

## TASK-BASED LEARNING IN EFL TEACHING: TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES

### *APRENDIZAJE BASADO EN TAREAS EN LA ENSEÑANZA DE INGLÉS COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA: PERSPECTIVAS DE LOS PROFESORES*

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### Resumen

The main objective of this quantitative-descriptive study was to explore the teachers' perceptions of implementing the Task-Based Learning method in public educational institutions in Cotopaxi province. The information was obtained through an instrument designed by Mahdavi-rad to examine EFL teachers' beliefs of Task-Based Language teaching with reference to classroom practice, which was answered voluntarily by a total of 106 English teachers belonging to 33 public educational institutions in the Latacunga - Pujilí canton. The information was analyzed through the SPSS statistical software. The research results showed that most English teachers have sufficient knowledge of Task-Based learning concepts and understand the role of a task. Likewise, English teachers have very clear points of view about the implementation of Task-based learning. However, there are a low percentage of teachers who would not implement the method in their classes because the texts are not adequate, and the large class size is an obstacle for teachers. The value of this study is to show the perceptions and understanding of teachers of English as a foreign language in the

implementation of the Task-Based Learning methodology and open the way for future teachers to implement this method adequately in their teaching processes.

**Palabras clave:** Teachers' perceptions; Task-based learning; implementation; concepts

### Abstract

*El objetivo principal de este estudio cuantitativo-descriptivo fue explorar las percepciones de los docentes sobre la aplicación del método de Aprendizaje Basado en Tareas en instituciones educativas públicas de la provincia de Cotopaxi. La información se obtuvo a través de un instrumento diseñado por Mahdavid para examinar las creencias de los docentes de inglés como lengua extranjera sobre la enseñanza del Idioma Basado en Tareas con referencia a la práctica en el aula, el cual fue respondido de forma voluntaria por un total de 106 docentes de inglés pertenecientes a 33 instituciones educativas públicas del cantón Latacunga - Pujilí. La información fue analizada a través del software estadístico SPSS. Los resultados de la investigación mostraron que la mayoría de los profesores de inglés tienen un conocimiento suficiente de los conceptos de aprendizaje basado en tareas y entienden el papel de una tarea. Asimismo, los profesores de inglés tienen puntos de vista muy claros sobre la implementación del aprendizaje basado en tareas. Sin embargo, existe un bajo porcentaje de docentes que no implementarían el método en sus clases debido a que los textos no son adecuados y el tamaño de las clases es un obstáculo para los docentes. El valor de este estudio es mostrar las percepciones y comprensión de los docentes de inglés como lengua extranjera en la implementación de la metodología de Aprendizaje Basado en Tareas y abrir el camino para que los futuros docentes implementen este método adecuadamente en sus procesos de enseñanza.*

**Keywords:** *Percepciones de los docentes; aprendizaje basado en tareas; implementación conceptos*

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### Introduction

Over the years, the use of different approaches, methodologies, techniques, strategies, and teaching materials, among other important aspects, has constantly evolved within the field of foreign language learning (Taourite & Cecilia, 2020). One of the methods used by English teachers is Task-Based Learning (TBL), which is characterized by being a fundamental piece in the classroom. It focuses on completing the tasks established by the teacher so that students can distinguish the specific goals of the target language, which are introduced intentionally in a pragmatic way (Nunan, 1989; Ellis, 2003). TBL is based on tasks that provide comprehensive information and encourage communicative interaction between students using the target language (East, 2012; Prianty, Ngadiso & Wijayanto, 2021). However, not all English teachers will understand or are trained to apply the TBL effectively for language teaching (Taourite & Cecilia, 2020).

Having key knowledge about the TBL for many teachers is a challenge, because most see the "tasks" as "homework" but not as a teaching method that has a specific learning objective (Taourite & Cecilia, 2020). However, other teachers see this teaching method as a more active teaching approach because it helps students improve their communication skills in precise and creative ways, leaving traditional approaches aside (Lin & Wu, 2012; Mahdavirad, 2017; Jeon & Hahn, 2006). Regardless of how it is matched by teachers, TBL has many benefits that create positive attitudes in teachers because it helps to improve their teaching process by creating better interaction between students when learning the target language. These benefits focus on creating situations in real contexts, according to the students' needs and interests for more exciting and meaningful learning, in such a way that it creates an appropriate environment that helps the teacher to achieve the desired goal (Ocel & Bergil, 2022). However, the TBL has a certain rejected by teachers when it is implemented, due to the lack of teaching materials, exam system, or time in which the teacher invests to plan a class using this method (Ocel & Bergil, 2022; Mahdavirad, 2017; Jeon & Hahn, 2006).

