Original Article

Comprensión de la Metodología de trabajo por tareas y su implementación: el caso de una Universidad Pública

Understanding task-based learning and its implementation: a Public University case

Carolina Herrera Carvajal[1*], Katherin Pérez Rojas[2]

[1*]*Magister en Enseñanza y Aprendizaje de Lenguas Extranjeras, carolina.herrera@udea.edu.co, ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8190-4604, Universidad de Antioquia, Medellín, Colombia.*
[2]*Magister en Procesamiento del Lenguaje Natural y Tecnología del Lenguaje Humano, katherinperez@itm.edu.co, ORCID https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8550-7956, Instituto Tecnológico Metropolitano, Medellín, Colombia.*

RESUMEN	
Palabras clave: aprendizaje y enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera, adquisición de lenguaje, educación pública, metodología basada en tareas	Este artículo presenta los hallazgos relacionados con los resultados obtenidos de la evaluación de un programa de adquisición de inglés ofrecido en una institución de educación superior en Medellín, Colombia, en términos de la comprensión que tienen los coordinadores y los profesores sobre la metodología utilizada (Task-Based Language Teaching), sus principios, aplicación y evaluación. El objetivo principal de este estudio era identificar las condiciones académicas necesarias para facilitar el alcance de la competencia comunicativa en lengua extranjera inglés. Se utilizó un estudio de caso múltiple mixto incluyendo técnicas de recolección de datos como análisis de documentos, una encuesta en línea y entrevistas. Los hallazgos muestran que hay una comprensión general de los principios de la metodología basada en tareas, su aplicación y evaluación, sin embargo, no es claro por qué se usa en este contexto específico; adicionalmente, se evidencia una contradicción en los discursos de los profesores y coordinadores en cuanto a las razones para el uso de esta metodología. Las implicaciones del estudio tienen que ver con los procesos de toma de decisiones y la participación de los actores a quienes es recomendable involucrar para obtener resultados favorables en cuanto a los procesos de adquisición de lengua de estudiantes.

ABSTRACT	
Keywords: EFL learning and teaching, language acquisition, public education, Task-Based Learning	This article presents the findings obtained from the evaluation of an English acquisition program offered at a higher education institution in Medellin, Colombia, in terms of the understanding that coordinators and teachers have about the methodology used (Task-Based Language Teaching), its principles, its application, and its evaluation. The main objective of this study was to identify the necessary academic conditions to facilitate the scope of the communicative competence in the English language. A mixed multiple case study was used, including data collection techniques such as document analysis, an online survey, and interviews. The findings show that there is a general understanding of the principles of the task-based methodology, its application, and evaluation; however, it is not clear why it is used in this specific context. Additionally, there is evidence of a contradiction in the discourses of teachers and coordinators regarding the reasons for using this methodology. The implications of the study relate to decision-making processes and participation of the actors to whom is advisable to involve to obtain favorable results regarding the process of students' language acquisition.

Introduction

The following article stems from a research study whose main purpose was to evaluate an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) program in terms of the academic structure needed for students to achieve language competences in English. The study was carried out between 2019 and 2020, in a public university in Medellín that offered technological, undergraduate and graduate programs in the fields of engineering, administrative sciences, exact sciences, and arts and humanities. Students were required to achieve communicative competence in English at a B1 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference –CEFR (2001)– and the Colombian Ministry of Education for undergraduate programs. This was done via English as a Foreign Language Program offered in two modalities: curricular courses and extension courses.

In general, the institution offers a minimum of 192 and a maximum of 320 mandatory hours of instruction in EFL, allowing students to achieve levels A1 to B1 according to the CEFR. Both modalities have a) a Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) methodology for teaching, learning and evaluating, b) teacher support via a Professional Development Program, c) administrative support in the acquisition of class material and provision of physical resources to support the teaching and d) extracurricular activities (speaking and writing clubs, tutoring sessions, and others) for students to practice the language outside the classroom.

This article will focus on analyzing the results obtained from the interaction with teachers and coordinators when it comes to evaluating their perceptions and understandings of the teaching methodology and assessment in terms of its principles and application.

English language proficiency in tertiary education is crucial for enhancing students' global competitiveness, facilitating academic and professional success, and fostering cultural exchange. In the particular context of this program, it was important to identify and understand the extent to which the structure of the program facilitated the development of students' language competencies and what needed to be changed to improve the desired results, starting with the academic actors in charge of leading the implementation of the curriculum. The proposed program represents a strategic response to this situation, aligning it with broader educational policies and institutional goals, and, at the same time assessing, through systematic evaluation, the effectiveness and quality, ensuring the alignment with institutional objectives outlined in the institutions' strategic proposal.

The University Context

English language courses in this public institution are administered by the Language Center, which is the academic unit in charge of providing the resources for students to comply with the foreign language requirement prior to graduation. The courses are provided in two modalities: curricular and extension. Curricular courses offer six levels of 32 hours to technology programs and four additional levels of 32 hours to professional programs, with 40 students per course. However, in 2016 the institution started a curricular redesign in which the programs offered between four and eight levels of 64-hour courses with a maximum of 25 students per group, for an average of 10,000 students registered per semester. The second modality were courses in the Extension program proposed for the term 2016-2019. This program, called Desarrollo de Competencias en Lengua Inglesa (DCLI), aimed at preparing 500 undergraduate students and 30 tenure track professors. This program was composed of four levels (A1, A2, B1 and B2) each one divided into four courses of 36 hours, providing a total of 576 hours of EFL instruction.

The Language Center is composed of a head coordinator, five language coordinators and around 60 teachers per semester. The first one is in charge of all the administrative issues, the second ones are

in charge of designing the guidelines for teachers and verifying compliance to the academic aspects and the third ones are in charge of guiding students' language acquisition process following the guidelines provided by the coordinators. The Language Center has official documents that are in agreement with the pedagogical model of the institution that falls under a constructivist approach. However, the Language Center is free to apply the methodologies that best suit their own needs.

