



**UNIVERSIDAD
DE ANTIOQUIA**

Trabajo de investigación presentado como requisito parcial para optar al título
de:

Licenciado en Lenguas Extranjeras

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Universidad de Antioquia

Escuela de Idiomas

El Carmen de Viboral, Colombia

2023

To Examine How Task-Based Language Teaching May Improve Sixth-Grade Students'
Speaking Skills in a Public Institution in La Ceja

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December 2023

Abstract

This action research intended to determine to what extent using a Task-Based Language Teaching Approach allowed improving students' speaking skills. This project was performed in an urban institution in La Ceja, Antioquia, with 6th graders. The actions executed were centered on a task cycle composed of pre-task, task-cycle, and language focus, and all these stages were concentrated on the speaking skill. Data instruments were journals, a checklist, some recordings, and a questionnaire. Four main findings were exposed in the following names: the relevance of developing tasks and topics in TBLT to improve learners' speaking skills, the teacher's role: promoting a student-centered class through actions and support in TBLT, the students' role in TBLT: active participation and attitudes toward tasks, and the speaking skills development: increasing performance and awareness of thew own process.

Keywords: Task-Based Language Teaching, Speaking skills, Contextualized Topics.

Título en español: Examinar cómo la enseñanza de idiomas basada en tareas puede mejorar las habilidades de expresión oral de los estudiantes de sexto grado en una institución pública de La Ceja.

Degree Requirement

This action research project is submitted as a requirement for the Bachelor of Education in Teaching Foreign Languages (English-French) at the Escuela de Idiomas, Universidad de Antioquia, in El Carmen de Viboral, Antioquia.

Acknowledgements

During this career, I have received the help of many people, either directly or indirectly. For this reason, I would like to express my gratitude to all of you.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my parents and my sister. They were the most important support that I had throughout my career. They were my emotional pillars, and their company helped me overcome the difficulties that were presented to me.

Secondly, I am deeply grateful to all my partners in this career because I learned a lot of things from them, and they made the university a remarkable experience. Especially, I would like to express my gratitude to my friends Kevin Ramirez, Dayana Marin, Edson Trujillo, and Laura Ospina. I want to thank them for their friendship and for sharing their company, advice and jokes all this time.

Thirdly, I want to thank my teachers, who enormously contributed to my personal development. Expressively, I would like to express my gratitude to the teacher, Sandra Alvarez, whose advice, and comments encouraged me to finish this project.

Furthermore, I would like to offer my special thanks to the institution where I did the practicum, the cooperative teacher, and the students who helped to carry out this project.

Finally, my most profound appreciation goes to myself because I did not give up all this time and for trying to finish this career and this project. I demonstrated to myself that I can do things that I considered almost impossible in the past. Once again, I want to say thanks to myself for all my endeavors.

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Preface

Since I started studying for this career, I have had problems with my speaking skills. I felt nervous, sometimes unable to structure ideas, and when I had to speak, I felt a lot of pressure. When I was thinking about the cause of the problem, I realized that I did not have enough space to develop this skill in school, which could be the cause. Then, at the university, I learned “Task-Based Language Teaching.” This approach encouraged students to use their speaking skills, which was awesome for me. Later, when I did the practicum observations in a school from La Ceja, I found the same problem, and I detected students did not have the opportunity to speak in English. Thus, the idea of using Task-Based Language Teaching emerged to enhance students' speaking skills.

Mauricio Andrés Arroyave Molina

El Retiro, Antioquia, November 28th, 2023

Description of the Context

The institution was located in La Ceja, Antioquia, Colombia. It was a public institution that had about 1000 students. This institution worked under a humanistic approach. The mission and vision of the institution were under construction, and a version from 2020 was being used. The school's mission was to educate students from a humanistic perspective. Furthermore, the vision of the institution was to stand out in the pedagogical innovation and community interaction, to generate participative processes in which their students would have integral training to develop critical consciousness, creativity and tolerance that characterize the new citizens (Manual de convivencia, 2020).

The school gave a lot of importance to English language and subject since it had obtained satisfactory results in some municipal contests in recent years. The english program had a communicative and socio-cultural approach in which the main objective was to understand and express ideas in English. It was based on “Estándares Básicos de Competencias en Lengua Extranjera” from “Ministerio de Educación Nacional.” Also, the school 's curriculum was based on the “Derechos Básicos de Aprendizaje,” adapted to the school context.

The class was a sixth-grade group, and they had three english hours per week all in the afternoon. The number of students was 36, and most of them were women. The age range was between 11 and 14 years old. Most students were at a basic english level. They were usually active and performed well when doing english tasks. The class focused on learning vocabulary and grammar. Usually, the activities were based on repetition, reading aloud, and translation drills. Nevertheless, the teacher sometimes implemented other activities combined with games, for instance, hangman, “commands,” “bingo,” or “hot potato.”

The teacher had a bachelor's degree in foreign languages and a master's degree. Also, he had a specialization in pedagogy and didactics. According to the teacher's experience, it was twelve years, nine in public education. The teacher conducted two subjects, English and “Lecto-escritura.” In English classes, the teacher tried to use a methodology combining macro and micro-skills. In addition, he used a cognitive perspective.

The main issue presented in class was the lack of spaces to develop English skills, especially speaking skill. The class was centered on grammar and vocabulary, so the activities were repetitive, and students got bored with the class. Also, this affected the engagement of students with the class because they did not have the opportunity to use the language. Besides, the overuse of individual activities did not allow the students to share ideas either concerning the language or the content presented in class.

Statement of the Problem

According to the different observations that I had carried out in a sixth-grade group in La Ceja, Antioquia, I identified some situations that hinder students' development of their speaking skills. The principal problem I observed was the need for more opportunities for students to perform oral tasks using English. Besides, the repetition and the absence of meaningful activities made the class boring for students, producing an absence of motivation, and impeding a real understanding of the topics.

