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Review

Civic Participation in Public Sector Education: A Critical Policy Analysis of the School System in Chile

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Abstract: The main aim of this study is to examine how education policies in the public sector of Chile have shaped civic participation among stakeholders in the education sector. We address two complementary research questions. First, has the implementation of top-down State-level education policies created practice-oriented opportunities for key stakeholders to collaborate with the distinct governing bodies operating in primary and secondary schools in Chile? Second, to what extent have top-down State-level public sector education policies in Chile affected stakeholders' levels of influence and participation in decision-making at the local level? To address these questions, the study involves a critical policy analysis of educational policies enacted in Chile between 1990 and 2022. The findings reveal that Chile's education policies were: (a) characterized by a neoliberal orientation to service delivery and (b) positively affected some aspects of civic participation of stakeholders in education at the local level. Notably, the majority of governing bodies that promoted policy-driven civic participation were based in fully funded public schools. This paper contributes to understanding civic participation in a deeply neoliberal context and, through critical analysis, highlights how the power and collaboration of schools' governing bodies in Chile are limited and differentiated by the nature of their funding.

Keywords: public policy; civic participation; education; schools; neoliberalism; Chile

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1. Introduction

The relevance of civic participation to democratic principles and the development of social, political and administrative aspects of societies has been widely reported (Fitzgerald et al., 2021; Jo, 2023). In the field of education, specifically, it has been recognized that policy-driven civic participation can bring new insights into how democratic values, social engagement, and civic skills are cultivated even from an early age (Gallagher, 2021; Jo, 2020; Muleya, 2020). The main aim of this study is to examine how education policies in the public sector of Chile have shaped civic participation among stakeholders in the school education sector. In general terms, the case of Chile exposes the paradox of achieving significant economic development while concurrently maintaining unequal societies and segregated educational systems (Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development, OECD, 2018, 2024). In Chile, the civic-military dictatorship (1973–1989) repressed civic and civil rights, and the educational curriculum was neutralized in terms of political and collective participation, prioritizing notions of individualism over collectivism (Errázuriz &

García-González, 2021). Yet, in terms of public administration during the dictatorship, policies and regulations were used to promote a neoliberal market-oriented approach, which impacted all spheres of society. For example, in education, Chile's market-oriented policies reduced the role of the government's administration and encouraged entrepreneurship in education, following the principle of freedom of teaching (Moreno-Doña & Jiménez, 2014; Poyanco, 2017; Rumié Rojo, 2019; Somma, 2022). Specifically, the Ministry of Education transferred the administration of primary and secondary public schools to Municipalities (Town Councils) and funded charter schools. In summary, Chile's educational policies, shaped by authoritarian rule and sustained neoliberal reforms, have historically limited democratic participation within schools by prioritizing market logic over civic engagement. These legacies continue to restrict the meaningful involvement of educational communities, contributing to civic disengagement while also fueling social mobilization demanding greater democratization in education. Given that civic engagement is a cornerstone of democratic societies, understanding how institutional arrangements shape or inhibit participation is essential for informing more inclusive and equitable education governance.

Therefore, with reference to a context deeply influenced by a dictatorship which repressed civic rights and promoted neoliberal principles of competition and individualism, this study builds on research in Chile focused on civic participation and factors such as the school curriculum, leadership, and teachers' beliefs (Cox et al., 2022; Jara Ibarra et al., 2023; A. López et al., 2024). Our study utilizes critical policy analysis to examine how educational policies in Chile have shaped opportunities for civic participation among students, parents, and educators in primary and secondary schools. Particularly, the study focuses on the opportunities governing bodies offer for civic participation in terms of collaboration and levels of influence in decision-making processes. This study highlights how neoliberal policy frameworks and fragmented funding mechanisms constrain the participatory roles of educational communities. Understanding these dynamics is vital for advancing democratic principles and civic engagement in systems marked by structural inequalities. By shifting attention from procedural participation to the broader historical, political and economic forces that shape it, the study challenges dominant assumptions in participatory governance literature. It offers a novel contribution by reframing participation as a contested process influenced by institutional and policy contexts, thus opening new directions for research on education governance and democratic inclusion.

The paper is structured in the following way. In the next section, we review empirical and theoretical literature on problematizing civic participation in neoliberal and post-dictatorial contexts, examining the challenges of fostering this in fragmented service providers such as the Chilean educational system. After this, we present the study's methodology. We then present our findings and conclusions, reflecting on the limited instances of effective civic participation shaped by the neoliberal administration of the school system.

2. Literature Review

Neoliberalism has been widely studied in different sectors and societies due to its widespread influence (Mejias, 2012; Dardot & Laval, 2013; Rumié Rojo, 2019). This concept can be understood as "an ideology, a mode of governance, and a policy package emphasizing the pivotal role of free markets and private enterprises [that seeks to] reshape their respective societies [through] deregulation, liberalization, and privatization" (Steger & Ravi, 2010, p. 136). Governmentality based on a neoliberal mindset is an ideology protected by elites that underpins entrepreneurial and market-oriented values, such as competition, individualism, and self-interest. For this reason, the neoliberal administration policy package comprises three core elements: deregulation, liberalization, and privati-

zation of government-owned goods (Mathebula & Banda, 2022; Wilkins, 2012). Hence, "neoliberal societies" emerge from these practices, shaping values, culture, economic systems, politics, citizenship participation, and lifestyle (Mejias, 2012; Dardot & Laval, 2013; Rumié Rojo, 2019). Consequently, it is possible to propose that the influence of neoliberalism is profound, as it impacts societies and their citizens, for example, by promoting values and regulations that shape how citizens are trained in predominantly individual and competitive environments.