To teach English as a foreign language, the Language Center advocated for a Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) methodology focused on developing communicative competence, therefore, teachers must focus on meaning rather than on form. This methodology is stated in the official documents of the Language Center like the Concept Document (2019), the Microcurricula (2019), the Pacing Guides (2019), and it is also specified in the hiring process, both the interview and the microteaching session. The methodology includes an evaluative system where evaluative tasks are coherent with what is established in the curricula and what is done in class.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

TBLT is a teaching methodology for language acquisition that aims at providing spaces in the classroom for students to have an approach to learning where they experiment and interact with the language in a spoken and written manner. This methodology uses tasks that help engage students through meaningful class interactions where language is authentic, practical, and functional. TBLT provides possibilities for students to use the language they already have when completing a communicative task (Nunan, 2004), and it is focused on 'meaning-based learning' and 'students-centered' teaching instruction which also help learners have a sense of accomplishment when they perform tasks successfully (Prabhu, 1987). Theoretical evidence of this approach argues that students experience 'real-time communication', in which they develop the competence to communicate fluently and effectively,

using the target language in an actual context, implementing strategies and developing skills for effective communication (Ellis, 2003; Kohonen, 1992; Kolb, 1984; Nunan, 2004). TBLT is beneficial in developing language learners' foreign language ability as their existing knowledge is put into real language use (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 1989, 2004; Willis, 1996).

This methodology involves three stages: Pre-task, task, and post-task. In the pre-task stage, the teacher presents and explains what the students should accomplish at the end of the task, presents a model of the task to be developed, and develops a set of activities that help students practice vocabulary and other aspects that are relevant to the task. In the task stage, students are expected to plan, prepare, develop, and present the task, either individually or in groups. In the post-task stage, students can assess, revise, and explore their products to receive formative feedback or do self- assessment.

In the Colombian context, this methodology is mainly used in primary and secondary education under the premise that learners acquire language skills, primarily written and spoken, by doing real tasks that focus on drawing from the real-life context, since it would help them recognize situations more easily (González-Humanez & Arias, 2009; Peña & Onatra, 2009). Nevertheless, at the university level, TBLT has also been implemented as a way to integrate language skills, helping students to improve their communicative competence in the EFL class (Córdoba-Zuñiga, 2016), with the possibility to integrate literary texts as authentic material to foster learners' language skills (Arboleda-Arboleda & Castro-Garcés, 2019).

The Assessment System in the TBLT EFL Class

In terms of language evaluative processes, particularly in foreign language learning, Shohamy (1998) proposes that judgement of language proficiency should be assessed from multiple sources of information to provide an informed decision on

the results obtained from a particular evaluative procedure. Teachers tend to highlight aspects such as large class size, time constraints, lack of student motivation, lack of authentic material, and institutional pressures as difficulties in assessing students' performance (Kim, 2014). This fact highlights the importance of using authentic material and a variety of evaluative procedures that help teachers decide on evaluative moments that support the learning process and facilitate the development and assessment of the four language skills during the lessons to encourage language learning for communicative purposes.

In the local context, studies that report teachers' perspectives regarding their evaluative practices at the higher education level show an existent confusion teachers had between formative and summative evaluation, the imprecise definition of the linguistic construct, the excessive emphasis on the organisational competence, the high importance given to non-linguistic aspects, the variation between what is taught and what is evaluated, and the lack of comprehension of the many qualities of evaluation in general (Arias & Maturana, 2005).

In terms of the assessment instruments used in EFL classes, a study carried out in two Colombian public universities showed that teachers preferred 'hard' assessment instruments such as quizzes and written exams, over 'soft' ones such as portfolios, interviews, self- and peer-assessment, role plays, and papers (Frodden et al., 2004). Furthermore, most Colombian universities do not offer evaluation courses or seminars in their language teaching programs which limit potential English language teachers to access the knowledge for designing and administering quality assessment procedures (López & Bernal, 2009).

These researchers found a correlation between the perception of teachers who had been formed in assessment, understanding it as a tool to foster learning and the ones who had not, who perceived it as a means to measure and exercise power. This

situation, combined with the lack of coherence between evaluation and the promotion of foreign languages led to the creation of a Consensual Evaluation System that advocated for different types and ways to evaluate, rigid and systematic methods, meticulous design of instruments, formats and evaluative tasks to make evaluative practices just and democratic to benefit students, teachers and institutions (Arias et al., 2012).

As for the evaluation system of the Language Center, it was designed in a way that it could reflect both the principles of the teaching methodology and the best practices teachers used for its implementation. To achieve this, the evaluation system is proposed to comply with assessment principles such as validity, reliability, practicality, authenticity, and fairness (Concept Document, 2019). The Language Center's evaluation system focuses primarily on strengthening language skills (speaking, writing, reading and listening) as a reference for knowledge construction, based on competency assessment. The evaluation system is outlined in the Microcurriculum and the Pacing Guides that is intended to be and developed throughout the semester. It consists of five tasks divided into language skills: a reading comprehension task, a listening comprehension task, a writing task and two speaking tasks, each with a 20% of the final grade of the course (Concept Document, 2019). These documents provide input on how teachers and language coordinators should design the evaluative tasks. These tasks should establish a purpose, proper instructions and a scoring system. For the receptive skills, the pacing guidelines propose activities such as sentence completion exercises, pairing exercises, diagram and images description, logic sequence, true or false exercises, and open and cloze questions and cloze exercises. For productive skills, the pacing guidelines recommend informative, descriptive and argumentative texts such as emails, letters, blog posts, and essays for writing; and dialogues, presentations, interviews or role plays for speaking skills. Furthermore, providing feedback is considered part of the post task stage, stating that in it, students review each other's work and give qualitative

feedback; teachers highlight the grammar aspects that were not clear and apply practice activities at end of the cycle.