Therefore, the present study seeks to identify the teachers' understanding of the TBL concepts, to examine the teachers' point of view on the implementation of TBL, and to determine the teachers' reason for avoiding or implementing the TBL method. Due to this, the main objective of this research was to explore the teachers' perceptions of implementing the Task-Based Learning method in public educational institutions in Cotopaxi province. In this way, this study could help English teachers who plan to implement this methodology in their classes to have a clear and precise understanding of the implementation of TBLT.

### **Task-Based Learning Methodology**

Task-Based Learning is a methodology focused on learning a language based on tasks; that is, a series of activities is provided to students by teachers, with the aim of completing them and promoting communication with the target language. Task-Based Learning is promoted as part of a major overhaul of the entire school language curriculum (East, 2012). Therefore, study plans must be designed around the interests, experiences, and cognitive levels of students, encouraging authentic experience, practice, participation, collaboration, and communication in the learning process. The Task-Based system approach develops comprehensive language skills, positive attitudes, proactive thinking, and bold practice (Cheng, 2011).

It is proposed that the task is an activity with a class goal, which leads students to understand, execute or interact using the target language, while their attention is focused on mobilizing knowledge with meaning, where the objective is to transmit a concept. Thus, the teaching and learning process is carried out entirely through communicative tasks, focusing mainly on the meaning and use of the language, completing the proposed tasks (Ellis, 2003).

Another fundamental characteristic of Task-Based Learning is that it helps to improve communication and language learning. However, this does not imply determining or controlling the language forms of the students. Therefore, learners should view their mistakes as a nominal part of learning, as each learner should be able to experiment and take risks on their own with the target language (Sholeh, 2020).

### **Task-Based Learning Approach (TBLA)**

The Task-Based Learning approach is fundamentally focused on carrying out tasks set by the teacher so that students can distinguish specific objectives of the target language, which is intentionally introduced. TBLA

is based on a task, which provides comprehensive information and drives the communicative interaction between students using the target language (Ahmadian, 2016).

Task-Based Learning approach helps students use the target language to improve their skills and competency under the direction of the teacher. In Task-Based Learning, the student is placed in real situations, in which communication skills are needed to carry out the task (Celik, 2017). Therefore, the root of this approach is to help learners become proficient in the target language through meaningful and creative Task-Based activities. Since the 1980s, the Task-Based approach has been taken as an important method that provides students with real activities. Thanks to these tasks, students feel more confident to solve problems in their daily activities (Nunan, 2004; Ellis, 2018).

The realization of tasks in language teaching through the implementation of task-based models has been approved and applied by many teachers in the world. Actually, the Task-Based study approach and learning resources have been considered for the usefulness they have for learning a language. Most researchers have focused on defining learning tasks, constructing tasks in classroom practice, specifying the roles of teachers and students, and evaluating task-based activities in practice that lead to meaningful learning (Ha et al., 2021).

### **Task and Task Outcomes**

There are different definitions when talking about tasks. A fundamental element of a task in task-focused education is that it focuses primarily on meaning at the end of the lesson (Mahdavidad, 2017). According to Nunan (1989), tasks are meaningful tasks that require students to understand, create, and interact in the target language as they are analyzed or classified by objective, input, activity, situation, and role. To further argue this definition, Breen (1989) refers to tasks “as a springboard for learning work” (p. 192).

Ellis (2018) stated that another special feature of tasks is that they are similar to languages used in real life. Ahmadian (2016) examined connections to the real world and found that many of the tasks that take place in the classroom do not take place outside. However, he highlights the correspondence between students' verbal behavior during task performance, and the communicative behavior associated with task performance in the real world. In addition, Skehan (1996) refers to two features that complement the previous description of the task: task completion and end-of-lesson task output.