Chile has not been exempt from the influence of this neoliberal rationality (V. López et al., 2018; Soto, 2022; Wilkins, 2012). The "Chile Project" aimed to promote post-coup free-market principles through rapid deregulation and privatization (Cademartori, 2002; V. López et al., 2018; Macekura, 2013; Steger & Ravi, 2010). Unlike other nations, there is little evidence of political debate regarding these changes (Steger & Ravi, 2010; Rumié Rojo, 2019). However, the "Chile Project" was not the only attempt to expand the public administration of neoliberalism in the Global South; the model was also imposed in other countries in Latin America and Africa, such as Malawi and South Africa (Mathebula & Banda, 2022). In effect, the model was used to build a highly hegemonic neoliberal environment for citizens, organizations, and services, including the educational system (Araujo, 2019; Artaza, 2019; Gutiérrez & Carrasco, 2021).

In relation to education system administration, authors such as Mathebula and Banda (2022) and Wilkins (2012) suggest the existence of a neoliberal global order translated into public deregulation in education policies and practices, promoting individualistic and market-oriented civic participation. According to Errázuriz and García-González (2021) and Wilkins (2012), neoliberal policies encourage competitive individuals, autonomy, and self-interest, which are values that tend to contradict efforts to reach a common good through means of collaboration and participation.

In this regard, Chile's educational policy has been influenced by market-oriented policies inspired by neoliberal principles (V. López et al., 2018; Soto, 2022; Wilkins, 2012). Nevertheless, although the influence of neoliberalism has been widely reported in several societies from the Global North and Global South, such as the United States (USA), the United Kingdom, and countries from Africa and Latin America, few studies have examined how societies marked by neoliberal market-oriented policies shape civic participation in education (Bosio et al., 2022; Errázuriz & García-González, 2021; Wilkins, 2012). Hence, focusing on civic participation within neoliberal societies becomes critical in this scenario. For this reason, the next section introduces the role of civic education and the challenges of civic participation in education.

2.1. Fostering Effective Civic Participation

Civic participation has been defined as: "...active citizen involvement in public issues [and} finds expression in the degree to which formal and informal stakeholders engage in public activity to make a difference in issues concerning the common good and to promote social changes (Mano, 2021, p. 1)". Notably, it has been widely acknowledged that education plays a vital role in developing and supporting these engaged citizens who can overcome societal inequalities and achieve social cohesion and social justice (Frank, 2022; Hafner-fink et al., 2013; Wagner, 2004; Walzer, 1993). Armijo and Willatt (2022), Baildon et al. (2016), Treviño et al. (2017), and Tzankova et al. (2021) emphasize the significance of different levels within the school system, such as schools and districts, in actively encouraging and supporting the development of engaged citizens through civic participation.

Specifically, authors such as Haste et al. (2017, p. 8) suggest that civic participation can contribute to developing effective citizenship through four strands: "civic knowledge and understanding; civic skills; civic values, motivation, and identity; and civic action".

According to the authors, these skills include participatory skills such as participation in collective and democratic decision-making processes, advocacy, and persuasive communication. Educative organizations which promote caring, democratic environments and favorable school climates, provide fertile terrain to teach civic participation. These environments ensure open discussions, provide opportunities to participate in different matters, and foster involvement in decision-making (Armijo & Willatt, 2022; Luengo & Jiménez-Moya, 2017; Treviño et al., 2017; Tzankova et al., 2021). Furthermore, Treviño et al. (2017) and Tzankova et al. (2021) propose that students are more likely to exhibit positive behaviors towards other groups, conflict management, and critical thinking in these contexts. Hence, scholars propose that civic participation should be taught transversally in all school subjects and activities (Da Matta et al., 2015; Graham et al., 2018; Haste et al., 2017; Michail et al., 2023).

Multiple studies have exposed how civic participation can vary in the educative space, arguing that frequent, genuine, and effective participation can be scarce and somewhat symbolic (Díazgranados & Sandoval-Hernández, 2017; Jo, 2020, 2023; Soto, 2022). In this context, education policy plays a pivotal role in managing strategies and national standards for civic participation, for example, by creating governing bodies within the school system (Cox & García, 2017). However, even if these standards exist, it is still necessary to examine whether these spaces guarantee the development of effective citizenship by providing opportunities for successful civic participation.

In this regard, different frameworks attempt to understand effective participation. The "Ladder of Citizen Participation" proposed by Arnstein (1969) and adapted to the educative field by Hart (1992, 2013) has gained significant attention in recent decades. According to these authors, there are increasing degrees of participation. The lower rungs of the ladder are considered the levels of non-participation and comprise actions of tokenism, decoration, and manipulation. Levels of genuine participation include, from the lowest to highest step, being informed, consulted, adult-shared decisions with children, initiated and directed decisions by children, and finally, child-initiated, shared decisions with adults (Hart, 1992, 2013).