Concerning the teaching and learning process, the English lessons were focused on developing receptive skills (Journal 4 March 3; 5 March 3). Then, I noticed that there was a need for more space to produce output. English as a language was supposed to be used for expressing ideas and thoughts; however, in the class, there were few opportunities to use the language in this way. Consequently, when any speaking activity was done in class students presented feelings of

fear and anxiety (Journal February 22, February 24, March 8, March 10). Furthermore, in the classes I observed, the activities were associated with reading, listening, and writing, with an emphasis on dictations or reading comprehension (Journal March 10, March 22). These activities were effective in their implementation, but they just developed receptive skills. Nevertheless, just using these kinds of activities could be tiring for the students, who could lose interest in the language. To summarize, the activities in the classroom just developed the non-productive skills of the students, and speaking activities were seldom implemented.

The second problem I found was related to the overuse of the same activities, and the topics were not reused. Occasionally, when the topics were presented, they were isolated, and they did not consider the previous knowledge obtained in preceding classes. For instance, one week the lessons were centered on classroom objects, and the other week students drew the parts of the body, and there was no connection between the topics (Journal March 24, April 12). There was no relation or transition between them, so students tended to forget the topics they had already learned in previous classes. Furthermore, the activities were repetitive, for instance, reading comprehension activities, drawing vocabulary, and looking for unknown words in the dictionary (Journal March 10, March 17, March 22, March 24, April 12, April 29). These could work in the classroom sometimes, but their overuse could be exhausting for students. In addition, these kinds of activities did not involve the students in the language, so students felt bored in the class. Consequently, a feeling of repetition appeared in learners, and despite the recurrence of exercises they tended to forget the topics because they did not have meaningful activities to practice the language.

In conclusion, the overuse of some activities produced in the students a feeling of repetition, and this caused a lack of motivation and engagement towards the target language.

Moreover, the lack of use of production activities in English affected the students because they did not have opportunities to use the language in an authentic way. For these reasons, I considered TBLT as a strategy to promote changes in the class because it was related to the use of productive skills and a variety of input to engage the students with the class (Ellis, 2009), these could be contextualized activities and topics that helped with the promotion of intensive speaking skills.

Theoretical Background

Considering the statement of the problem, I presented three main concepts that would be essential to developing this project. In the first part, I explained what task-based language teaching (TBLT hereafter) was and why it was crucial in this research. The second concept was the speaking skill and its importance when learning a new language. Equally important, I showed the significance of translanguaging for this research. Finally, I established the relationship among these concepts in this study.

The first concept was TBLT. This approach had gained importance in the last few years, and it had some essential characteristics. For example, it had a learner-centered philosophy, some specific outcomes to carry out by the students, and the content was more important than the form (Richards & Rodger, 2001, Ellis, 2005, Nunan, 2005, as cited in Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2011). Besides, TBLT implied group work (Prasad Bhandari, 2020) because students were interacting, monitoring, and sharing information about the tasks, which could be extremely helpful. Another essential aspect was that students could resolve and reflect on conflicts and social troubles (Prasad Bhandari, 2020). This was possible by considering the meaningful activities in which TBLT was involved and using real-world situations in the tasks.

There are different definitions of “task,” which have similar characteristics. The first one is Nunan (2010), who stated that a task involves the students comprehending, manipulating, producing, and interacting with the target language, and the learners’ attention is on the meaning. The other author who defined “task” was Prabhu (1987), who stated “an activity which required learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought, and which allowed teachers to control and regulate that process” (p. 24). These two concepts had a strong relationship because the first one called for the students to use the language, and the second one asked the teacher to focus on the outcomes that students produced. In this way, students would have the opportunity to use the language for a real purpose.

Similarly, tasks had some essential characteristics related to the two definitions previously mentioned. These were: meaning was more important than form, tasks were comparable to real-world activities, task completion had priority, and finally, the task assessment was based on terms of outcome (Skehan, 1998 cited in Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2011). In addition, Ellis (2000) stated:

The outcome is evaluated in terms of whether they are successful in this goal, and there is a relationship with the real world in the sense that the kind of discourse that arises from this task is intended to resemble that which occurs naturally. (p. 196)

On the other hand, these tasks had a clear structure to be followed. This structure could vary depending on the author. The structure used in this project presented three steps: the pre-task, the task cycle, and the language focus (Willis, 1996). The pre-task step was where the teacher introduced the new topic to the students. Then, the task cycle which at the same time was divided into three parts: the tasks, where the students used the new language and practiced using it; the planning, where students will be focused on planning the report; and the report, where

students expressed what problems, they had while doing the task. Lastly, the language focus step where the main spotlight was on what learners mentioned in the report and on the problems the teacher could observe in the task-cycle phase. In this stage, we analyzed the language's meaning and its use (Willis, 1996).

Equally, an important part of TBLT was the role of the teacher and the role of the students. The teacher's role in the classroom had three special characteristics; firstly, the teacher selected and sequenced the students' tasks; secondly, the teacher prepared the learners to do the task and promoted consciousness-raising; and thirdly, the teacher had to show the importance of the task to the students (Richard & Rodgers, 2010). The selection of the topics and tasks was under the control of the teacher, based on the problems or needs he or she observed in the classroom. Additionally, the learners' roles comprised doing the tasks, having good group participation, monitoring each other, being risk-takers, and being innovators (Richard & Rodgers, 2010). For this, we needed a good environment where students could feel comfortable participating in the oral activities.