Other authors such as Bygate, Skehan, and Swain (2013) stated that a task is an activity that requires students to use the target language with a focus on meaning, to achieve a goal in language acquisition, as well as to develop skills of interactive communication which aim to develop conversations. Therefore, Ellis (2018) stated the task is an activity in which the first thing is that it has a main meaning, second that it is related to real life, third that in the completion of the task has a certain type of priority, and fourth that the evaluation of the work of the task is in terms of objectives achieved.

Three fundamental aspects have been proposed for the production of the language to be learned; these are fluency, precision, and complexity, which can be chosen to be implemented in the performance of tasks to achieve special academic results (Ellis, 2018). Hence, when Task-Based Learning is applied as a teaching method that focuses on students, it encourages learning to take place through spontaneous activities, which are resolved in a meaningful way and related to the real world. This process develops skills such as creativity

and critical thinking, which are key in teaching Task-Based Learning to improve the production of the target language (Mahdavirad, 2017).

### **Task Implementation**

Teachers, designers, and all those who design curricula know the importance of tasks. However, they differ in the use that each of them gives to the task. Task-Assisted Language Teaching and Task-Based Language Teachings are the two main approaches for using tasks in the classroom (Ellis, 2003). In this way, tasks have been carried out to make language teaching more communicative and dynamic. Therefore, a task is an important element of Communicative Language Teaching. TBL is chosen for many reasons, one of which is the challenge to the nature of the teacher-student relationship (Mahdavirad, 2017).

For teachers, using a task-based methodology corresponds to the idea of relinquishing control and letting the learning flow, as well as having faith and letting the students lead their learning. Student tasks are stated to be the basic principles of TBL. However, the task of the students towards the choice of the right material becomes a sign of this approach. When a new type of material is presented, the teacher can create a number of ideas for the elaboration of a task; As a result, an idea is in the minds of the students. In TBL, students are expected to master the information to be initially conveyed in any order. Therefore, the teacher's lesson will be limited to giving false or true conclusions or perhaps pure improvement for the student to interact and thus acquire the language (Sholeh, 2020).

### **Teachers' Perspective on Task-Based Learning**

Understanding experience-based perspectives is of great importance in the application of different teaching methods. Foreign language teachers believe that the use of TBL helps them be more creative and also encourages small groups of students to learn different communication skills, whether it is speaking, writing, listening, or reading (Taourite & Cecilia, 2020).

According to the teachers, the correct execution of the TBL seems to correspond to the knowledge and management of the four language skills, which are acquired through social interaction, and the role of the teacher should be that of facilitator of said acquisition (Cheng, 2011).

English teachers use language teaching methods and methods that emphasize process and outcome to create real language learning situations and contexts (Liu et. al., 2018). Therefore, teachers consider that the TBL approach is socially constructed through one's face to face interactions so that "homework" serves as work schedules that are done based on students' interests, personalities, and goals. In this way, the apprentice's learning will be more meaningful (Ellis, 2003).

As a result of the analysis of stories extracted from a set of interviews with teachers, curriculum entrepreneurs and consultants, the great innovation potential of TBL in educational institutions stands out, since most of the EFL interviewees seem to have positive opinions and highlight several benefits to implement TBL. However, teachers often struggle to understand what TBL means and also to work hard to make it work in the classroom (East, 2011).

## Task Components to Consider for Implementing TBL Successfully

To successfully implement TBL, a special and highly relevant component is the implementation of clear homework objectives since initially it will help students to achieve the activities more easily, acquiring experiences and well-desired results. Therefore, they can be derived from general results, improve the students' communication skills, or develop linguistic skills to achieve general objectives (planning a walk), or specific objectives (ordering food in a restaurant) (Jeon & Hahn, 2006).

However, defining the objectives with absolute precision is considered complex since each task is dependent on a number of variables, such as the environment, the social community, personal factors, and feedback needs, among others. Another important component is the distinction or contrast that exists between traditional and experimental tasks. Here, the teacher must focus on the variety of students and different levels of difficulty in order to know how students are responding and performing better according to the observed (Nunan, 1989).