Understanding these participation frameworks becomes significant when scholars suggest that neoliberal contexts deplete collective participation and instead promote individual self-interest, competition, and passivity (Errázuriz & García-González, 2021; Ochoa, 2022; Soto, 2022).

2.2. Civic Participation in Post-Colonial and Neoliberal Educative Contexts: The Case of Chile

Seminal authors such as Freire (1985) and Galeano (1997) highlight the critical role of education in overcoming a country's paternalistic colonial inheritance, thus underscoring the need to focus on school systems' promotion of civic participation (see also, Byker & Vainer, 2020; Nieto, 2018; Torres Madroñero et al., 2021). Thus, in the case of Latin America, analysis of data derived from the 2016 International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) has highlighted the importance of integrating civic learning into the curriculum, while correspondingly acknowledging that students' educational aspirations played a vital role in shaping their civic engagement (Gómez & Suárez, 2023; Schulz et al., 2016, 2023). In the Chilean context specifically, Errázuriz and García-González (2021) and Soto (2022) suggest that, even though schools are spaces where citizens are raised and nurtured, educative curriculum and practices have, in the post-civic-military dictatorship era, followed a conservative approach that has prioritized a paternalistic control, order, and production of obedient individuals. Indeed, democratic spaces are commonly limited to specific exercises where students can vote instead of being embedded in daily routines. The study conducted by Ochoa (2022) about students' participation in Chile and Mexico demonstrated that adult-centrism is a common barrier to their civic participation. The

study reveals that adult-centrism manifests as an asymmetrical power dynamic between adults (seen as technical experts) and students, thereby constraining students' autonomy and civic participation.

Furthermore, traditionally at least, most civic opportunities tend to translate into traditional activities such as learning the national anthem or praising the nation's flag (Errázuriz & García-González, 2021; Soto, 2022). These practices do not equate to methods for conflict resolution or genuine civic participation. In this regard, even though efforts by the Ministry of Education have been made to tackle this situation and advance towards more democratic and inclusive civic participation in educative spaces (Mineduc, 2017), the Chilean educational system still faces significant challenges due to the lack of renewed legislative policies to support this progress.

2.3. Chile—A Market-Oriented Educative Landscape

During Chile's civic-military dictatorship period (1973–1989), a series of market-oriented reforms privatized education (Raczynski & Muñoz, 2007; Siches & Bellei, 2022). These reforms established an educational system rooted in different funding types and ownership. Concerning public education, the government transferred the administration of public schools from the Ministry of Education to Municipalities, which are political entities responsible for different services in the territories and are not necessarily specialized educational institutions (Falabella, 2020; Raczynski & Muñoz, 2007). Through their Departments of Municipal Education (DME), Municipalities were responsible for administering public schools. Following this, a voucher system based on student attendance was established. These vouchers were given to municipal and privately owned schools, leading to the creation of charter schools (Falabella, 2020; Ministry of Education of Chile, Mineduc, 2018; Raczynski & Muñoz, 2007).

In this context, the Chilean educational system comprised the following various types of schools based on funding and administration type: municipal, private, and charter schools. This scenario encouraged segregation and unequal access, as charter and fully private schools operated with larger budgets than municipal schools and could select their students (Gutiérrez & Carrasco, 2021; Raczynski & Salinas, 2008). Thus, access to education in this neoliberal context relied upon the family's socioeconomic level (SES) and pupils' performance (Mineduc, 2018; Moreno-Doña & Jiménez, 2014; Raczynski & Muñoz, 2007; Shon & Jilke, 2021). Notably, the OECD Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) exposed a concerning gap in the Chilean school system: the higher the SES of the pupil, the better their academic performance. Indeed, in Chile, municipal schools have shown lower academic results than private or charter establishments (Agencia de la Calidad de la Educación, 2017; Mineduc, 2018; OECD, 2018).

In addition to the described administrative and funding variety in the school system, civic participation was impacted during the civic-military dictatorship, as all forms of collective organization, including educative governing bodies, were suppressed during this period. Following the constitutional principle of freedom of teaching, the system required private and charter schools to adhere only to mandatory curricular standards. This situation became more critical when, after returning to democracy, the civic education module was eliminated (Errázuriz & García-González, 2021).

Consequently, after the return of democracy to Chile, students and educational stakeholders demanded improvements in public education through social movements and manifestations. For instance, the "Penguin Revolution" (2005–2006) was led by students from secondary education in public schools. Although their initial demands were related to infrastructural developments, these evolved into demands for greater democratization, civic participation, and involvement in educational decision-making processes. The

2019 social upheaval became one of the most critical manifestations in recent Chilean history, characterized by demands for equal opportunities and social equality through improvements to different social spheres, including education (Siches & Bellei, 2022).

In light of this backdrop, Figure 1 portrays the timeline for the creation of participative bodies in the Chilean educational system.