The second concept was speaking skill. Speaking was one of the four principal skills in English, together with writing, listening, and reading, and in the same way as writing, speaking was a productive skill. Speaking was defined as a social, multi-sensory event where the topic could be unpredictable (Nazara, 2011). Concerning the social aspect, we established that speaking was a communicative skill, and we needed it to communicate our ideas, feelings, attitudes, and opinions with other people (Nazara, 2011; Akhter et al., 2020). Furthermore, speaking was an ability that required paralinguistic features; for example, eye contact, non-verbal communication, fluency, or voice quality changes, and so on, (Thornbury, 2005). However, these features could change in the moment of speaking a foreign language.

Simultaneously, a valuable concept when we talked about speaking was proficiency. According to Burkart (1998) who stated that proficiency involved more things than just grammatical competence, it was also about discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. To clarify, grammatical competence was defined as the knowledge that a person had about grammar and vocabulary. Discourse competence was represented as the ability to make meaning of a conversation, to understand what the other person said, and to express your ideas about the topic. Sociolinguistic competence was about the context and understanding of how we had to answer or talk with other people. Strategic competence was detailed as the use of strategies to give a clear message, for example, using other words, using non-verbal communication, and so on. To clarify, this project was centered in grammatical and discourse competence.

Furthermore, it was worth mentioning that in English learning, there existed several types of speaking. According to Brown (2004), there existed five kinds of speaking: they were imitative, intensive, responsive, interactive, and extensive. Imitative speaking consisted of repeating phrases or words and focusing on how students pronounced them, but there was no production by the students. In intensive speaking, students had more opportunities to produce by themselves, but the interaction with other people was minimal. Responsive speaking was a type of speaking where students had interactions, but short ones, so they answered some simple questions, or they had conversations with other students with basic vocabulary. Interactive speaking had some similarities with intensive speaking, but interactive speaking was more complex. Thus, students should use more structures and pragmatic elements. Finally, extensive speaking was more related to monologues, where students could create some speaking products, for instance, presentations or a piece of storytelling. All these types of speaking could appear in

the classroom, and this could be useful to advance progressively in the speaking skills of the foreign language.

Additionally, it was important to highlight and describe some characteristics of intensive speaking since this was the core of this project. This concept was centered on some linguistic aspects such as grammatical, lexical, phrasal, or phonological, this latter included intonation, stress, or rhythm relationships (Brown, 2004). Besides, the comprehension of the meaning was a fundamental item, and the production was in second place (Bakhtiyorjon Qizi & Hulkar Gayratovna, 2021). Hence, the interaction with other people was minimal, but in any case, students had to control the elements previously mentioned. As the interaction was minimal, we could do various activities, for instance, reading aloud, sentence and dialogue completion, or activities to follow simple structural sentences (Brown, 2004).

Therefore, to reduce students' nervousness, we could work on speaking by using topics that students already knew about, topics related to their contexts, and allowing them to express themselves in the target language (Hanifa, 2018; Akhter et al., 2020). This anxiety could be caused because speaking was a combination of rules, structures, and linguistic features (Nazara, 2011). For this reason, when students tried to develop their speaking skills, they found problems such as anxiety (Hanifa, 2018) or fear of speaking. Besides, another problem that affect the performance of students in speaking skills was the lack of spaces to practice the speaking skill in the educational field, for two reasons, the lack of resources and the teachers' methodologies (Akhter et al., 2020). To conclude, it was important to work with contextualized topics to enhance the speaking skills of the students in the class, and to give the students the space to practice the language.

Now, concerning TBLT, this was supposed to be used principally in the target language, but in some contexts where the target language level was low, one could use the mother tongue (MT hereafter) as a valuable and essential strategy to teach the new language. The MT in the EFL classroom had some benefits and disadvantages, but it could help to implement TBLT. The MT could be an effective way to create meaning and scaffold the knowledge that students acquired in previous classes. Also, the MT allowed students to express their identity and thoughts through topics related to their context in an easier way (Carless, 2008). Besides, using MT combined with translanguaging could help when implementing language tasks because students could use all their linguistic resources (Rabbidge, 2019), something that could ameliorate their participation and confidence in the class. However, it could be negative because the overuse of MT could affect the acquisition of the target language (Carless, 2008).

Consequently, it was useful to define translanguaging. This could be confused with the concept of code-switching; however, this latter term still referred to a view where the languages a person knew were two separate linguistic systems (García & Lin, 2017). In contrast, Garcia & Lin (2017) stated that “translanguaging, however, posits the linguistic behavior of bilinguals as being always heteroglossic, always dynamic, responding not to two monolingualisms in one but to one integrated linguistic system” (p. 120). Hence, as Gumperz (1964) stated, the linguistic repertoire “contains all the accepted ways of formulating messages. It provides weapons of everyday communication. Speakers choose among this arsenal following the meanings they wish to convey.” To sum up, translanguaging was a bilingual practice that allowed the students to use all the linguistic repertoire they had to express ideas and thoughts.

To conclude, I wanted to highlight the relationship among these concepts and explain why I decided to combine TBLT, speaking, and translanguaging. TBLT included meaningful

activities to teach the target language, which was related to the teaching of speaking because both need meaningful and contextualized materials to achieve effective learning. Besides, using translanguaging could help to develop this ability better since students would have more freedom when doing the activities. In sum, I proposed to improve the students' speaking skills through a TBLT approach, and I aimed to help students achieve satisfactory results in the target language through this project.

Research Question

To what extent does using a task-based language teaching approach allow to improve 6th-grade students' speaking skills?

General Objective

To explore how the Task-Based Language Teaching Approach may improve sixth-grade students' speaking skills.

Specific Objectives

1. To compare students' speaking skills before and after implementing a Task-Based Approach in an EFL classroom.
2. To determine how students' speaking skills may ameliorate by using real-world situations and semi-authentic material.
3. To monitor the benefits of intensive speaking activities on students' grammatical and phonological aspects of the language.