Materiales and Methods

To carry out this project, a mixed methods explanatory multiple case study was carried out. This type of empirical inquiry aided to investigate this particular educational phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context (Yin, 2003; 2011). Given its constructivist philosophical background, this type of research approach allowed establishing the organisational and managerial processes of the EFL program by the systematic identification of the possible relations and connections among the participants' understanding of the programs' methodology. The question that guided this study was What are the necessary academic conditions for a foreign language-English program to facilitate the process of acquiring communicative competence? Particularly for this article, two groups of participants were selected, 34 teachers and two coordinators, as we desired to highlight the perspectives of the people in charge of the decision-making process in this context. Their profiles are described as follows:

Teachers: Since this institution has a high-quality certification, it is expected that teachers comply with a particular profile as established in the Concept Document (2019) and the ITM Bilingual Concept Document (2017). All teachers should certify a bachelor's degree in language teaching or related areas such as philology and translation, and a specialization or a master's degree in languages, education or similar fields. They should also certify a B2 proficiency level of English and 12 months of teaching experience in an EFL program. The recruitment process includes a) the verification of the candidate's profile, b) an interview, and c) a microteaching session. The Language Center has a Professional Development Program that offers all teachers continuous education through class observations, and in-service sessions about academic aspects, such as teaching strategies, classroom

management ideas and materials design, among others, led by the figure of a support teacher (Concept Document, 2019). All 34 teachers surveyed in this study complied with the profile described above, their ages ranged between 21 and 50 years, and there were 13 females and 21 males.

Coordinators: The Concept Document (2019) also established the profile expected for the five language coordinators and the head coordinator. On the one hand, the language coordinators must certify a bachelor's degree in language teaching or related fields such as philology, translation, and interpretation, and preferably a master's degree in languages or education fields. They should have 12 months of professional or teaching experience at any context and experience as a teacher in any of the programs offered by the Language Center. They must certify a C1 level of English and must demonstrate critical thinking skills, efficient organization skills, great communication skills, and a sense of projection towards future improvement of the programs. They oversee the design of intellectual material according to their area of expertise, such as master documents, microcurricula, academic schedules, and institutional evaluations; assess and provide feedback to teachers under their responsibility, lead complementary education spaces resulting from their duties, plan and conduct teacher in-service sessions on various current topics in education.

At the time of the application of the research, the language coordinator who participated in this study was a man in his 40s who complied with the profile as he held a bachelor's degree in languages and a master's degree in foreign language teaching, he had been a teacher in the Language Center for over 10 years and a language coordinator for five. This participant will be referred as Coordinator 1.

As for the profile of the head coordinator, it included holding a bachelor's and a master's degree (no area of knowledge specified), a C1 language certification, preferably in English, and 24 months of professional or teaching experience in higher

education. Qualities for this position included leadership, planning, decision-making skills, management capacity to direct staff under their responsibility, and commitment to the organization and user orientation. The person in this position was required to support the dean's office in the projection and development of the Language Center by institutional policies and current regulations, delegate who and how the curricular processes should be administered, and verify the compliance of quality standards for their design, development, and evaluation, to enable undergraduate, postgraduate, and continuing education students to achieve institutional objectives and accredit language competencies (Concept Document, 2019). The head coordinator who participated in this study was a man in his 40s who complied with the profile required. He held a bachelor's degree in languages and a master's degree in marketing, had experience as an English teacher at the tertiary level and as an administrative coordinator in different programs in several universities. By the time the study was conducted, he had been the head coordinator of the Language Center for five years. This participant will be referred as Coordinator 2.

The two researchers of the study complied with the profile of language coordinators mentioned above and had experience as both English teachers and language coordinators in both programs of the Language Center. One of them was a woman in her 30s with a bachelor's degree in translation and a master's degree in natural language processing and human language technology; the other researcher was a woman in her 30s with a bachelor's degree and languages teaching and a master's degree in languages teaching and learning. They had both made part of the construction of the Microcurriculum and Pacing Guides. Additionally, they believed that teaching English in this type of context required a complete understanding of the students' needs and limitations to provide a more significant experience in the classroom setting.

The data were collected systematically over a period of four months, using the instruments as conceived by Yin (2011) and the guidelines to do evaluative investigation established by *Modelo de Evaluación de Programas de Extensión en Lenguas Extranjeras* (Universidad de Antioquia, 2015) depending on the type of data collection instruments as it will be explained.

Document analysis: It aimed at identifying the coherence among objectives, strategies and the methodological approach implemented to determine the coherence between the conceptualization described in the documents and the actual teaching practices. A total of 90 documents related to the program proposal, microcurricula, students' evaluation of the courses, syllabi, pacing guides, resolutions and code of conduct were analysed using AntConc, a freeware corpus analysis tool that allows identifying discourse patterns. To analyse the official documents, the principles of TBLT were considered and broken down to distinguish the main components that guided its application and assessment in this specific context. Here, three main concepts appeared: teaching and learning methodology, evaluation system, and support strategies. These concepts were explored with the AntConc Software, and they were analyzed using the Key Word In Context (KWIC) feature, in which each term was retrieved with adjacent context to determine its relationship with the main concepts.

Online survey: The survey applied to the teachers inquired about their understanding of the official documents structure, their perception of the teaching methodology (TBLT principles, class instructions, lesson planning, formative and summative feedback); their understanding and application of the assessment system (type and percentages of tasks, learning objectives, instructions, program coherence, summative results). (See Annex 1). All survey responses were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software.