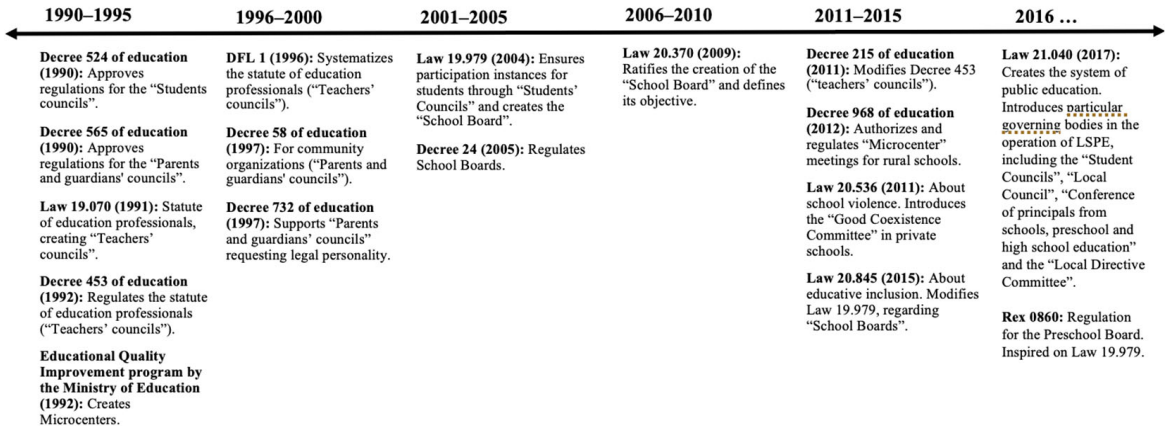

Figure 1. Timeline for the creation of participative bodies. Note: Authors' elaboration. Sources: Decree 524 (1990); Decree 565 (1990); Law 19.070 (1991); Decree 453 (1992); DFL 1 (1996); Decree 58 (1997); Decree 732 (1997); Law 19.979 (2004); Decree 24 (2005); Law 20.370 (2009); Law 20.536 (2011); Decree 215 (2011); Decree 968 (2012); Law 20.845 (2015); Law 21.040 (2017).

In order to tackle these challenges concerning the quality of education and segregation, the educational system has been immersed in reforms that include ending the voucher system and municipal administration, and the creation of a new school type (that is, fully public schools) inspired by democratic principles, and administered by Local Services of Public Education (LSPE; Holz, 2018; Mineduc, 2018). In Chile, four types of schools were thus brought into existence, as classified by their funding and administration: (a) fully public schools, administered by LSPEs; (b) municipal schools, administered by DMEs; (c) charter schools, administered by private owners but receiving government vouchers; and (d) fully private schools. Table 1 provides an overview of the organization of the Chilean school system per funding and administration nature.

Table 1. School districts per funding and administration type in Chile.

Admin. Type	School Type	Funding Type	Creation & Implementation	Student Attendance 2023 (%) [4]
Local Service of Public Education (LSPE)	Fully public	Full public funding.	2017–2018 [1]	4.9%
Department of Municipal Education (DME)	Municipal	Administered by municipalities but funded with public resources.	1980–1986 [2]	30.8%
Private but subsidized	Charter school	Private ownership and mixed funding: partially private and public.	1980–1986 [3]	54.5%
Private	Fully private	Private ownership and funding.	Since the XIX century [4]	9.2%

Note 1: Law 21.040 (2017). Note 2: According to Decree. Nº 1-3063 (1980). Note 3: It existed since the XIX century but became widespread since the municipalization of education in 1980 (Raczynski & Salinas, 2008). Note 4: Dataset of the Ministry of Education (Mineduc, 2022).

2.4. Summary

Considering this context of reform and contemporary social movements requesting more effective participation and equality in the school system, we seek to unpack how education policies in Chile have shaped civic participation opportunities. Specifically, we address two complementary research questions. First, has the implementation of top-down State-level education policies created practice-oriented opportunities for key stakeholders to collaborate with the distinct governing bodies operating in primary and secondary schools in Chile? Second, to what extent have top-down State-level public sector education policies in Chile affected stakeholders' levels of influence and participation in decision-making at the local level? In order to address these questions, the study proceeds to present a critical review and analysis of educational policies enacted in Chile between 1990 and 2022. The 1990 to 2022 time period of the analysis was selected as marking the first year of the post-military dictatorship era in Chile and the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to provide a thorough and representative examination of civic participation education policies, the analysis does not exclude per funding type. The next section of the paper summarizes the methodological strategy that was designed and implemented to address these questions.

3. Methods

This study employs a critical policy analysis approach to explore opportunities for civic participation within the Chilean educational system. Critical policy analyses allow for examining the connections between policy discourse and larger social issues and inequities (Young, 1999, p. 689). Consistent with the conventional focus on texts and documents of this methodological approach (Allan, 2003; Poon & Segoshi, 2018), the primary sources of data for this study were eighteen Chilean educational laws, fifteen decrees, and regulations enacted between 1990 and 2022, and other thirteen official documents (N = 46). These relevant policies and official documents were identified through snowball sampling (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007) and included all official laws and decrees recognized by the Ministry of Education up to 2022. Additionally, official documents from the Ministry of Education were independently reviewed and compared by the research team to triangulate information and ensure the study's credibility, dependability, and confirmability (Loh, 2013; Miller & Brewer, 2011). To avoid potential bias, a Chilean educational law expert was consulted when there was disagreement about the inclusion of specific official documents.

