a rebel without a cause, but to change the game from obeying, to being meaningfully focused. It is the responsibility of leaders to model a culture that ensures that while they take into account the requirements of external accountability

at the national level, they develop internal accountability that leads to the expected results. Middle leaders need to set ambitious alternatives that develop the capabilities at the heart of the systems” (p. 13).

Therefore, although public policies are merely government actions, it is not reduced to the government, we citizens are also responsible for generating significant change, since as Paul Romer (2019), first economist of the World Bank stated “government officials do not act in a vacuum. Their decisions reflect the bargaining power of citizens competing with each other to defend competing interests” and, focusing as citizens on the issue of governance, as a key response to the challenges facing Chile today, will be the future guarantee for compliance with the law in the interest of equity, development and prosperity.

In short, public policies participate in national development by solving and responding to the various deficiencies, needs, interests, demands and individual and community predilections, thus making possible the progress of citizens and strengthening their coexistence.

They must be established within the current legal framework, be prepared by qualified individuals, be financially viable, be oriented towards the common good and allow for citizen participation.

Evaluations of public policies must be impartial; they are carried out for improvement, not for stigmatization, as a follow-up and monitoring action; they must include any moment, from the definition of priorities and design, implementation, resources, performance during its course, partial results, complications and difficulties, to final results and impact on users.

The evaluations of national policies present relevant elements for decision-making in the context of the important transformations and educational reform processes that Chile is undergoing. It analyzes the educational continuum and highlights recommendations that, if implemented, could have a positive impact on the quality of learning and the equity of the system as a whole. public policies in Chile must be designed and manage educational environments that advance in quality to be drivers of creativity, innovation and inclusion.

CONCLUSIONS

Finally, the role of public policies in educational improvement depends on the context of each school, i.e., those external elements that influence the daily activities of each school community (Spillane et al. 2002). The external element considered most explanatory of educational results is the socioeconomic level in which the educational establishments are immersed. Another very

important element, which influences the way a school responds to policies and projects improvement, is that linked to institutional pressures or support from intermediate authorities (Trujillo, 2013; Woulfin et al. 2016). Although, in effect, the school, through its internal capacities, is the main unit of change, the principal's leadership is key in terms of how policies are perceived or received by a school, which influences their adequate (or not) implementation, both in terms of (or lack of) technical-pedagogical and political and economic support (Spillane, 1996; Leithwood et al. 2004; Trujillo, 2013; Woulfin et al. 2016; Valenzuela and Montecinos, 2017).

From the above it is clear that Public Policies are the consequence of:

- Guideline, decisional guideline defining how to act in special cases
- The public character of the policies is given by the participation of the different actors involved in these decisions.
- A set of decisions, principles and norms that guide action, defining specific objectives and goals aimed at legitimizing and exercising power and authority to satisfy certain needs of a country, sector, institution or community.
- Once we have already analyzed and conceptualized Public Policies, we can say that, from a civil society perspective, Public Policies are relevant, since they constitute one of the socially available instruments to meet the needs of the population. The vision that needs to be emphasized here is an instrumental one, emphasizing that they are a “means to” the resolution of social problems. From the above it can be deduced that the ideal of a government is to have state policies, to maintain them over time, regardless of the government of the day.