As previously mentioned, the objectives cannot be defined with absolute precision because each task depends on several variables such as the environment, the social community, personal factors, and feedback needs (Nunan, 1989).

On the other hand, the books or academic texts, as well as the didactic material, will always be a pillar for a successful class. The book can serve as a good tool where the production of materials for the learning of a target language is an important component in the study program, which will be very useful to start the discussion or use the language in different activities or tasks (Nunan, 2004).

## The Notion of Task as a Central Unit for Designing Communicative Classroom

In order to consider the task as a unit for the development of communication, it is important to have a clear and precise concept of the TBL, in which its main characteristics and key elements must be captured (Jeon & Han, 2006).

After having an exact notion of the task as a central unit, it is important to apply it correctly to the design of the communicative classroom, so it is important that the task covers aspects of the reality of the classroom at the central description level, which allows generalization in lessons and lesson plans, and a more detailed analysis of the language learning process and its relationship with teaching carrying out the central monitoring such as objectives, input, data, classroom configuration, types of activities, and evaluation (East, 2011).

## Materials and Methods

### Type and Design of Research

This research was focused on exploring the teachers' perceptions of implementing the Task-Based Learning method in public educational institutions in Cotopaxi province by applying an instrument (Teacher Questionnaire). Thus, this study followed a quantitative approach as it is focused on "collecting numeric data from a large number of people using instruments with preset questions and responses" (Creswell, 2012, p. 13). In addition, the type of research was descriptive because it was in charge of specifying and detailing the characteristics of the population in which the study was carried out, whose objective was to focus on the

reasons why a specific phenomenon occurs. Similarly, the descriptive research method is very common in educational studies due to the fact that it facilitates the description of a finding and its respective characteristics (Nassaji, 2015).

### Population

The population was 128 English teachers belonging to 33 public educational institutions of two different cantons, Latacunga and Pujilí, where pre-service teachers of the Technical University of Cotopaxi carried out their pre-professional practices.

### Sample Size

The sample was obtained through the *Decision Analyst STATS* program (Fernandez, Hernandez & Baptista, 2014). The following data was entered to obtain the sample size:

- Universe size: 128
- Maximum acceptable percentage points of error: 4%
- Estimated percentage level: 50%
- Desired confidence level: 95%

After applying it, the total sample was 106 teachers.

### Data Collection Techniques and Procedure

The instrument used in the study was the *survey* designed by Mahdavi (2017) to examine EFL teachers' beliefs of Task-Based Language teaching with reference to classroom practice. The quiz includes 15 Likert-type questions and two open items which were divided into four sections. The first section contains *demographic questions* to obtain information on the age and gender of the teachers. The second section (items 1-7) contains *the basic concept of task and the principles of task-based instruction* to identify teachers' practical understanding of *TBL*. The third section (items 8-15) is related to *the teachers' points of view in the practical classroom of TBL*. In the second and third sections, teachers are asked to respond to each question using a five-point scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". Finally, in the fourth section, teachers are asked to mark *yes or no* according to their criteria to identify why *they avoid or choose the implementation of Task-Based Learning* in their classrooms through an *open-ended survey*.

The survey was applied via Google Forms. Its link was sent to the participants via WhatsApp. The survey had a header of a consent report, where it was mentioned that participation was completely voluntary and the data to be collected would be used for academic and scientific purposes. The estimated time for the collection of information was around two months on the google forms platform.

### Data analysis

The SPSS Statistics (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 29.0.1.0 (171) was used for the analysis of the survey data.

## Results and Discussion

### Demographic Information

The participants in the study were 106 English teachers from different educational public institutions in Cotopaxi province: 71.7% were female, while 28.3% were male. In addition, 11.3% of the teachers teach in elementary school, 17.9% in middle school, and 82.1% in high school. Likewise, most of the teachers surveyed were between the ages of 40 and 20 (96.1%), and 3.9% belong to teachers aged 50 and over.