Semi-structured interviews: Two semi-structured interviews in Spanish were applied; one to Coordinator 1 and another one to Coordinator 2. These two participants were selected for the researchers to be able to learn about the factors that explain similarities and differences in the inquiry issue as they were knowledgeable about the programs involved in this study. The purpose of the interviews was to corroborate and contrast the perception they had of the academic structure of the program, specifically on the curriculum proposed and its implementation. These were applied by a teacher of the Language Center who was not a member of the research project but had research experience in conducting interviews. Outsourcing this helped the researchers of the study to diminish the level of bias when conversing with the interviewees. The questions inquired about the coordinators' perceptions and understandings of the theoretical principles of TBLT and the relationship between the methodology applied and its implementation (See Annex 2).

The data were analysed through an inductive-deductive approach and following the five-phased cycle suggested by Yin (2011): compiling the data collected, disassembling data (collecting categories and codes), reassembling (organizing the data according to those codes), building interpretations and conclusions.

The triangulation process involved gathering information from the three data collection instruments that allowed the construction of the following categories: principles and characteristics of TBLT, procedures to implement the TBLT cycle, and procedures to assess students' language acquisition. The results and conclusions were shared with the teachers and coordinators through official reports to the main coordination and the research department of the institution.

Results and Discussion

Data revealed that the coordinators and teachers had a clear understanding when it comes to the principles of the teaching methodology used (TBLT), its application and its assessment; however, it is not clear for them why this particular methodology was chosen for this context. Findings will be presented following the hierarchical structure found in the institution, this is to say, the documents that guide the program, the understanding the coordinators had of said documents, and the understanding teachers have of both the documents and the instructions provided by the coordinators.

Clear Understanding of the Principles and Characteristics of the TBLT

Most of the program guideline documents provide information regarding the methodology (components and classroom strategies) to be implemented. The guidelines provide a basic understanding of the TBLT principles and how to implement them in the classes such as the case of the Concept Document, which presented academic and administrative roles and guidelines of the Language Center:

[…] TBLT allows the student to be immersed in everyday communicative contexts, therefore, the student needs to activate experiences and previous knowledge to build new meaning. TBLT allows building those new meanings, and this process must be assessed throughout the whole academic development, not just the submission of products, but the building of new meanings through the teacher's conceptual guideline (Concept Document, 2019, p. 60).

The Concept Document for the extension modality also states that TBLT is

[…] A methodological approach that aims at fostering the learning of a foreign language by using it in real-life communicative situations close to the students' experiences and in a spontaneous way. This methodology allows students a direct contact with the language and consequently, acquire the necessary competences to access knowledge and effective communication in different academic, social, work or cultural

situations with the use of the appropriate linguistic tools (ITM Bilingual Concept Document, 2017, p. 60).

Contrastingly, when asked about the teaching principles that guide the program, coordinators' opinions differed: one of the coordinators elaborated on what TBLT is, what it entails in terms of use and exposition to the target language and its practice, principles, characteristics and an explanation of the cycle to be used in class. Contrary to what the first coordinator said, the second coordinator did not provide a clear answer to that question, nor defined or characterized TBLT, but rather focused on the professional development process teachers should follow to use such methodology and how it provided organized, sequential and coherent classes. The following excerpts evidenced what the coordinators explained in the semi-structured individual interview concerning the teaching methodology.

[...] It was a task-based methodology. This methodology basically takes students to learn a language by exposing them to it, by approaching them to the contexts close to them and by using communicative tasks. [...] the principle of the task-based methodology is to approach students to realities or contexts close to them, that they already experience, or they will experience when they face the language they are learning. The principle for this is to help them face communication moments that are real or will be real for them. (Semi-structured interview, Coordinator 1, May 4th, 2019)

[...] We reviewed some methodologies, amongst them, an instruction model to search for that communicative approach we were saying that we had. We started then with the 5E model to give clear instruction in the language, for teachers to have more organized classes, and for students to see a coherence and perceive it as meaningful (Semi-structured interview, Coordinator 2, May 9th, 2019)

Similarly, teachers' discourse evidenced an understanding of the principles that support the methodology they apply in their lessons. This was evidenced by teachers when asked, in the survey, about the definition of TBLT. As seen in Figure 1, most teachers defined it as a teaching method oriented towards developing a communicative task using the

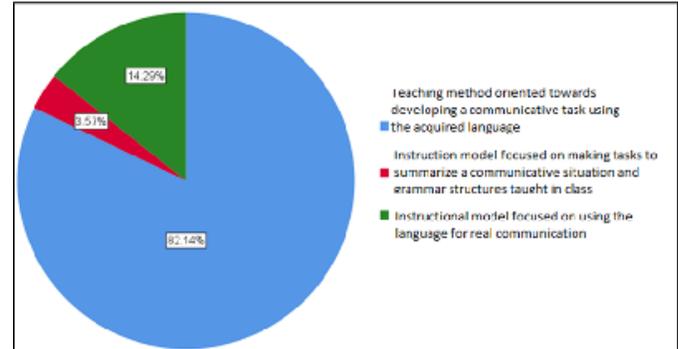acquired language, which reflects the definition of such methodology.