The study develops its main findings using a thematic analytical strategy of emergent categories aimed at identifying the guidance or rules set forth by the Chilean educational system regarding civic participation (Holz, 2018; Mineduc, 2018). Table 2 lists the assessed governing bodies operating in the Chilean school, providing their original titles in Spanish and the translated version of each.

Table 2. Original and Translated names for governing bodies.

English Translation Used by the Authors	Original Title in Spanish
Students' council (SC)	Centro de alumnos
Parents' Council (PC)	Centro de padres y apoderados
Teachers' council (TC)	Consejo de Profesores
School board (SB)	Consejo escolar
Good coexistence committee (GCC)	Comité de Buena convivencia
Local School District Council (LC)	Consejo Local
District and School Leaders (DSL)	Comité Directivo local
Local directive Committee (LDC)	Conferencia de Directores de Escuelas, Jardines y Liceos

Note: Authors' elaboration.

To examine how educational policy in Chile shaped civic participation among primary and secondary schooling educational stakeholders, policy and documents were coded and subsequently grouped into thematic categories (Creswell, 2014, 2009) using the NVivo 13 qualitative software. The findings of the analyses are presented below.

4. Results

When addressing the study's two Research Questions, the analyses revealed (a) the limited opportunities for collaboration in the school education system and (b) the nature of governing bodies' influence in decision-making processes. Table 3 details the composition and function of each governing body, as stated by the relevant educational policy.

Table 3. Aims and actors in each governing body.

Governing Body	Definition	Members
Student Council	It aims to develop students' reflective and critical thinking, training them for democratic life and preparing them to participate in cultural and social changes (Article 1, Decree 524).	Students. Advisors (teachers).
Parent Council	Supports the development and improvement of the educational processes (Article 8, Law 21.040). It aims to promote solidarity group cohesion among its members, support the provided education, and stimulate the development of the school community (Article 1, Decree 565).	Parents School Guardians
Teacher Council	Is a technical body in which the professional opinion of its members can be expressed (Article 8, Law 21.040) for the fulfilment of educational objectives and programs and in the development of the educational project of the educative establishment (Article 50, Decree 453).	Directive, technical-pedagogical, and teaching staff Teachers (Article 15, Law 19.070, and Article 15, DFL 1).
School Board	Promotes participation among different educational community members to improve the quality of education, school coexistence, and learning achievements (Article 15, Law 20.370).	School district leader (or administrative organism), School principals, A teacher elected by the Teacher's Council, and A representative of the assistants of education (elected by colleagues). President of the Parents' Council and President of the Students' Council (Article 7, Law 19.979).
Good Coexistence Committee	[In the schools without School Councils] aims to stimulate and channel the participation of the educational community in the educational project, promote good school coexistence, and prevent violence (Part B, Law 20.536).	Student Council members Parent and Guardian Council members Teachers' Council members

Table 3. *Cont.*

Governing Body	Definition	Members
Local School District Council	Represents the interests of educational communities in front of the school district leader so that the LSPE considers their needs and particularities (Article 49, Law 21.040).	Two representatives of the Students' Councils, Two representatives of the Parents' Councils, Two representatives of assistants/professionals of education. Two representatives of leadership teams or technical pedagogic teams (elected by colleagues). A representative from local universities, ideally from faculties of education. A representative of "institutions of technical formation", ideally non-profit and public (Article 50, Law 21.040). The LSPE's School district leader (Article 22, Law 21.040).
District and School Leaders	With the Executive Director, analyzes the progress of the Local Strategic Plan. Proposes improvements for the design and provision of the technical-pedagogical support that the LSPE provides (Article 11, Law 21.040)	All school principals and All schoolteachers in charge of rural schools who depend on the LSPE (Article 11, Law 21.040)
Local Directive Committee	Supervises the strategic development of the LSPE and the accountability of the school district leader. It also links the LSPE with the regional government (Article 29, Law 21.040).	One or two representatives appointed by local towns' mayors. Two representatives of the Parents Councils. Two representatives of the regional government (Article 31, Law 21.040). The LSPE's School district leader (Article 22, Law 21.040).

Note: Authors' elaboration.

4.1. Limited Opportunities for Collaboration

The findings reveal the limited opportunities available for students, parents, and teachers to collaborate with intra-school and exo-school level leaders (see Table 4). Further, our analysis highlights that there were fewer opportunities for students, parents, and teacher councils to collaborate with intra-school and exo-school leaders in private schools compared to fully public schools. These limited opportunities for collaboration influenced the extent to which actors within the governing bodies could meaningfully engage in civic participation practices.

Table 4 summarizes the opportunities to collaborate among different governing bodies depending on funding type. The analysis shows that only one specific type of governing body at the school level, regardless of funding type, was formally encouraged to collaborate with educational leaders. Thus, only collaboration with intra-school level leaders was promoted within this one type of governing body. In publicly funded schools, this was the School Board, and in fully private schools, it was the Good Coexistence Committee.