**Table 1.** Teachers' information.

<b>Sample</b>	106
<b>Gender</b>	Female: 71.7%
	Male: 28.3%
<b>Level</b>	Elementary school: 11.3%
	Middle school: 17.9%
	High school: 82.1%
<b>Age</b>	20 - 30: 31.1%
	30 - 40: 29.2%
	40 - 50: 35.8%
	50 +: 3.9%

To analyze the information, the five-point Likert-type scale was the instrument, from 1 to 5, where 1 corresponds to "strongly disagree" and 5 corresponds to "strongly agree". The five possible answers were organized into three options: 1) strongly disagree and disagree; 2) neutral; 3) strongly agree and agree.

### Teachers' Understandings of TBL Concepts

**Table 2.** Teachers' Understandings of TBL Concepts (n=106).

Questionnaire Items	Strongly disagree/ Disagree %	Neutral %	Strongly agree/ Agree (%)	M	SD
1. A task is a communicative goal directed.	38.68 %	7.55 %	53.77%	3.34	1.34

2. A task involves a primary focus on meaning.	0.94 %	7.55 %	91.51 %	4.13	0.62
3. A task has a clearly defined outcome.	5.66 %	6.60 %	87.74 %	4.12	0.84
4. A task is any activity in which the target language is used by the learner.	7.54 %	18.87 %	73.59 %	3.82	0.83
5. TBL is consistent with the principles of communicative language teaching.	5.67 %	23.58 %	70.75 %	3.93	0.86
6. TBL is based on the student-centered instructional approach.	4.72 %	12.26 %	83.02%	4.06	0.80
7. TBL includes three stages: pre-task, task implementation, and post-task.	2.83 %	11.32 %	85.85 %	4.23	0.83

*Note.* M= Mean Score, SD= Standard deviation

According to the results shown in Table 2, most of the participants understand the functions of a task as a primary focus on meaning (91.51%), as it has a clearly defined outcome (87.74%), and as it is an activity where the target language is used by the learner (73.59%). Other elements understood by responders are that TBL is based on the student-centered instructional approach (83.02%). It includes three stages (85.5%), and the TBL is consistent with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (70.75%). On the other hand, the results also showed that an important number of English teachers do not agree with the concept that a task is a communicative goal-directed since the percentage of agreement with this item was only 53.77%. Despite this, it can be established that English teachers have sufficient knowledge (M= 3.95) of the concepts of the TBL and comprehend the role of a task. Similarly, Lin & Wu (2012) & Mahdavi-rad (2017) concluded that most of the teachers who participated in their studies, understand clearly what a task is and TBL most relevant concepts.

### Teachers' Views on Implementing TBL

**Table 3.** Teachers' Views on Implementing TBL (n=106).

Questionnaire Items	Strongly disagree/ Disagree %	Neutral %	Strongly agree/ Agree (%)	M	SD
8. I have interest in implementing TBL in the classroom.	1.88 %	1.90 %	96.22 %	4.61	0.67

9. TBL provides a relaxed atmosphere to promote the target language use.	1.88 %	3.78 %	94.34 %	4.22	0.65
10. TBL activates learners' needs and interests.	2.83 %	9.43 %	87.74 %	4.18	0.79
11. TBL pursues the development of integrated skills in the classroom.	6.60 %	5.66 %	87.74 %	4.20	0.82
12. TBL gives much psychological burden to teacher as a facilitator.	7.55 %	16.04 %	76.41 %	3.95	0.86
13. TBL requires much preparation time compared to other approaches.	9.43 %	16.04 %	74.53 %	3.90	0.88
14. TBL is proper for controlling classroom arrangements.	38.68 %	22.64 %	38.68 %	3.05	1.20
15. TBL materials in textbooks are meaningful and purposeful based on the real-world context.	0.94 %	2.83 %	96.23 %	4.38	0.64

*Note.* M= Mean score, SD= Standard deviation

According to the results shown in Table 3, most of the participants have clear points of view on the TBLT material in textbooks are meaningful and purposeful based on the real-world context (96.23%), as well as, they also have interest in implementing TBL in the classroom (96.22%), because TBL provides a relaxed atmosphere to promote the target language use (94.34%). Other important teachers' views about the implementation of TBL are that TBL activates learners' needs and interests (87.74%). In the same way, TBL pursues the development of integrated skills in the classroom (87.74%), and that TBL gives much psychological burden to a teacher as a facilitator (76.41%), so TBL requires much preparation time compared to other approaches (74.53%). On the other hand, the results also showed that a significant number of English teachers do not agree with the point of view that TBL is proper for controlling classroom arrangements since the highest percentage in agreement with this question was only 38.68 %. Nevertheless, it can be established that the teachers have very clear (M= 4.06) points of view about the implementation of the TBL. Likewise, Taourite & Cecilia (2020) concluded that most teachers have a clear and positive vision of the implementation of TBL since they consider that the use of this methodology helps due to its creative and communicative nature, to work with students in quiet environments that benefit the development of different skills.