Figure 1. Teachers' Responses to the Question: What is TBL? Source: own creation

Data analysis also evidenced a piece of unclear or non-existent information as to the reasons why the program selected TBLT as the teaching methodology. The only official document containing information regarding the justification to use the TBLT methodology was the Concept Document, stating that,

The Language Center is articulated to the institutions' proposal of the constructivist approach for teaching and learning, and to what is proposed by the UNESCO in the lifelong learning postulates and the Delors' (1996) pillars of education, searching for an integral being (learning to know). Both Spanish and the foreign language fields aim at strengthening the communicative competence in the students taking the courses. For this, each field adopts its own methodological referents without leaving the umbrella approach of the constructivism and competence evaluation (Concept Document, 2019, p. 59)

In addition to this lack of clarity regarding the implementation of TBLT as the default methodology in the program, both coordinators agreed that the choice had more to do with administrative aspects and the necessity to provide a degree of organization to the Language Center. At that time, there was a need to regulate teachers' practices and offer a sense of structure and organization to the classes in terms of timing, topics to be covered and strategies to teach language skills. To this matter, the head coordinator expressed "I found a Language Center that had no

methodology to teach […] and I received only a few documents where it stated that the Language Center worked under a communicative approach…" (Semi-structured interview, Coordinator 2, May 9th, 2019). Similarly, Coordinator 1 mentioned "We, as an institution, believe in this methodology. Even the other programs in the institution are also aligned to this methodology and deeply believe in it. It has given us very good results and we continue implementing…" (Semi-structured interview, Coordinator 1, May 4th, 2019).

The head and language coordinator's answers do not reflect a clear reason as to why they chose TBLT to be the methodology to teach English in this context. Coordinator 2 specified that the reason had more to do with an administrative aspect to regulate and structure teachers' classes, and the fact that there was not a clear approach to teaching English. Coordinator 1 attributed the reasons to the good results they had obtained by applying it; however, no evidence was provided to prove this. This seemingly contradictive answer might have happened because of the nature of the roles of both coordinators, whereas Coordinator 1 was an academic coordinator who worked directly with teachers, the head coordinator played a more administrative- role. Another possible reason that might explain the lack of clarity of the coordinators regarding this issue is the fact that a needs analysis was never done when the program was being restructured, therefore students' needs and interests were not considered or studied to make informed decisions as to what was best for them to acquire the language.

Nonetheless, it must be said that official documents show clear principles and guidelines that define the TBLT methodology. These principles were found within the Concept Document and the documents that are handed to the teachers. The main takeaway of these documents reflected the spirit of the TBLT, as proposed by Willis (1996) when he suggests teachers to use tasks that are similar to the student's real-life context in which they can use the language with real communicative purposes, for

example, sending messages, requesting information from the university or writing essays. Being a public university that offers a variety of programs in different fields of knowledge and whose students' backgrounds also vary, task models need to reflect the realities of their day-to-day lives as university students. For example, completing a profile to apply to a scholarship, sending emails to professors, uploading posts to the university's social media, or responding to an interview. These types of situations reflect students' needs to learn English and be able to communicate in an academic setting (Nunan, 1989).

Clear Guidelines to Implement TBLT in the English Classroom

When it comes to the guidelines teachers should follow to plan their lessons and implement the TBLT cycle within this context, the idea of a three-stage process is fairly repetitive in the documents, like in the case of the extension modality main document where it is stated "The tasks must be done in three sequential moments, pre task, 'preparation activities', task 'planning and producing' and post task 'assessment activities'" (ITM Bilingual Concept Document, 2017, p. 18). The course plan, which contains methodological strategies such as teaching and learning activities per level, also emphasizes the type of methodology used and provides general guidelines to understand what should be done in the three stages. All this information is further specified in the Pacing Guide, which is the document that teachers use the most in their everyday planning, by proposing a structure that must follow that three-stage process as follows:

1. Pre-task
1.1. Classroom agenda. It must explain the task, the purpose of the task and the classroom activities to be developed for students to reach that task.
1.2. Background knowledge activities. It must include activities such as dictations, Kahoot, hangman, word games, etc. to prepare students for the development of the task.

1.3. Model of the task. It presents students with one or several models of the type of texts they will produce (oral or written) and provides students with classroom activities (emphasis on input skills) to practice before developing the task.

1.4. Instructions to develop the task. It presents an explanation of the prompt and material needed to develop the task.

2.Task
2.1. Development of the task. It presents a review of the task model to help students in the preparation, development and presentation of the task.

3. Post-task
3.1. Formative feedback. It provides a space for students to review each other's work and give qualitative feedback; teachers highlight the grammar aspects that were not clear and apply practice activities to end the cycle.

The coordinators provide instructions to teachers to use the pacing guide document and the TBLT methodology described there; however, they specifically request avoiding grammar and teacher-centered classes in the early stages of the hiring process and within the class observation sessions.

[...] Input is to give students the tools they will need to achieve the communicative task. Students are given these elements and the linguistic ones to achieve the task, and then teachers have the moment of the communicative task, which indicates if the student achieves the objectives stated at the beginning of the class. [...] (Semi-structured interview, Coordinator 1, May 4th, 2019)

Similarly, Coordinator 2 stated that "This could be guaranteed via the Microcurricula and the Pacing Guide, and via the evaluations focused on what the student must know, must learn and finally will use" (Semi-structured interview, Coordinator 2, May 9th, 2019)

The coordinators' discourse about the implementation of TBLT is mainly positive, referring to its effectiveness, coherence, and order. Their assessment of the implementation of this methodology is based on the external results obtained in the government standardized evaluations of university students before graduation, specifically in English as a foreign language. Coordinator 2 specifies that

[…] I think the methodology […] has helped our teachers to understand the type of instruction that we give to the students, with an order, a coherence, a sequence of activities, and this is reflected first in the results of the Pruebas Saber Pro and Pruebas T&T (Technic and Technological programs). We have never had such favourable results in the institution; second, we have a lot of students doing external mobility […] (Semi-structured interview, Coordinator 2, May 9th, 2019)

