

## 2 frameworks for ELT and 1 national English programme in Latin America

### Part 2

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April, 2020

### Approaches to ELT

A framework for ELT in a region (the two examples in this article are the CEF for Europe and CLAFET for Latin America, a postulated or hypothetical framework) may propose a general approach to ELT, but different specific approaches are required for different contexts (e.g. for a national English programme, and, perhaps within that, for early primary school, late primary school, secondary school and higher education). That means flexibility in the framework and recommended adaptation and suggestions for different contexts. Below, Table 3 presents general orientations and approaches, and Table 4 presents more specific approaches or recommendations.

<b>Table 3: General orientations and approaches</b>		
<b>CEF (actual framework)</b>	<b>PRONI (national programme)</b>	<b>CLAFET (postulated framework)</b>
<p>The CEF aims to be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>flexible: adaptable for use in different circumstances.</li> <li>open: capable of further extension and refinement.</li> <li>non-dogmatic: not irrevocably and exclusively attached to any of the competing linguistic or educational theories or practices.</li> </ul> <p>In general terms, CEF has an action-oriented approach. Language use and language learning are seen to involve actions, in social contexts, that employ and develop a range of communicative competencies. Engagement in language activities, using language processes to produce and receive texts on specific themes in specific domains, and using strategies for specific tasks, allows participants to monitor the actions taken, and competences are thus reinforced or modified.</p>	<p>PRONI is less open and flexible than the CEF, no doubt partly because it is not a general framework but a national programme for public schools from end of pre-school to end of lower secondary school only, with free text-books provided (a range from commercial publishers to choose from).</p> <p>PRONI embraces the CEF approach, with little adaptation to Mexican public school contexts and students' needs (e.g. few Mexicans ever need English in a range of social contexts, or at all). PRONI takes an action-centred approach focused on social practices of language. These are oriented towards the process and integration of learning and offer students opportunities to participate in different communicative exchanges that require the appropriate use of knowledge, abilities, attitudes and strategies, and to reflect on different aspects of language, linguistic expression and culture.</p>	<p>CLAFET aims to be flexible, open and non-dogmatic, but taking the specific EFL teaching-learning contexts, conditions and needs of Latin America into account.</p> <p>In general terms, CLAFET has an approach close to CEF. In ELT methodology, all variants of CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) are accepted, from CLT-PPP (Presentation-Practice-Production of language items in an environment of communication and communicative activities) to CLT-TBL (Task-Based Learning, working through graded communicative tasks, preferably related to learner needs, and focusing on language as required through consciousness raising tasks and focused practice). Handling of language form/use should take the students' L1 – Spanish or Portuguese – into account.</p>

**Table 4: More specific approaches and/or suggestions for adaptation**

CEF (actual framework)	PRONI (national programme)	CLAFET (postulated framework)
<p>The CEF is designed as the basis for quite distinct curriculums, syllabuses, materials, etc., to be developed in reference to it, so it aims to be open and flexible.</p> <p>Each of the components of the CEF may, if selected as a main learning objective, offer choices in content and approaches to the facilitation of learning. For some situations, the objectives might be broad and for general competences and skills in the public domain, with some attention to intercultural communication; in other situations, the objectives might be narrow and, for example, for specific competences and skills in the occupational domain, or even just for occupational reading comprehension or for routine information exchanges.</p> <p>The CEF has examples of different curriculums based on it: Primary School, with the focus on language awareness, general competences, comprehension, sound, rhythm, etc.; Lower Secondary School, with more attention to the linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic dimensions of communicative competence; and Upper Secondary School, with a shift from formal ELT towards subject teaching in English (and the option of classes in another foreign language).</p>	<p>PRONI is essentially a single 10-year English curriculum covering A0 to B1 CEF levels to be applied from the US border to the Guatemala border, from large cosmopolitan cities to isolated towns, and from industrial areas to international tourism centres. The only indication that goals and approaches should be varied according to contexts is in a few statements in SEP documents like this: “These orientations and suggestions are indicative more than prescriptive. Their purpose is to offer the teacher various ways to handle the contents within the [PRONI] teaching approach. Each teacher can adapt them to their context or develop their own.”</p>	<p>CLAFET is intended for ELT mainly in Latin American public education, and that includes very different contexts and situations, in some countries starting from some level of primary school, in lower secondary and upper secondary school, through to higher education and language centres in public institutions; all that in large cosmopolitan cities, small provincial cities, and isolated and under-resourced towns and rural areas. CLAFET actually recommends that ELT should <i>not</i> be attempted where it is almost certain to fail nor be continued where it has clearly been failing for some time (at least some of PRONI would be cut back applying this recommendation). On the other hand, CLAFET recommends public language centres and online learning resources for older teenagers and adults who did not learn enough English at school and find they need or want it.</p> <p>In some respects, CLAFET itself can be seen as an adaptation of the CEF for ELT in Latin American public education, and any private education that chooses to follow CLAFET guidelines. Naturally, it is more limited and focused than the CEF, aiming rather less at highly fluent English and more at English for specific purposes of some kind.</p>