Action Plan

To respond to the research question presented in this project, I performed a task cycle that consisted of three steps: the pre-task, the task cycle, and the language focus (Willis, 1996). These steps were implemented from August to October. The first step was the pre-task phase, where the topics of conflict resolution and role play were presented to the students, and they accomplished different activities in preparation for the task cycle. Then, in the task cycle, students created a role-play script where they had to represent a conflict and a solution. Here, students worked in groups, and they played the role-play with the rest of the class. Later, in the report of the problems, students mentioned issues they struggled with during the presentation. Finally, in the language focus, we concentrated on the problems that both students and teacher observed to tackle these obstacles using some worksheets and activities in class.

Furthermore, recordings, journals, checklists, and questionnaires were used as data collection techniques in this project. The journals were done and codified weekly, one journal per class. The checklists were done during the project to observe the development of students in the TBLT approach. Besides, two questionnaires were done at the beginning and end of the project to monitor the changes in the beliefs of students about the class and their perceptions of their speaking skills. Furthermore, the voice recordings were done once during the presentation; these were transcribed and analyzed to examine the performance of students in intensive speaking skills. To conclude, these data collection techniques and the action plan were completed successfully, and they provided useful information for answering the research question of the project.

Development of actions

To initiate my project, I asked my cooperative teacher about the syllabus. He mentioned I could implement my actions but kept the topics from the syllabus, so I adapted my action plan. Then, my main three actions were the pre-task stage, task cycle, and language focus. Unfortunately, some classes were missed, so the time for my actions was reduced.

In the pre-task. Initially, I explained what TBLT was, and students felt curiosity about it. Then, I taught the “simple present” considering the school syllabus. This topic took more time than expected, but it was difficult for the students to understand because the time to explore the topic was limited and the activities were teacher-centered. Later, I prepared two activities focused on conflict resolution. One was to create a party invitation in which students worked in groups to share ideas to organize the party and to get into agreements about the invitation. Also, they read the invitation to their partners, but they were nervous, so they did not speak clearly. The other activity was about reading a role-play script and answering some questions about it. Students worked in groups with the text to understand the structure of a script. They also created two different solutions to the situations presented in the texts, displaying their skills to think in diverse ways to solve the problems and move towards the task cycle.

In the task cycle, three activities were executed. The opening activity was the creation of a script. It took various classes where students shared ideas and opinions to create their role-plays. Besides, they could create a part of the script in Spanish, and this benefited some groups to achieve the activity under a reasonable challenge, especially the ones with low English levels. Then, they presented the project. Originally, students had to act out the script, but I allowed them to read it and act at the same time. Some difficulties during this activity were that some students had problems reading aloud, mispronouncing words, and were too shy to act. However, a good

average of students took the risk to read, pronounce, and act the scripts using their linguistic repertoires and skills to succeed in the task. They also reflected on the importance of conflict resolution when they explained the process of working together in the creation and presentation of the role play. Finally, students reflected on the things they struggled with during the task cycle, and they mentioned reading aloud, acting, and writing in English, both in the checklists and journals

Finally, the language focus was centered on reviewing the simple present tense. This was worked through a student-centered activity in which students created a daily routine and asked their partners what they did at certain hours. Thus, students worked on their speaking skills and the grammatical aspect where they showed a good response walking around the classroom interacting with different partners and always asking the questions in English. Concluding with this action, the cycle established by Willis (1996) finished.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed following the scheme proposed by Burns (2010). The steps were assembling the data, coding the data, comparing the data, building meanings and interpretations, and reporting the outcomes. When I assembled the data, I transcribed the recordings and created graphics to analyze the questionnaires. Then, in Google Docs I coded and compared the data to analyze the most recurrent codes and categories to build the meaning and interpretations. Furthermore, considering the recurrence of the codes and categories, I organized the categories according to the topics that were most important for my research. Finally, I clarified ideas to write the final report.

Findings and Interpretations

The purpose of this project was to analyze to what extent using a task-based language teaching, using semi-authentic material and real-world situations as teaching strategies, allowed improving students' speaking skills, more specifically, intensive speaking as proposed by Brown (2004). I analyzed the findings in two ways. Regarding the journals, I focused on all students, but I analyzed four specific cases in the recordings, the questionnaires, and the checklist. During the data analysis, I produced four main topics: the development of tasks and topics in TBLT to improve learners' speaking skills, the teacher's role in TBLT, students' role in TBLT, and speaking skill development. Likewise, translanguaging was essential for implementing some tasks, so it was relevant during the data analysis. In the following paragraphs, I provided more information about each category.

Development of tasks and topics in TBLT to improve learners' speaking skill

Data revealed that the tasks and activities developed in this project had different results depending on the connection to the real world in different stages of the process. For this reason, I must mention that the correct choice of activities was an aid in achieving the objectives proposed. Evidently, not using real-world situation activities affected students' performance, while using real-world situation activities and meaningful topics generated a good response from students.

According to the non-use of real-world situations and activities, students presented difficulties of engagement and issues in developing the activities because they did not have the opportunity to express their ideas or feelings orally. The specific case was a homework assignment where they had to create ten sentences in English using the simple present, but this was not useful, and students did not do the homework, or they did just half of it (Journal August

25, September 6). Accordingly, Skehan (cited in Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2011) further explained that TBLT activities need to focus on the meaning and be centered on real-world situations to catch students' attention and work on the language's communicative aspect. This could be an explanation of students presenting issues to complete the activity as was evidenced in the data analysis previously mentioned.