In relation to publicly funded schools, the Ministry of Education policy states that the precise aim of the School Board is to encourage collaboration between different actors within the school: "It is the instance that promotes participation and brings together different members of the educational community to improve the quality of education, school coexistence, and learning achievements" (Mineduc, 2022). However, the educational policy outlined that the purpose of this governing body is to promote collaboration by encouraging its members to participate in decision-making processes which will impact their school, regarding the quality of education, learning achievements, and school coexistence. It is important to note that the actors within this governing body are mainly elite

representatives. Specifically, only one representative from the student, parent, and teacher council can participate in the decision-making and collaborate with school-level educational leaders, not the entire student, parent, and teacher council membership. Furthermore, this governing body has no exo-level actors, such as locally elected leaders or other city or county-level actors. Further, when looking at exo-school level governing bodies, limited opportunities for collaboration are evident, given that these are primarily composed of adults and educational leaders rather than students, parents, or other members of educational communities. We observe this in the case of the Local School District Council (LC), which comprises a student representative, parent representative, teacher representative, school staff representative, school leaders, local higher education institutions, and district leader. Hence, although this governing body includes representatives from school-level actors, most of its members are exo-school-level educational leaders rather than students, parents, or teachers. Notably, LCs also only exist in fully public schools.

Table 4. Summary of collaboration among governing bodies in private vs. public schools in Chile.

Governing Body	**Collaboration with Other Governing Bodies**			
	Public		**Private**	
	Fully Public	**Municipal**	**Charter**	**Fully Private**
Students' Council (SC)	None	None	None	None
Parents' Council (PC)	None	None	None	None
Teachers' Council (TC)	None	None	None	None
School Board (SB)	SC PC, TC, District Leader, School Staff	SC, PC, TC, District Leader, School Staff	SC, PC, TC, District Leader, School Staff	-
Good Coexistence Committee (GCC)	-	-	-	SC, PC, TC
Local School District Council (LC)	SC, PC, TC, School Staff, School Leaders, Local Higher Education Institutions, District Leader	-	-	-
Local Directive Committee (LDC)	Locally Elected Leaders, PC, Regional Government Leaders, District Leader	-	-	-
District and School Leaders (DSL)	School Leaders	-	-	-

Note: Dash (-) means the governing body does not exist within this school type, and thus, there cannot be collaboration with another governing body.

Unlike other governing bodies, the educational policy, when referring to the LC, explicitly outlines that this governing body can collaborate with exo-level educational leaders: "[LCs] will collaborate with the Executive Director of each Local Service (...) They will represent the interests of the educational communities" (Article 49, Law 21.040, 2017). Despite the limited presence of students and teachers in this body, the educational policy outlines LCs as the primary body, given the opportunity for its actors to be in conversation with the executive director, while other governing bodies do not have this opportunity.

When analyzing the membership nature of other governing bodies at a district level, such as the District and School Leaders (DSL) and the Local Directive Committee (LDC), it becomes evident that the exclusion of students, parents, and teachers is facilitated by its composition. We also see that the educational policy does not mention or encourage collaboration with the student council, parent council, and teacher council. For example, educational policy outlining the functions of the District and School Leaders (DSL) fails to encourage this body to convene with other governing bodies and outlines its' members' unique ability to influence technical changes: "[The DSL] Proposes improvements for the design and provision of technical-pedagogical support that the [Fully Public school district] provides to establishments" (Article 11, Law 21.040, 2017). Considering that other intra-school level governing bodies, such as student, parent, and teacher councils, are not encouraged to collaborate with the DSL or are part of its composition, only leaders from the DSL can inform technical improvements.

Our analysis also reveals that collaboration in fully private schools is relatively restricted compared to schools that receive public funds. This is evident when probing into the Good Coexistence Committee's (GCC) composition. Unlike in schools that receive public funding (that is, Fully Public, Municipal, and Charter schools), in fully private schools, educational policy does not require a School Board. The only similar type of governing body encouraged in fully private schools is the Good Coexistence Committee. However, the GCC is distinct from School Boards in its composition. That is, GCCs are only composed of representatives from the student council, teacher council, and parent council, but do not include the district leader or school staff members, as is the case with School Boards.

Further exemplifying how collaboration is restricted within fully private schools, we observe that collaboration across intra-level and exo-level school actors is only encouraged among governing bodies that exist in fully public schools. This includes the Local School District Council, Local Directive Committee, and District and School Leaders governing bodies. Notably, these governing bodies allow and promote collaboration with different actors, including regional government leaders in the case of the Local Directive Committee and higher education representatives (Local School District Council). Yet, these governing bodies do not exist in fully private schools, which ultimately restricts the few opportunities to collaborate solely among fully public schools. Table 5 summarizes the main governing bodies operating in each type of school as the law requires.

Table 5. Governing bodies in private vs. public schools in Chile according to Law requirements.

Governing Body	Required by Law			
	Public		Private	
	Fully Public	Municipal	Charter	Fully Private
Students' Council	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Parents' Council	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Teachers' Council	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
School Board	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

Table 5. *Cont.*

Governing Body	Required by Law			
	Public		Private	
	Fully Public	Municipal	Charter	Fully Private
Good Coexistence Committee	No	No	No	Yes
Local School District Council	Yes	No	No	No
Local Directive Committee	Yes	No	No	No
District and School Leaders	Yes	No	No	No

Note: Table 5 was created based on information from the following sources: Decree 524 (1990); Decree 565 (1990); Law 19.070 (1991); Decree 453 (1992); DFL 1 (1996); Decree 58 (1997); Decree 732 (1997); Law 19.979 (2004); Law 20.370 (2009); Law 20.536 (2011); Decree 215 (2011); Decree 968 (2012); Law 20.845 (2015); Law 21.040 (2017). The use of grey highlights the bodies which are not present in the studied school types.