In line with what is expected from teachers, when asked about the teaching strategies and activities used in their classes and their frequency, teachers also described the strategies used in class to help students acquire the language, which mirror the fundamentals of TBLT. They manifested that they frequently like implementing preparation and previous knowledge activities, providing real-life and contextualized model of the communicative situation, giving instructions to develop the task, presenting the products students developed, giving formative feedback, implementing self-evaluation and co-evaluation processes, and motivating students to attend extracurricular activities. Among the strategies almost never used within the classroom is the focus on grammar aspects; however, teachers did manifest that grammar explanation is used at the end of the task cycle to provide feedback on students' productions (See Figure 2).
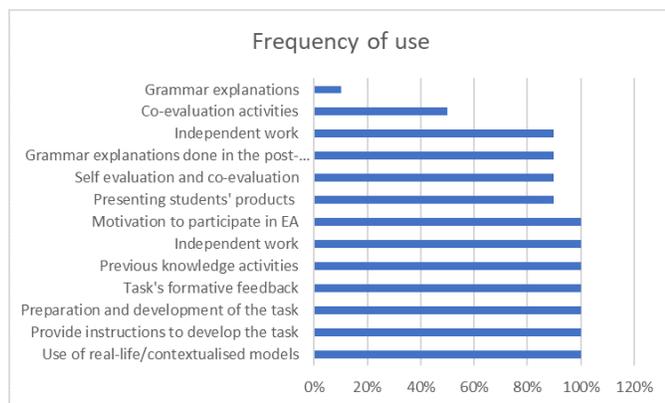
Figure 2. Strategies Teachers Use in Class to Help Students Acquire the Language.

Source: own creation.

The analysis of the teachers' survey also evidenced that they have a clear understanding of the type of activities to be implemented in the context of the task, and how they favor language acquisition, since they present models that reflect the communicative situation to be developed in class and its relation to the competences to be acquired.

According to Ellis (2003) course design must contemplate the content (the tasks to be used) and the methodology (how those tasks are going to be implemented). These two aspects are paramount to create a communicative setting where students can understand and produce meaning by using the language. Ellis's assertion was evidenced by teachers' clarity on the conception of the communicative competence, on the teaching methodology and on the activities to be implemented in the classroom. Their class preparation focused on communicative tasks, including real-life language and models, therefore students' participation increases, and learning becomes more significant. Furthermore, for an effective acquisition of the communicative competence in a foreign language, it is necessary to have a transdisciplinary strategy that allows meaningful exposition to general and specific situations (Calvo-Vázquez, 2010). This strategy is intended to master a linguistic code, at different levels, and understanding or producing discourses

appropriate to a situation and a context, with a degree of formality (Lomas et al., 1993).

Teachers planned their classes in a way students can prepare, plan, and practice the communicative task, which will be later formally developed following instructions to demonstrate their knowledge in the classroom, using the linguistic and pragmatic resources necessary to solve the communicative situation. To complement this process, there were spaces in class to apply tools that allowed students' reflection, evaluation, co-evaluation, and self-evaluation, aimed at recognizing strengths and weaknesses in the use of the language (Ellis, 2003; Willis, 1996). The recognition of students' strengths and weaknesses in the use of language, allowed teachers to adapt, create, renew, and propose different teaching and learning strategies to help students deal with them and promote the achievement of the communicative competence. In addition, if all these processes were implemented, in this context, the evaluative tasks became a complement and reflection of what was taught, therefore, the formal, formative, and summative evaluation processes were the result of developing communicative tasks focused on solving real-life situations and meaning negotiation (Arias & Maturana, 2005).

Clear Assessment Procedures Used in the English Classroom

Data analysis revealed that the Language Center evaluative system of its English courses included assessing the four language skills. Nevertheless, it was mainly focused on the strengthening of productive skills (speaking and writing) by using receptive skills (reading and listening) as a referent to build knowledge. The evaluative system was referenced in the Microcurricula and pacing guides of each course, it was developed throughout the semester and its results were registered in the institutional platform (Concept Document, 2019). Due to institutional restrictions, and to better reflect the evaluative process of a TBLT methodology, the Concept Document states that the percentages must

be divided into five tasks that will focus on reading, listening, writing and two moments for speaking skills, each one of 20% of the final grade and to be assessed in specific weeks of the academic calendar.

Additionally, the design of the evaluative tasks was done by both teachers and language coordinators. Teachers were expected to design evaluative tasks aiming at assessing receptive skills (reading and listening), the language coordinators were in charge of designing evaluative tasks of productive skills (speaking and writing), following the guidelines of TBLT. As mentioned earlier, the Microcurricula and the Pacing Guide provided some guidelines on the types of exercises, items and criteria to use when designing class tasks and evaluative tasks. Hence, having a clear understanding of the different types of evaluative tasks, the purposes, the criteria, and their application, allowed students to understand their purposes, their dynamic, their results and the feedback.

The coordinators' discourse was in line with what official documents stated, as they considered that this methodology allowed teachers to apply some formal evaluative moments, with a summative evaluation which helped them to determine students' language acquisition, as they saw a connection between what was taught and assessed. Specifically, Coordinator 1 described a possible relation of teaching and assessment "because if the methodology is communicative, the evaluations are also communicative". He also mentioned how teachers needed to create spaces in the class for students to feel submerged in a communicative setting, and he added "The teachers provide feedback, and like that, students acquire the competences" (Semi-structured interview, Coordinator 1, May 4th, 2019).