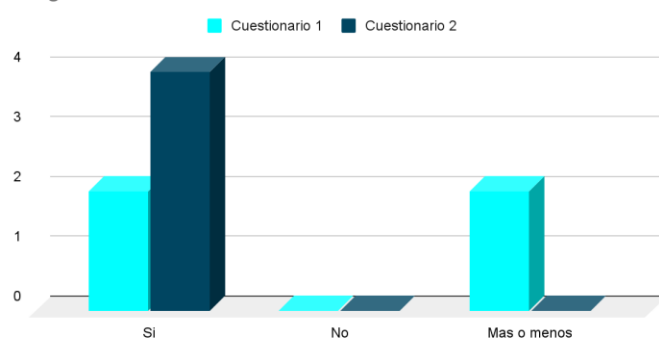
In contrast, students' reactions differed when I executed activities related to real-world situations and with a communicative purpose. One of those activities, developed in the pre-task, was to create an invitation for a party; this promoted students' participation in group work such as sharing ideas, discussing, and so on (Journal September 1). Besides, students used previous knowledge, they used diverse features of the language to create meaning about what they wanted to say (Gumperz, 1964), and this could be considered as their linguistic repertoire. Finally, sharing the invitation to the group helped in the students' speaking skills, and this proved the efficiency of real-world situations in TBLT, as declared by Ellis (2000).

Furthermore, the questionnaire gave me an interesting answer that enriched this analysis because students felt motivated toward the activities proposed in class.

Figure 1

Activities that motivate to speak in English

¿Consideras que las actividades en clase te MOTIVAN a hablar en inglés?



Moreover, the use of meaningful topics triggered curiosity in students. They participated more actively in developing the tasks because the topics were familiar to them. As a particular case, I can mention the topic of conflict resolution, which generated a good response from students. They commented about the topic, gave examples, and felt encouraged to speak, but it was just in Spanish (Journal September 1). In this situation, translanguaging played a significant role because it encouraged students to give their opinions about topics related to their context using their MT (Carless, 2008) and they were not penalized. An example of students reacting to activities connected to real-world situations and translanguaging was an informal talk that I had with a student because he said to me, “Teacher, esas obras de teatro sobre la convivencia eran sobre el conflict resolution, ¿cierto?” (Journal September 15) referring to an extracurricular activity. Thus, this proved the efficacy of TBLT with topics related to students’ context (Prasad Bhandari, 2020).

To conclude, an accurate decision on topics and activities benefits students’ language learning process. We must be careful because with some specific topics or activities that are not meaningful to students, we can influence their attitudes and performance.

Teacher’s Role: promoting a student-centered class through actions and support in TBLT

According to the data analysis, I could corroborate the importance of the role of the teacher in the TBLT. I found three main aspects in this project. First, the teacher's actions because these influenced the development of classes and activities. Second, I could identify the difference between the teacher-centered and the student-centered classes and their efficacy. Finally, the teacher’s influence in solving different problems that appeared while students were working in groups.

Related to the teacher's actions, my main participation was in the moment of implementing actions and strategies to facilitate the use of English and the TBLT. My fundamental deeds were to explain the topics, clarify them, provide instructions for the activities, and offer support to students in completing the tasks. The efficacy of the explanations depended also on the topic itself, the activities, and the engagement of the students with the topic. My support to each group was different, it was challenging to have students working in groups because I could not be in other groups simultaneously (Journal September 22). The clarifications were easier because when I realized they had any problem understanding, I used examples related to their context to explain in a familiar way (Journal September 6). To sum up, these data findings were related to two of the three functions that a teacher must follow in TBLT: one, the teacher prepares learners to do the task, and two, the teacher shows the importance of the task and topics to the students (Richard & Rodgers, 2010).

Now, to highlight the opinion of students towards the teacher's actions, I had some answers from the questionnaire applied to the students. Although the question referred to the activities developed in the classes, students related the success of the tasks with the teacher's role directly.

Image 1

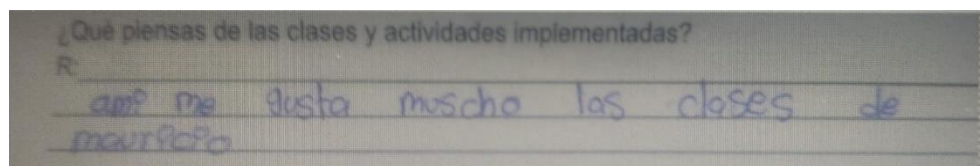


Image 2

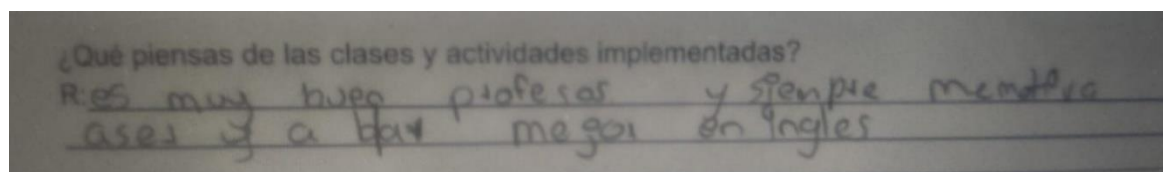
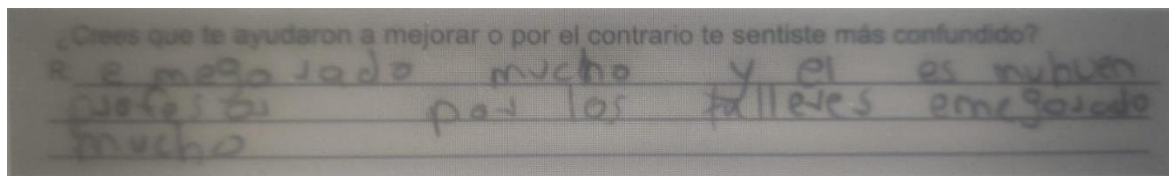


Image 3



Concerning teacher-centered and student-centered classes, data demonstrated that students performed better in the last one. I evidenced this when students had more control of the class and could talk more about the topics. They worked in a more positive way (Journal September 6). Conversely, when I tried to teach a class in a teacher-centered way, students did not focus on the topic, and the attention in the class was almost null (Journal September 25). Hence, I could verify the importance of the learner-centered philosophy of TBLT (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, Ellis, 2005, Nunan, 2005, as cited in Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2011), considering the benefits presented in the class.