4.2. Governing Bodies' Influence on Decision-Making Processes

Our second emergent theme reveals that existing civic participation laws created power imbalances in the influence of different education stakeholders on decision-making processes. To understand the extent of power imbalances of governing bodies in decision-making processes, Table 6 indicates their level of influence. Our findings reveal the following: (a) students, parents, and teachers have limited influence in decision-making at the school and district level; (b) other educational stakeholders have more power than students, parents, and teachers; and (c) educative communities from fully private schools have less power than students from fully public schools.

Table 6. Summary of levels of influence in decision-making processes.

Governing Body	Level of Decision-Making Influence					
	Public			Private		
	No Influence	Some Influence	Major Influence	No Influence	Some Influence	Major Influence
Students' Council	X			X		
Parents' Council	X			X		
Teachers' Council		X			X	
School Board	X*Municipal	X*Fully Public		X*PS		
Good Coexistence Committee	-	-	-	X*FP		
Local School District Council			X*Fully Public	-	-	-
Local Directive Committee			X*Fully Public	-	-	-
District and School Leaders		X*Fully Public		-	-	-

Note: *Fully Public means the level of influence identified only applies to the Local Service of Public Education schools. *Municipal means the level of influence identified only applies to the Department of Municipal Education schools. *PS means the level of influence identified only applies to Charter schools. *FP means the level of influence identified only applies to fully Private schools. When there is an X, it means the influence level identified applies to all schools regardless of the funding type. When there is a -, it means this governing body does not exist within this school type.

To unpack these three main aspects, we draw inspiration from the "Ladder of Citizen Participation" proposed by Arnstein (1969) and Hart (1992, 2013), which breaks down civic participation as information, consultation, and actual decision-making influence. Unlike other models such as Fung's Cube or the International Association of Participation IAP2- and which look into engagement and structure of participation, the Ladder of Citizen Participation allows for a critical assessment of power and control, looking not only whether

participation happens, but also, how much power do participants have and whether that participation is symbolic or transformative. Hence, we categorize the capacity to receive information or be informed as having no influence; consultation or being consulted as some influence.

In relation to the first aspect, students, parents, and teachers appear to have extremely limited influence in decision-making at the school and district level. Table 6 shows that most school governing bodies (that is, Student, Parent, and Teacher Councils) have little to no influence. This is because they can inform (or be informed), consult (or be consulted), and propose (or be proposed) only about their internal issues and among themselves without significant influence at the school or district levels.

In relation to the second aspect, our analysis reveals that school-level leaders and exo-school-level leaders have more power than students, parents, and teachers in the Chilean educational system. This occurs because the governing bodies that wield significant influence in school and district decisions primarily consist of adults, including the Local Directive Committee and District and School Leaders (see Table 4).

In relation to the third aspect, our analysis indicates that students', parents', and teachers' participation is minimal across all school types (that is, fully public, Municipal, Charter, and fully private schools) but especially in the case of fully private schools. Specifically, the School Board is the only governing body that influences the school's decision-making and congregates representatives from students, parents, teachers, and other educational stakeholders. However, as Table 5 highlights, the School Board does not, by policy edict, exist in fully private schools. This lack of power given to educative communities in fully private schools conveys a type of legislative coherence with principles of free market through freedom of teaching, as the Constitution accords relative freedom and autonomy to private owners of educative projects (Moreno-Doña & Jiménez, 2014; Poyanco, 2017). Accordingly, from the perspective of civic participation, in Chile, private owners can educate and train citizens to follow their ideas and ideology instead of national regulations about the topic.

5. Discussion

After the dictatorship implemented market-oriented neoliberal policies, the Chilean educational system has been marked by historical processes oriented toward overcoming social inequalities and educational segregation. However, reforms appear to have barely touched the roots of the neoliberal model of administration, promoting competition, individualism, and self-interest, as highlighted in the literature review above (Bellei, 2020; V. López et al., 2018). Our findings reveal how these issues have impacted educational policy on civic participation by limiting participation, collaboration, and influence in decision-making processes at school and district levels. Specifically, our critical analysis unveils the extent of deregulation, lack of influence, lack of collaboration, and civic participation for members within schools that are not fully public (that is, fully private, Charter, and Municipal schools), which represent the majority of enrolments in the system (95.1%, Mineduc, 2022).

After a return to democracy, significant efforts were made to encourage the reappearance of civic participation in Chile. For example, Student, Parent, and Teacher Councils were created to give voice to these actors and administer their participation. However, our analysis unveils the strong influence of an adult-centric, individualistic approach in designing these governing bodies, where transversal collaboration is restricted, and, at best, permitting educative actors to promote their own goals rather than engaging in meaningful reflections and actions with intra-school and exo-school leaders. Given the strong influence of market-oriented values in Chilean society, our findings unveil how neoliberal

ideologies have shaped civic participation in the educational system by perpetuating the individualistic values of private owners (Moreno-Doña & Jiménez, 2014; Poyanco, 2017).