Adding to this, Coordinator 2 provided a general perception of teachers' practices

[…] We have reviewed and made sure that what the teachers take to the classroom is coherent and is also reflected in the evaluation, so the student acquires what they need. This

could be guaranteed via the Microcurricula and the Pacing Guide, and via the evaluations focused on what the student must know, must learn and finally will use (Semi-structured interview, Coordinator 2, May 9th, 2019)

Moreover, when teachers were asked to rate the evaluative system of the courses, it was evidenced that most teachers have a positive perception of the evaluative tasks used to assess students' performance. Regarding the percentages of the course's evaluative tasks, teachers manifested these to be pertinent to the purposes of the courses. Teachers also believed that the evaluative tasks were coherent with the competences to be assessed, the methodology and content worked in class, which indicates that the evaluative system is adequate to what is proposed in the curriculum (Figure 3).
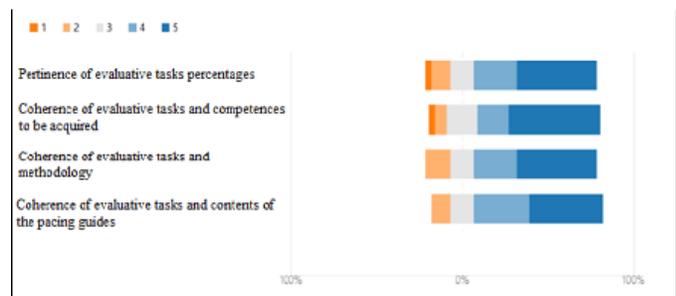

Figure 3. Teachers Rating the Evaluative Tasks Used to Assess Students' Performance.

Source: own creation.

According to their experience with the program, teachers also reflected on why students reached, or not, the language competences. Results from the teachers' survey also showed that they considered that the methodology allowed clarity in terms of themes and their relation to real-life contexts, it gave students opportunities to practice and evaluate their own process, it allowed teachers to plan a good class structure with several scenarios, to be exposed to the language to improve communicative competences. Furthermore, teachers are suggested to provide spaces in class to apply strategies for formative and summative feedback about students' performance and how they can correct it while in class.

To sum up, results from this study reassured that, in terms of evaluative processes, particularly in foreign language learning, proficiency level judgement should be assessed taking into account the features of the Multiplism Perspective of assessment proposed by Shohamy (1998). Results demonstrated that even though the evaluative tasks applied in the programs focused mainly on the four language skills, the characteristics inserted into each evaluative task complied with some of these features. For instance, teachers applied multiple procedures for measuring knowledge (different types of exercises and tasks), multiple criteria to assess performance (linguistic and extralinguistic factors), and multiple ways of designing items and tasks (multiple choice, picture description, virtual formats, paper-based). Additionally, teachers and coordinators incorporated different notions when designing evaluative tasks, some tasks assessed achievement and others proficiency, and some tasks assessed linguistic competence and others communicative competence. Teachers could use objective testing and open tasks (receptive skills and productive skills), they could use holistic and analytic rating (diverse types of rating scales), as well as formative and summative assessment.

These findings contrast with the imprecise definition of the linguistic construct, the high importance given to non-linguistic aspects, the variation between what is taught and what is evaluated, and the lack of comprehension of the many qualities of evaluation and methodology in general, that Arias and Maturana (2005) found examining EFL teachers assessment discourses and practices in the local higher education context. These sorts of issues were not present in this study, which suggests a well-structured foundation of the program's evaluative system, a strong and systematic follow-up of the procedures applied in class and a strong systemic validity, which refers to coherence among the theoretical foundations of a program, the teaching practices and the assessment procedures and the implementation of such procedures (Arias et al., 2012).

Another noteworthy issue has to do with the skills to be assessed in an EFL classroom. Participants in this study have an overall understanding of the fundamentals of TBLT, and the importance of enhancing, developing and assessing all language skills (Duran & Ramaut, 2006). The results evidenced teaching practices where teachers developed and assessed receptive and productive skills, as suggested by theorists (Richards & Rodgers, 2001); however, when analyzing the official document, the two coordinators' discourse and the teachers' responses, there was a tendency to favor productive skills (writing and speaking).

According to what the TBLT methodology proposes, to obtain good results, it is necessary to develop all components of the communicative competence as well as interactions. Consequently, a constant and systematic review of the strategies implemented in the classroom is of high importance to guarantee a successful negotiation of meaning, as Savignon (2001) suggests. Further exploration of this issue is required to understand if favoring productive skills in assessment was an administrative oversight or a decision to comply with the institution's requirement of having a 100% grade by the end of the semester. As researchers, we suggest that this is an issue that could be resolved by involving teachers' opinions, voices and experiences in the design of the evaluative procedures.

Even though official documents and participants had clear definitions of TBLT and its implementation, it seems that they had a narrow understanding of the reasons why that methodology is used. Nevertheless, something that caught our attention was the fact that even though there was not a clear reason why TBLT was implemented, there is enough theoretical support for its implementation and its use in a monolingual setting such as this one.

Having identified this issue in this study, we inferred that this is another recommendation for administrators and curriculum developers of the institution. It becomes clear that they need to pay close attention to the reasoning behind the decisions taken, which could be done through the application of a needs analysis process as part of the continuous improvement of the program, and more work needs to be done to make explicit support in the program's official documents on why TBLT was chosen as the methodology to teach English in the institution.

Conclusions

Findings showed a high degree of understanding of the teaching methodology used (Task-Based Language Teaching) in terms of its principles, application, and assessment within the Language Center of a public institution. This understanding was present in official documents, the coordinators, and teachers' discourses, as they explained their perceptions of the programs' fundamental guidelines. It was possible to identify the characteristics of the program that allowed the two types of participants referred in this study to implement the process of teaching and assessing to help students learn English using a TBLT methodology.

As explained above, the mismatch found between the coordinators and the teachers' discourses suggests that their teaching background allowed them to understand better the TBLT principles and its application. On the one hand, the head coordinator's profile and experience made him prone to view language teaching from an administrative position. On the other hand, the fact that these English teachers were knowledgeable about teaching approaches helped mitigate any shortcomings from the administrative side in terms of academic instruction.

Implications of this study highlight the importance, for EFL programs to choose and state an appropriate definition and application of a teaching methodology and the assurance that all stakeholders have a clear understanding of said concepts.

Therefore, when designing, structuring or evaluating an English as a Foreign Language program and its curriculum, in a particular context like the one subject of this research, it is of utmost importance to implement a needs analysis process. Additionally, the involvement of teachers' voices and experiences permits having a clear conceptualization of the methodology and its reasons to be used, the types of strategies used, and the learning objectives to be achieved. All of these facilitate stakeholders' understanding of the guidelines to do their job and impact students' learning.