Finally, my ability to solve problems was essential. Even if this aspect was not related to the theory, it promoted a safe-learning atmosphere in the classroom. It allowed the flow of the activities, tasks, and topics presented in the classes. For example, in creating an invitation for a party, some students argued because they disagreed with the ideas of each other, so I had to talk with the group to pacify them, and they could continue working (Journal September 1).

To close this section, the teacher's role was fundamental in the class. Even if I tried to implement a more student-centered methodology, the teacher's presence was crucial to solving some doubts and issues presented when explaining the topics or carrying out the activities.

Students' role in TBLT: active participation and attitudes toward tasks

Data showed how students played the most crucial role in TBLT and this project. For this reason, two main sub-categories appeared in the analysis. These were students' performance in TBLT and students' attitudes.

Referring to students' performance in TBLT, I could highlight four main characteristics: student's response and participation towards the topics and the activities, students' background, tools, and strategies to complete the tasks, students' development of individual exercises, and students' performance in groups and collaborative learning.

Students' responses to the topics and participation showed that the level of involvement increased when presenting activities that required a more active role. For example, in the activities where I asked the students to participate, giving examples and telling things about their context, they engaged with the class. For instance, when we were studying the different strategies to deal with the conflicts, students participated, and they gave examples of each strategy (Journal September 6). Besides, when they were doing the role play, the groups' participation was good, and many students looked involved in the task (Journal September 20). They worked on the exercise and tried to speak in English with their partners.

Another aspect was the students' background, tools, and strategies to complete the tasks. Firstly, the students' background was helpful to create the situations with the role plays. For instance, in an exercise where students had to make an invitation, they could follow a model. Still, at the end, each group showed quite different results thanks to their varied knowledge of the invitations (Journal September 1). Also, in the role play, it was evident when students were familiar with the topic. For example, some students had a conflict with bikes (Journal October 4) because they liked them, or others had relationship conflicts because of soap operas (Journal September 29). Furthermore, continuing with the role-play, the smartphone was an indispensable tool to the students. They had to write a lot in English, and since they were not used to doing this, they had to use Google translator as a tool to accomplish the task (Journal September 13, September 20, September 22, September 29). However, this situation created a dependency on

the smartphone, and when they could not use it, they had problems writing or thinking of ideas for the role play, and they got stuck in the creation process. Also, in the same role-play, students created first the Spanish part and then the English part because it was easier for them in this way (Journal September 22). This happened because students could use Spanish to create meaning of the topics that they had observed in previous classes (Carless, 2008). Furthermore, it was also related to the linguistic repertoire, considering they used previous knowledge to create a new meaning (Gumperz, 1964). To conclude, as Richard & Rodgers (2010) mentioned, the role of learners is doing the tasks, and those strategies and backgrounds demonstrated how students worked to complete the task.

In addition, the other two aspects analyzed were the students' work in individual exercises and the performance when students worked in groups or implemented collaborative learning. Initially, students' development of individual activities was less efficient. Students had two assignments where they had to work alone; in both cases, most did not do the homework. The first consisted of ten sentences in simple present tense, and the second consisted of writing about their routine. Nevertheless, in the creation of the routine, when they worked in class, they did a better job (Journal September 18). Contrarily, students' performance in groups was efficient in all the implementations. The main evidence of this was an activity done in the pre-task and the task cycle. In the pre-task cycle, I requested students to read a role-play and answer some questions about it. Here, I noticed that students had better behavior than when they worked independently (Journal September 9). Even if they talked more in groups, they also debated about the activities. Besides, students shared ideas about the class themes to complete the activity successfully. In the task cycle, similarly, students created role play, sharing their thoughts, and

monitoring the work from the partners in their groups (Journal September 20). All this was mentioned by Prasad Bhandari (2020), who stated that the TBLT implies group work.

The other subcategory was students' attitudes. These varied throughout the project. For this reason, I could identify four primary characteristics: students' perception and feelings about the TBLT approach and class, their behavior and engagement with the topics and materials, and their attitudes toward their classmates.

Students' perceptions and feelings about the TBLT approach and class were collected using some open questions in the questionnaire:

Image 4

¿Que piensas de las clases y actividades implementadas?
4 respuestas

ami me gusta muscho las clases de mauricio

Son muy buenas para un futuro mejor

es muy buen profesor y siempre me mptiva aser y ablar mejor en ingles

yo pienso que estas clases y actividades que son muy buenas y que he aprendido muchas cosas que he necesitado saber y estas clases de ingles son muy buenas

¿Crees que te ayudaron a mejorar o por el contrario te sentiste mas confundido?
4 respuestas

me ayudo a mejorar

A veces me confundo o me pierdo

e mejorado mucho y el es muy buen profesor por los talleres e mejorado mucho

si me han ayudado a mejorar a hablar ingles a saber cosas de ingles a pronunciar las cosas a ingles

¿Como te sentiste a lo largo de las clases?
4 respuestas

yo me siento muy bien

bien porque puedo aprender mas cosas en un futuro

muy bien el es muy buen profesor y lo quiero mucho porque por el e mejorado enormamente y le adradesco teacher mauri

con miedo de no saber nada de ingles con pena y me he sentido muy segura de estudiar ingles y con menos penas.