## Reasons Teachers Use TBL in the Classroom

**Table 4.** Reasons Teachers Use TBL in the Classroom (n=96).

Statements	Frequency	Percentage
TBL improves learners' interaction skills.	63	65.63 %
TBL promotes learners' academic progress.	52	54.17 %
TBL creates a collaborative learning environment.	47	48.96 %
TBL is appropriate for small group work.	25	26.04 %
TBL encourages learners' intrinsic motivation.	17	17.71 %

The fourth section of the survey corresponds to two-open ended questions that are related to the reasons why teachers choose or avoid TBL in their classes. Table 4, shows that the main reason why teachers choose to implement this method is because TBL improves learners' interaction skills (65.63%), and TBL promotes learners' academic progress (54.17%). Another important reason is that TBL creates a collaborative learning environment (48.96%). Nevertheless, few of the respondents believe that TBL is appropriate for small group work (26.04%), and TBL encourages learners' intrinsic motivation (17%). In contrast, Taourite & Cecilia (2020) concluded that most teachers prioritize the implementation of the TBL for its capacity for creativity, collaborative way of working in small groups, and motivational benefits.

## Reasons Teachers Avoid TBL in the Classroom

**Table 5.** Reasons Teachers Avoid TBL in the Classroom (n=10).

Statements	Frequency	Percentage
Materials in textbooks are not proper for using TBL.	7	70 %
I have limited target language proficiency.	5	50 %
Large class size is an obstacle to use task-based methods.	4	40 %
Learners are not used to task-based learning.	3	30 %
I have difficulty in assessing learner's task-based performance.	2	20 %
I have very little knowledge of task-based instruction.	2	20 %

According to the results shown in Table 5, the main reason why English teachers avoid implementing TBL in their classes is that the materials in the textbooks are not suitable for using TBL (70%), followed by the fact that the participants consider they have a limited target language proficiency (50%), and stated that large class size is an obstacle to using task-based methods (40%). Another important reason why they avoid this method in their classes is that students are not used to task-based learning (30%), so teachers have difficulty assessing student task-based performance (20%) and have very little knowledge of task-based instruction (20%). In line with these results, Prianty, Ngadiso & Wijayanto (2021) concluded that the content of the books

is the main reason why teachers do not want to implement the TBL in their classes, due to the content is not related to real situations, and the large size of the class prevents them from having a pleasant interaction with the students.

## Conclusions

The main objective of this research was to explore the teachers' perceptions of implementing the Task-Based Learning method in public educational institutions in Cotopaxi province. Therefore, it could be concluded that English teachers have sufficient knowledge about the concepts of Task-Based Learning; in addition teachers believe that this method has a primary focus on the meaning of the task, as well as, a completely defined outcome, where students can use the target language to meet the objectives of this method.

In the same way, English teachers have clear views about implementing Task-Based Learning since they think TBL materials in textbooks as meaningful and purposeful based on real-world context, as well, teachers are also very interested in implementing this method because TBL provides a relaxed environment to promote the use of the target language.

Complementary to this, most English teachers would implement Task-Based Learning in their classes because it improves students' interaction skills and promotes their academic progress. However, there are a low percentage of teachers who are not willing to implement Task-Based Learning in their classes because teachers believe that the texts are not adequate to create situations in a real context, and the large size of the course prevents a good interaction in the classroom.

In this way, the present investigation contributes to and strengthens the academic field, focusing on the teaching of English as a foreign language, and helping future English teachers in the implementation of the Task-Based Learning method taking into account the perspectives of teachers who were participants in this study.

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