Further studies involving students' points of view and higher-up administrators could widen the understanding of the academic principles that guide language programs in higher education institutions.

Referencias

Arboleda-Arboleda, A., & Castro-Garcés, A. Y. (2019). Fostering language learning in the university EFL classroom through literature: A task-based approach. GIST–*Education and Learning Research Journal*, (19), 101-127. https://doi.org/10.26817/16925777.706

Arias, C. I., & Maturana, L. M. (2005). Evaluación en lenguas extranjeras: Discursos y prácticas. *Íkala, Revista de Lenguaje y Cultura*, 10, 63-91. https://doi.org/10.17533/udea.ikala.3051

Arias, C., Maturana, L., & Restrepo, M. I. (2012). Evaluación de los aprendizajes en lenguas extranjeras: Hacia prácticas justas y democráticas. *Revista Lenguaje*, 40(1), 99–126. https://doi.org/10.25100/lenguaje.v40i1.4945

Council of Europe. (2001), *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment.* Council of Europe Publishing, https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages

Calvo-Vázquez, M. C. (2010). *Estrategia didáctica para el desarrollo de la competencia lectora intercultural en estudiantes no hispanohablantes del curso preparatorio en lengua española de la UMCC*. (Not published) [Doctoral dissertation, Universidad de Matanzas "Camilo Cienfuegos"]. Repository UMCC.

Centro de Idiomas ITM. (2017). ITM Bilingual Concept Document. Instituto Tecnológico Metropolitano. Language Center.

Centro de Idiomas ITM. (2019). Concept Document. Instituto Tecnológico Metropolitano. Language Center.

Centro de Idiomas ITM. (2019). Microcurricula. Instituto Tecnológico Metropolitano. Language Center.

Centro de Idiomas ITM. (2019). Pacing Guides. Instituto Tecnológico Metropolitano. Language Center.

Córdoba-Zúñiga, E. (2016). Implementing task-based language teaching to integrate language skills in an EFL program at a Colombian university. *Profile, Issues in Teachers Professional Development,* 18(2), 13-27. https://doi.org/10.15446/profile.v18n2.49754

Duran, G., & Ramaut, G. (2006). Task for absolute beginners and beyond: developing and sequencing tasks at basic proficiency level. In Van den Branden, K (ed). 2006. *Task-Based Language Education: From Theory to Practice* (pp. 41-72). Cambridge University Press.

Ellis, R. (2003). Designing a Task-Based Syllabus. *RELC Journal*, 34(1), 64–81. https://doi.org/10.1177/003368820303400105

Frodden Armstrong, M. C.; Restrepo Marín, M. I., & Maturana Patarroyo, L. (2004). Analysis of Assessment Instruments Used in Foreign Language Teaching. *Íkala, Revista De Lenguaje Y Cultura*, 9(1), 171–201. https://doi.org/10.17533/udea.ikala.3146

González-Humanez, L. E., & Arias, N. (2009). Enhancing oral interaction in English as a foreign language through task-based learning activities. *Latin American Journal of Content & Language Integrated Learning,* 2(2), 1-9. https://doi.org/10.5294/laclil.2009.2.2.10

Kim, A. (2014). Examining how teachers' beliefs about communicative language teaching affect their instructional and assessment practices: A qualitative study of EFL university instructors in Colombia. *RELC Journal*, 45(3), 337-354. https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688214555396

Kohonen, V. (1992) Experiential Language Learning: Second Language Learning as Cooperative Learner Education. In Nunan, D. (Ed.), *Collaborative Language Learning and Teaching* (pp. 14-39).

Kolb, D. (1984). Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development. Prentice Hall, Inc. Retrieved from: https://learningfromexperience.com/downloads/research-library/the-process-of-experiential-learning.pdf

Lomas, C., Osorio, A., & Tusón, A. (1993). *Ciencias de lenguaje, competencias comunicativas y enseñanza de la lengua*. Paidós Ibérica.

López, A., & Bernal, R. (2009). Language testing in Colombia: A call for more teacher education and teacher training in language assessment. *Profile, Issues in Teachers Professional Development*, 11(2), 55-70. https://revistas.unal.edu.co/index.php/profile/article/view/11442

Nunan, D. (1989). *Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom*. Cambridge University Press.

Nunan, D. (2004). *Task-Based Language Teaching*. Cambridge University Press.

Peña, M., & Onatra, A. (2009). Promoting oral production through the task-based learning approach: a study in a public secondary school in Colombia. *Profile, Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 11(2), 11-26. http://www.scielo.org.co/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1657-07902009000200002&lng=en&tlng=en.

Prabhu, N. S. (1987). *Second Language Pedagogy*. Oxford University Press.

Richard, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2001). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* (2nd Ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Savignon, S. J. (2001). Communicative Language Teaching for the Twenty-first Century. In Celce-Murcia, M. (Ed) *Teaching English as a Second and Foreign Language* (3rd ed.) (pp. 13-28). Heinle & Heinle.

Shohamy, E. (1998). Evaluation of learning outcomes in second language acquisition: A Multiplism Perspective. In Byrnes, H. (Ed.). *Learning Foreign and Second Languages* (pp. 238-261). MLA's Teaching Languages, Literatures and Cultures series.

Universidad de Antioquia. (2015). *Modelo de Evaluación de Programas de Extensión en Lenguas Extranjeras*. Imprenta Universidad de Antioquia.

Willis, J. (1996). *A Framework for Task-Based Learning*. Harlow: Longman.

Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case Study Research Design and Methods*. Sage Publications.

Yin, R. K. (2011). *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*. (2nd ed) The Guilford Press.