Thanks to this evidence, it was notorious that the TBLT was a good strategy to work in this group, considering most of the answers were positive. Likewise, this demonstrated that students liked this approach and could be useful to be implemented in further classes.

Data concerning students' behavior and engagement with the topics and materials was collected in the journals. In each journal, the reactions were different. For instance, in the pre-task stage, the activity about reading the role play generated good responses from the students, and they worked without behavior issues in this activity (Journal September 9). Besides, in this same stage, when explaining the conflict resolution, the interest in the topic was notorious (Journal September 9). Later, in the task-cycle stage, a significant part of the groups was focused on creating the role-play; they shared ideas and subjective experiences to make it. However, one or two groups were misbehaving, but they returned to work in the role play once I told them to (Journal September 20). Finally, I implemented an activity that students accomplished in the language focus stage. Here, the activity was communicative, so students were engaged and looked motivated to ask their partners about their routines. Even the students who normally misbehaved performed the exercise adequately (Journal October 18). These reactions were possible because I selected the activities and topics according to the context. This happened thanks to students having the chances and the spaces to express what they think or feel (Willis, 1996) and this could motivate them towards the themes and materials.

Finally, students' attitudes towards their classmates were important too, considering TBLT must propose the group work and the pair work (Ahmadniay Motlagh et al., 2014). There were some problems among the students in the project because of issues outside the classroom. The main situations were discussions and difficulties because of objects or situations that happened in the week or other classes (Journal September 20, September 29). Some further

complications in the activities were discussions about ideas or opinions, which were easy to control (Journal September 1). In other cases, some students had to tell the others to work, because it was supposed to be a teamwork activity, and the others were not working (Journal September 20). This was related to the students' role in having good group participation and monitoring each other (Richard & Rodgers, 2010). Nevertheless, in general terms, teamwork functioned well because in most classes, there were no significant issues. Finally, these situations showed students' reactions towards group work and their partners, an essential skill for human beings in any context.

In conclusion, students' role in TBLT is fundamental, considering that TBLT has a learners-centered philosophy, making students the center of this approach.

Speaking Skill Development: increasing performance and awareness of their own process

In this category, data revealed three main characteristics to analyze the students' speaking skill development. First, the speaking skill performance improvement. Second, students' problems with speaking tasks. Lastly, students' feelings towards speaking tasks. Furthermore, to clarify, when I mention speaking skills, I refer to intensive speaking, which was the project's focus.

Students' speaking skill performance improvement could be observed from the first class until the last class. At the beginning, students could pronounce in English just when the whole group pronounced simultaneously, so there was no evidence at the student's individual level, and they felt nervousness of speaking alone (Journal August 18). Then, in other activities when they had to speak alone, they struggled with reading aloud, so it was too difficult to understand what they said, and no one spoke loudly (Journal September 1). The main change was evidenced in the role play because some students spoke quietly, but I was surprised because many students read

loudly and pronounced well, considering their level (Journal September 29). This demonstrated that the previous activities worked as expected, and they felt more confident speaking or reading in English. Furthermore, an immense help with the role-play was that students had the opportunity to talk in Spanish too, and this helped some groups because they did not feel all the pressure of speaking everything in English. This was one of the cases in which translanguaging was effective because it allowed the students to use their linguistic repertoire (Rabbidge, 2019), and this improved the participation of students in the task. Lastly, in the language focus stage, students had to ask their partners questions about their daily routines. I noticed that all students were speaking and answering in English, even some students who usually did not participate (Journal October 18). This demonstrated the importance of using contextualized topics and giving enough time for students to reduce the tension (Hanifa, 2018; Akhter et al., 2020). Additionally, the activities where students had to interact with their partners were beneficial because students worked on the social aspect of the language (Nazara, 2011; Akhter et al., 2020). Finally, talking about intensive speaking (Brown, 2004), reading aloud was an activity that fitted perfectly with this kind of speaking because the focus was on the linguistic aspects. In this specific stage, they were more focused on the phonological part of the language, which is one of the main focuses of intensive speaking (Brown, 2004).

Furthermore, students' perception of their speaking skills also improved, as observed in the following graphic.

Figure 2:

Performance speaking in English

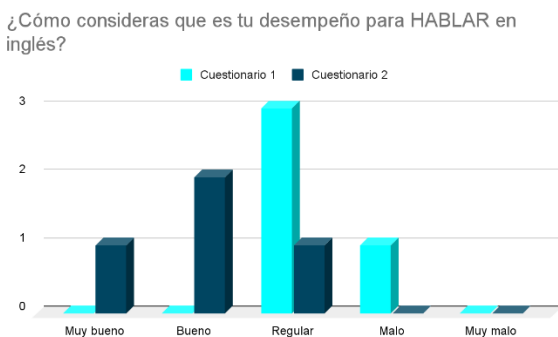
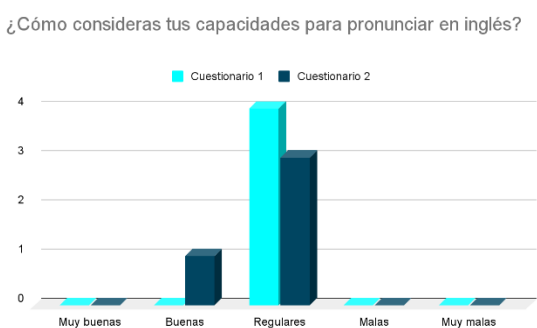


Figure 3:

Students' perceptions of their speaking skills



Additionally, I must mention students' problems with speaking tasks during the implementation. Some of those difficulties have already been mentioned, but I had to explore further. The first problem presented in class was that students spoke quietly because students had not been exposed to many activities to speak or to pronounce, so when they had to do it, they felt anxiety (Hanifa, 2018). In the role-play, the groups that presented most difficulties were the groups which made less effort in creating role-plays (Journal September 9). This fact caused tension in students because they had not prepared the dialogs properly (Hanifa, 2018; Akhter et al., 2020) and this affected their pronunciation too. Now, concerning the pronunciation, they made some mistakes, but I just corrected the students in the words we had worked on in class, considering we had already practiced pronouncing them (Journal September 29). However, I was

more centered on the content, considering that students use many words we did not study in class. The following extract is the transcriptions of the role-play (October 18):

“Student 3:

tri best friends went out for a walk when tey got to the otel and they went to a suit store entwas
only lu tu of de friends so it
smuit an finayi ever tina was resolved and dey were ale yous me with dop and tey enoyed it an
loy and bught a paisa tray tey
ialthy and saved dey wantid to come back again but dey ad to wait te next december vacaciones.

Student 1:

with em and te remain tickets
I dont wart to buy tem because i dont ace muney
jive me te tickets ake left now
not bacase arreonfi what win
pero a mi no me importa que usted no tenga que usted dinero, yo quiero mis tickets ya
me van a entregar los ticketes si o no
quien me los puede pagar”

Here, it was evident some mistakes students made when pronouncing, but as I mentioned, the focal point was on the content following the characteristics of a task proposed by Skehan (cited in Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2011). To clarify, I did not forget Brown's theory; I just corrected the students in the words they knew and the words we worked on in class, as I mentioned previously, because grading them using other words would have been unfair.

Finally, concerning students' feelings towards the speaking tasks. Initially, they looked afraid of speaking in English, which was evident in the first time they spoke aloud (Journal

September 1). Then, in the task cycle, the difference was notorious. Some students looked confident even if they did not know how to speak in English (Journal September 29).

Furthermore, in the pre-task cycle, the reactions when I mentioned they had to speak were negative, in their own words, “¿usted nos cree bilingües o que?” (Journal September 13). And in the language focus, when I mentioned they had to speak with their partners in English, their reaction was positive, and students' performance in this class was the evidence (Journal October 18). Moreover, students could identify their problems in English, and they mentioned that speaking was the most challenging skill for them (Checklist, October 11).

Image 5

The student is able to recognize his or her difficulties and problems and is able to identify the issues he or she needs to work on most.	X	She acknowledged that speaking in English was the most difficult thing for her, besides she said she was afraid to participate and speak for fear of making mistakes.
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Image 6

The student is able to recognize his or her difficulties and problems and is able to identify the issues he or she needs to work on most.	X	She acknowledged that it was difficult for her to express herself in English; she said she was afraid to speak in this language. Even so, in the final role-play activity, she tried to speak in English.
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Image 7

The student is able to recognize his or her difficulties and problems and is able to identify the issues he or she needs to work on most.	X	She mentioned that acting and speaking in English were the most complicated things in the activities. She said that she found the pronunciation in English very complicated.
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Image 8

The student is able to recognize his or her difficulties and problems and is able to identify the issues he or she needs to work on most.	X	He said that speaking English was his biggest problem, and for this reason, he mentioned he had had trouble doing the role play.
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To conclude, speaking skill performance was especially important in this project, and I could observe the difference between the first and last days of the project. I could observe how increase students' participation in oral activities, but at the same time how the students marked

the speaking skill as the most problematic in English. Finally, I could say that the objective of fostering students' speaking skills was completed.

Conclusions and implications

The main objective of this project was to analyze how implementing TBLT could help the students to develop their speaking skills. Data demonstrated that TBLT could help students to acquire the language easily and improve their speaking skills. However, we must be careful when choosing the material and the topics to work on in class because this was a fundamental part of developing activities and students' performance.

I want to start talking about the selection of materials and topics. This part was crucial in this approach because, depending on the topics, students could feel engaged with the class or have a significant lack of interest in the lessons. For this reason, it was essential to analyze the groups, get to know their needs, and implement an effective TBLT. Furthermore, giving the students the space to develop the activities in the classes was essential because we gave the students more control in their own learning process. Normally, it is difficult for teachers to forget the main role, but this approach calls us to play a supporting role, allowing the students to take the responsibility of their learning. This helps to create a meaningful learning environment where the students can share their ideas, thoughts and they can develop a deeper understanding.

Sadly, this project required a lot of things that sometimes are difficult to get. A drawback of this approach could be the time that it demanded. Probably, it would not be a problem in other contexts, but in this case, the time was few, and this caused many activities not to be done as planned. For this, it is essential to consider this aspect and be aware that it deserves a lot of time that sometimes we do not have. Another important aspect is the number of students because in

some situations is too huge, so we must create strategies to teach and monitor each group or each student.

Reflection

Before the beginning of the last two semesters, I was unsure about my feelings about this career; sometimes, I felt happy, and sometimes, I wanted to quit, but in the end, I remained. I have learned a lot during this process. Especially this last year when I did my practicum. The difference between university and real life is so notorious. The first time I came to a real classroom, I felt a lot of pressure and forgot most of the things I had learned at the university. Besides, I realized that things did not happen as I wanted, and sometimes, when I did lesson plans, they were useless because I had to teach or focus on other things.

Nevertheless, even with this almost traumatic experience, I feel so happy I could successfully finish my practicum. I know I like to exaggerate things, but this has been one of the most important years of my life. This year, I learned to trust in myself and my skills. I learned that if I want things to go well, I must put all my effort into them. I learned that if things do not go as planned, it is not the end of the world. It is an opportunity to try new things (but it is still frustrating). I learned that the students are entirely new worlds, and I cannot suppose I can control them. However, I felt thankful for these new worlds because I could learn many things from them. Finally, this practicum left a mark on me, and in the future, I will remember all the things I gained this year.

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