In the light of these findings, it can be argued that, in line with the described neoliberal principles, the predominant model that operates in the Chilean educational system tends to approach the administration of schools as "islands" without encouraging their interconnection and cooperation with other institutions within their communities. Accordingly, it is plausible to suggest an almost strategic reluctance from the legislative level to regulate private administrators of education. This apparent reluctance creates the impression that the schools operated by these elites remain outside of the direct influence of the public sphere, including the government.

It is also possible to argue that there is a form of ideological coherence in the revised legal framework. That is, educational policies appear to have created participative governing bodies in the school system, where the primary importance is given to the individual and their immediate peers, rather than encouraging collaboration across different actors at the intra- or exo-school levels. Indeed, the legal framework has shaped the school system's functioning and promoted a flow of messages that reinforce hierarchies and other prevalent features of the context. In echoing findings relating to governance and leadership in the non-governmental (NGO) sector in Chile (Diaz & Rees, 2020), our findings suggest that power distribution persists without adequate oversight, and misconceptions exist regarding the efficacy of various participation and involvement mechanisms in the educational environment's transformation processes.

Furthermore, consistent with the findings presented by Ascorra et al. (2021) and Ochoa (2022) (see literature review above), our critical analysis reveals that, despite recent reforms, civic participation in Chile continues to adhere to a paradoxical adult-centric approach. In this approach, only intra-school and exo-school leaders tend to be granted the power to influence decision-making processes at both the school and district levels, while students tend to be disregarded in the formation process. This situation contrasts with the efforts of thousands of Chilean students through social movements such as the "Penguin Revolution" to achieve more inclusion and equality in the educational system and demand more opportunities for civic participation.

Our findings indicate that the School Board emerges as the primary forum in which most actors can converse. Moreover, when crafting these School Board policies, policymakers focused almost exclusively on their implementation in schools which received financial support from the government. Indeed, our analysis demonstrates the limited regulatory oversight of governing bodies for educative communities based within fully private schools. In contrast, fully public schools were empowered, through national School Board policy, to engage in civic participation from the intra-school level, to the exo-level, to the community (district) level.

Arguably, the findings indicate that, in Chile, the problematic aspect of the entrenched autonomy of private educational entrepreneurs continues to lie in its alignment with principles that bolster the neoliberal perspective, as discussed earlier in the literature review. In effect, the aspects of our findings offer some support to the views of Errázuriz and García-González (2021) and Wilkins (2012) discussed above; that is, that neoliberal policies encourage competitive individuals, autonomy, and self-interest, which are values that tend to contradict efforts to reach a common good through means of collaboration and participation.

Hence, autonomy is perceived as necessary for the entrepreneurial attitude to flourish, relegating the government to a secondary role of setting only some basic norms. This makes it much less feasible for new laws to interfere with "educational projects" in the private sector, thereby reinforcing segregation and perpetuating existing power and influence

groups (Shon & Jilke, 2021). Essential elements of neoliberalism that were enshrined in the 1980s Constitution during the dictatorship continue to form the foundation of Chile's educational system (Gutiérrez & Carrasco, 2021; Marcel, 2009; Raczynski & Muñoz, 2007).

6. Conclusions

This study demonstrates that neoliberal policy frameworks and fragmented funding structures restrict meaningful participation in educational governance. By reframing participation as shaped by broader historical, institutional and economic forces, it challenges dominant assumptions and invites new critical perspectives on democratic engagement in education. Although educational policies in Chile have extended the existence of participative bodies in educative communities at the school and district levels, this research paper unveils the need for further improvements related to the administration of civic participation in public and private education services. Even though existing educational policies seemingly declare the importance of participation and its relation to democracy, this is not necessarily translated into bodies with actual decision-making influence. Thus, these principles are not significantly embedded in the school system. Consequently, there is a danger that the creation of governing bodies provides an illusion of participation. Students, parents, and teachers have been granted governing bodies to manifest their opinions, though our study suggests that these key stakeholders may still have extremely limited involvement and leverage decision-making processes, especially in private schools. As such, the findings indicate that Chile may need to take additional legislative action to facilitate meaningful involvement of educational communities in the governance of schools and districts, regardless of their administrative affiliations and funding.

While this study focuses on the legally intended framework for participation in Chile's education system, it does not empirically assess the actual degree of cooperation or participation within the school system. This is a recognized limitation, as formal policy frameworks do not always translate into practice. However, the study's central aim is to interrogate how these policies structure the possibilities for collaboration and influence among key stakeholders. By examining the design and intent of these policy frameworks, the research provides a critical foundation for understanding the institutional conditions that shape stakeholder participation. Future research could extend this analysis by exploring how these opportunities are experienced in everyday school system governance practices. Finally, we highlight that we have not sought to devise policy recommendations based on our findings, though we do note that the findings have raised a series of issues relating to issues such as school governorship and funding. These issues are likely to be of interest to policymakers seeking to promote civic participation in school education systems in Chile and perhaps other national contexts.

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