**Observations on Table 3:**

While PRONI generally follows the CEF approach, it doesn't do so in a "flexible, open and non-dogmatic" way, adapting the CEF specifically for Mexico and offering variations or suggestions for use in the markedly different regional and local contexts that Mexico has. CLAFET, however, does aim to do something on those lines and be a framework specifically for Latin America, taking the region's EFL teaching-learning contexts, conditions and needs into account, including the students' L1, Spanish or Portuguese. CLAFET also roughly translates the CEF's rather theoretical description of its approach to ELT into the wide range of communicative ELT methodology that most professional EFL teachers in Latin America are now usually familiar with.

**Observations on Table 4:**

The CEF and CLAFET both consider different circumstances for ELT, within Europe (and now the world, which wasn't the intention of the CEF) and within Latin America respectively, and both aim at encouraging and facilitating the appropriate adaptation for those different circumstances of ELT based on the frameworks. PRONI doesn't do that, except for briefly mentioning adaptation: "Each teacher can adapt [the ways of handling the contents within the PRONI teaching approach] to their context or develop their own." The impression given is that adaptation is for teachers who fancy doing some, and for different socio-economic circumstances (which it may be, e.g. in relatively well-off areas with some English in the environment and students' home, and in impoverished areas with little or none), and not that ELT should be a bit different along the US border (especially where there's a lot of border traffic), in cosmopolitan cities, in isolated towns and rural areas, in heavily industrialized areas, in international tourism and vacation centres, and so on.

**General observations:**

The CEF arose as part – a political and educational part – of 'The European project' (or, to be more precise, the Council of Europe's 'Language Learning and European Citizenship' project), intended "to promote European mobility, mutual understanding and cooperation, and overcome prejudice and discrimination". That accounts to some extent for the approach of the CEF: It aims at universal bilingualism or multilingualism, and that for all normal communicative purposes in the first foreign language, including, even especially, everyday life in another country (remember that the first foreign language isn't necessarily English, though ELT is by far the largest CEF-based activity). Another factor that accounts in part for the approach of the CEF is the general development and wealth of European countries: They have the resources to realistically aspire to provide universal foreign language teaching of generally high quality. ELT, and other foreign language teaching, in Europe has become much more widespread and successful than 30, 40 or more years ago, and some of that is surely due to the CEF.

Though PRONI is a very different matter in a very different context, it's modelled closely on the CEF, far too closely. That happened for a number of reasons, no doubt, probably including: The global influence of the CEF (which the CEF didn't seek), incomplete understanding of the CEF (largely ignoring that it should be adapted to different circumstances), ill-considered acceptance of clichés like "Everyone needs English in today's globalised world" and "The earlier children start learning a second language, the better" (on that, see Rixon, 2000), and, of course, politics (promising social equity, though it can't be delivered). For a start, Mexico doesn't have the resources to realistically aspire to provide universal

foreign language teaching of generally high quality, partly because Mexico isn't yet as developed and wealthy as Europe, and partly because even more resources may be needed in Mexico because of the size and varied conditions (one country in almost half the area of the EU, which contains 27 countries). Also, Mexico doesn't need bilingualism or multilingualism the way European countries do, especially those with notably non-international languages like Dutch, Swedish, Finnish, Polish, Czech, Hungarian, etc. If those and other considerations had been noted and acted upon, PRONI would have been a radical adaptation of the CEF, not only in its aims, but also in its general orientation and approach. Something on the lines of CLAFET, which itself could be considered an adaptation of the CEF, would surely have been a much better starting point for PRONI, but even then, variations in the programme and in the teaching approach are really needed for at least some of the very different contexts and circumstances in Mexico.

What is taught and how it is taught in ELT should be very different for young children (5-6 years old in PRONI), older children and young teenagers, young adults and adults (not covered in PRONI, but they really should be because they're the most likely users of English outside classrooms, in the working world), for students in places where some English is in the environment and the need of English is a more real possibility (US border areas, international vacation and tourist areas, industry and business area) and in remote towns and rural areas where the need of English is just a remote possibility, for ESP in higher education (English for medicine, engineering, business, etc.) and specific domains and skills, as in company courses (technical reading, business correspondence, routine hotel and restaurant exchanges, etc.).

TO BE CONTINUED IN MAY

## References

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